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Guenter Lewy

## Himmler and the ‘Racially Pure Gypsies’\*

On 12 December 1938, Himmler issued a decree entitled ‘Combating the Gypsy Plague’, that spoke of the need to tackle the problem of the Gypsies in the light of the ‘inner characteristics of that race’. It had become clear, the decree stated, that *Zigeunermischlinge* were responsible for most of the criminal offences committed by Gypsies. It therefore was necessary that ‘racially pure Gypsies and *Mischlinge* be treated differently’. The decree provided for the registration of all Gypsies and for the issuing of new identity cards. Those for ‘pure Gypsies’ were to be brown; those for *Mischlinge* brown with a blue stripe.<sup>1</sup>

This was the first decree directed against Gypsies that made explicit reference to race, but, of course, the introduction of racial terms into the debate over what to do about what was commonly called the ‘Gypsy nuisance’ was hardly surprising. Many Gypsies had dark skin, and this fact had long given rise to charges that they represented a foreign element. Hence, it was only a question of time before the nazis’ policy of cleansing Germany of non-Aryan elements would come to include the Gypsies. Here was a body of people who, while originally from India and therefore presumably of Aryan origin, certainly did not look typically Germanic. For the first few years of the nazi regime, anti-Gypsy measures had been justified primarily on social grounds. Gypsies, it had been asserted, were given to crime and generally represented an asocial element. Now the notion of Gypsies as an alien and inferior race was added, introducing a powerful new catalyst for increased anti-Gypsy agitation.

The decree of 12 December 1938 built upon what had been implicit in the Nuremberg Laws of 1935. The text of the laws had not mentioned Gypsies, but a decree issued by Minister of the Interior Frick on 26 November noted that, besides Jews, there were others who polluted the German blood — ‘Gypsies, Negroes and their bastards’.<sup>2</sup> An authoritative commentary on the new racial legislation published in 1936 noted that persons of ‘alien blood’

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\*Some authors consider the traditional word ‘Zigeuner’ pejorative and instead have begun using the terms ‘Sinti’ and ‘Roma’. These names refer to the tribe to which the majority of German Gypsies belong (the Sinti), and to the Gypsies of south-eastern European origin (the Roma). In fact, there is nothing pejorative per se about the word ‘Zigeuner’, and several Gypsy writers have insisted on the uninterrupted use of the term in order to maintain historical continuity and express solidarity with those who were persecuted under this name. I agree with the latter view.

1 ‘*Bekämpfung der Zigeunerplage*’, *Ministerialblatt des Reichs- und Preussischen Ministeriums des Innern*, 51 (1938), 2105–10.

2 *Ministerialblatt für die Innere Verwaltung*, no. 49 (1935), col. 1429.

could not become German citizens. 'Ordinarily, only Jews and Gypsies are persons of alien blood in Europe.'<sup>3</sup>

The fact that Gypsies were not specifically mentioned in the first two important racial laws of the Nazi state was undoubtedly due to the limited importance attributed to the Gypsy issue. *Mein Kampf* does not mention the Gypsies, in whom Hitler appears to have had no interest whatever. During his twelve years as a ruler of Germany, Hitler referred to Gypsies only twice, and these brief remarks were made in connection with the issue of Gypsies serving in the military. For the Nazis there existed only *one* racial problem in Germany and that was the problem of the Jews, who were regarded as the sworn enemies of the Aryan people and a mortal threat. In 1933 there were about 525,000 Jews in Germany, many of them in important positions in German society. The Gypsies, on the other hand, numbering a mere 26,000 or so, represented a strictly marginal element. As two officials of the Ministry of the Interior put it in a quasi-official treatise published in 1938: 'The racial problem for the German people is *the Jewish Question*, since only the Jews are numerically significant as members of an alien race in Germany.' In addition to the Jews, Germany also had other foreign races, such as Gypsies. But numerically, they concluded, in comparison to the Jews, 'they are of little significance'.<sup>4</sup> The escalation of anti-Gypsy measures after the outbreak of the war in 1939 was due to concerns about the alleged tendency of Gypsies to engage in espionage as well as to pressure from local officials and the population at large to get rid of the 'Gypsy nuisance'. However, even then actions taken against Gypsies always remained a sideshow to 'the Jewish Question'.

A recurring problem that arose in connection with the enforcement of various laws and decrees directed against the Gypsies was the question of who exactly was to count as a Gypsy. This issue became especially acute after the enactment of the Nuremberg Laws which used racial criteria. Membership in the racial category 'Jew' was based on the religious affiliation of parents and grandparents. However, no such simple criterion was available in the case of Gypsies, who were Christians and had often intermarried with the local population. Some had become sedentary and could not be easily identified as Gypsies. In order to solve this problem, the Ministry of the Interior in spring 1936 ordered the establishment of a research institute in the Reich Health Office. The central task of this institute, located in Berlin and called *Rassenhygienische und bevölkerungsbiologische Forschungsstelle*, was to collect information about Germany's non-sedentary population, especially Gypsies and *Zigeunermischlinge*. These data were to be used by the *Kripo* and other official agencies in their handling of the 'Gypsy problem'. In addition, the information collected was to provide a basis for a law dealing with the Gypsy issue that was under discussion from early 1936. The physician Dr

3 Wilhelm Stuckart and Hans Globke, *Kommentar zur deutschen Rassengesetzgebung* (Munich 1936), vol. 1, 55.

4 Wilhelm Stuckart and Rolf Schiedermaier, *Rassen- und Erbpflege in der Gesetzgebung des Reiches* (Leipzig 1938), 10.

Robert Ritter became the head of the institute and was very soon regarded as the government's leading expert on the Gypsies.

Organized in small groups, Ritter's investigators toured cities and the countryside, educational institutions and Gypsy camps, prisons and concentration camps in order to collect material on Gypsies and Gypsy-like itinerants. Local police and other officials were under orders to render all possible assistance. The investigators searched in civic registries and municipal archives, in police files and court records, took photographs and anthropometric measurements as well as blood samples, and interrogated individuals about their background. Some of them are said to have spoken the Romani language. Interviewees who were reluctant to co-operate were threatened with arrest and the concentration camp. This information was subsequently arranged in genealogical tables; some of these scrolls are said to have been 18 feet long and to have included hundreds of names.

In addition to classifying individual Gypsies, Ritter also set out to undertake a systematic study of the 'Gypsy problem', the results of which were to serve as a basis for policy and legislation. The Gypsies in Germany, Ritter concluded, were a primitive people who belonged to an alien race, though, due to inter-marriage with other asocial elements, entirely pure Gypsies were now a decided minority — perhaps no more than ten per cent of the entire Gypsy population. 'Pure Gypsies', he suggested, were to be allowed to follow their own way of life, though one had to make sure that they remained separate from the rest of the population. The *Zigeunermischlinge*, whom Ritter regarded as a largely criminal population, were to be put into 'closed colonies' and sterilized.<sup>5</sup>

Ritter rejected the view that because the Gypsies originally came from India and because their language was related to Sanskrit they were to be considered 'Aryan'. For Himmler, on the other hand, who had a lively interest in the Aryan origins of the Germanic people, the pure Gypsies apparently held a special fascination, and in 1942 he gave orders to undertake new research into their way of life.

In 1935 Himmler had created the research institute *Ahnenerbe* (Ancestral Heritage) for the purpose of studying the spirit and heritage of the Nordic Indo-Germanic race. The institute aimed at legitimating the ideological assumptions of the SS by scientific study. The executive secretary of the institute became *SS-Standartenführer* Wolfram Sievers, later to achieve notoriety on account of the involvement of *Ahnenerbe* in medical experiments on concentration camp inmates. On 12 May 1939, the renowned scholar of Indo-Germanic languages, Walther Wüst, at the University of Munich, a newly appointed curator of *Ahnenerbe*, gave a lecture at a special meeting of the German Academy. In this lecture, entitled 'Early German Times and Aryan Intellectual History', Wüst argued that Gypsy fairy tales were told in an idiom

<sup>5</sup> Robert Ritter, 'Zigeuner und Landfahrer' in Bayerischer Landesverband für Wanderdienst, *Der nichtsesshafte Mensch: Ein Beitrag zur Neugestaltung der Raum- und Menschenordnung im Grossdeutschen Reich* (Munich 1938), 87.

that was 'Indoaryan' and thus manifested 'unadulterated Aryan thinking'.<sup>6</sup> For Himmler, who had an insatiable curiosity about everything Aryan, these remarks appear to have become one of the sources of his belief that pure Gypsies were descendants of the primordial Indo-Germanic people, or at least closely related to them.

By 1942, *Ahnenerbe* had 197 employees and the institute had become part of Himmler's personal staff.<sup>7</sup> On 20 April 1942, Himmler noted in his diary after a telephone conversation with Heydrich: 'No annihilation of the Gypsies [*Keine Vernichtung der Zigeuner*].'<sup>8</sup> We do not know the context of this cryptic remark, but it is in keeping with Himmler's general attitude toward the German Gypsies. On 16 September 1942, Himmler gave orders that *Ahnenerbe*, in co-operation with Arthur Nebe, the head of the Criminal Police (*Kripo*), 'establish a closer and very positive contact with the Gypsies still living in Germany in order to study the Gypsy language and, beyond that, learn about Gypsy customs'. Also at this time, the head office of the *Kripo* in Berlin (*Reichskriminalpolizeiamt* or *RKPA*) let it be known that Himmler had 'forbidden any further resettlements of Gypsies for the duration of the war'.<sup>9</sup> The original text of Himmler's order of 16 September has not been preserved; it is mentioned in a letter addressed by Sievers to the *Kripo* of Vienna on 14 January 1943. Carrying out Himmler's mandate, Sievers wrote, Johann Knobloch, an assistant to the dean of the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Vienna, *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Prof. Dr Christian, had chosen as his dissertation topic the language of the Gypsies of the Burgenland. Sievers requested that the *Kripo* facilitate Knobloch's research and, if appropriate, allow him access to the concentration camp Lackenbach to interview Gypsies held there.<sup>10</sup> Knobloch, warned that his subjects might soon be 'resettled', worked with dispatch; his dissertation '*Romani-Texte aus dem Burgenland*' was completed in 1943.<sup>11</sup>

On 13 October 1942, less than a month after Himmler had called for closer contact with the Gypsies, the *RKPA* informed the regional and local *Kripo* offices of a new policy for pure Gypsies. Coming after years of harassment and

6 Walther Wüst, *Indogermanisches Bekenntnis: Sieben Reden* (Berlin 1943), 37. See also Michael H. Kater, *Das 'Ahnenerbe' der SS 1935–1945: Ein Beitrag zur Kulturpolitik des Dritten Reiches* (Stuttgart 1974), 414, n. 160.

7 Sabine Schleiermacher, 'Die SS-Stiftung "Ahnenerbe": Menschen als Material für "exakte" Wissenschaft' in Rainer Osnowski (ed.), *Menschenversuche: Wahnsinn und Wirklichkeit* (Cologne 1988), 72.

8 The note was recently discovered in a Moscow archive. The diary in question is to be published by Dieter Pohl et al. in 1999 or 2000.

9 *Kripo* Dortmund to *Regierungspräsident* in Minden (Westf.), 14 October 1942, Staatsarchiv (hereafter STA) Detmold, M 1 I P, Nr 1578.

10 Sievers to *Kriminalrat* Dr Zauke, 14 January 1943, Nuremberg document NO-1725, National Archives (hereafter NA) Washington, RG 238, box 35.

11 Peter Heuss, 'Kulturpolitik im Dritten Reich: Das "Ahnenerbe" der SS und seine Funktion für Himmlers Rassenpolitik' in Daniel Strauss (ed.), *Die Sinti/Roma Erzählungskunst im Kontext Europäischer Märchenkultur* (Heidelberg 1992), 103.

discrimination that had often inflicted the worst disabilities and penalties upon the 'pure' Gypsies, while those with little Gypsy blood at times had received somewhat better treatment, the new regulation, signed by Nebe, marked a significant volte-face:

The *Reichsführer-SS* [Himmler] intends that in the future racially pure Gypsies be allowed a certain freedom of movement, so that they can itinerate in a fixed area, live according to their customs and mores, and follow an appropriate traditional occupation. The *Reichsführer-SS* assumes at the same time that the Gypsies encompassed by this order will conduct themselves irreproachably and not give rise to any complaints.

*Zigeunermischlinge*, who from the point of view of the Gypsies are good *Mischlinge*, shall be returned to specific racially pure Sinti Gypsy clans. If they apply for membership in a racially pure clan and the latter has no objections they shall be assigned the same status as racially pure Gypsies.

The treatment of the remaining *Zigeunermischlinge* and of the Rom-Gypsies is not affected by this intended new regulation.<sup>12</sup>

The instruction went on to list the names of nine headmen or spokesmen (*Zigeunerobmänner* or *Sprecher*) who had been appointed, one each for the various parts of the country. One spokesman was to serve the Lalleri Gypsies, a closely-knit tribe originally from the German-speaking part of Bohemia and Moravia that in 1939 had become a German protectorate. The spokesmen were to inform the racially pure Gypsies in their area about the intended measures and encourage them to lead an orderly life. They were to report criminal acts by any Gypsy (not only the racially pure) to the nearest *Kripo* office. They were to make lists of racially pure Gypsies and send the names to the *RKPA* in Berlin. While the nine spokesmen were granted freedom of movement in the area assigned to them and were given the right to resume their traditional occupations, the Gypsies under their care had to stay at their respective places of residence until further notice and continue the work to which they had been assigned. The instruction also included a sample identification card to be issued to the spokesmen that described them as liaison persons between the pure Gypsies of their tribe and the police. The card stated that their task was to make sure that the Sinti Gypsies for which they were responsible obeyed their own racial laws and refrained from any sexual intercourse with those of German blood or *Zigeunermischlinge*.<sup>13</sup>

Himmler's instruction establishing a special status for racially pure Gypsies incorporated some key ideas first proposed by Ritter. The veteran Gypsy researcher had always considered the few relatively pure Gypsies as the better element, had favoured granting them the right to carry on an itinerant way of life, albeit under careful supervision that would keep them separate from the German population, and had suggested the selection of spokesmen from their

12 'Zigeunerhauptlinge', 13 October 1942, *Beilage zum Meldeblatt der Kriminalpolizeileitstelle München und der Kriminalpolizeistellen Nürnberg, Augsburg, Regensburg und Würzburg*, Nr 97 (27 October 1942), 295–6. The instruction is reprinted in Hans-Joachim Döring, *Die Zigeuner im nationalsozialistischen Staat* (Hamburg 1964), 212–14.

13 Ibid.

ranks who would provide liaison with the authorities.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, as Ritter's assistant Eva Justin recalled after 1945, many of these proposals, made in a time of peace, were no longer very practical in a war situation. Most of the Gypsies no longer owned caravans, and, at a time when even the farmers had to give up their animals, it would have been quite a problem to provide them with horses. Given the rationing of food, how would the itinerant Gypsies have been fed? How would they have made a living? Research into the Gypsy problem for many years had been the preserve of Ritter's institute, and Ritter probably was less than happy about the intrusion of Himmler's *Ahnenerbe* into his privileged domain. Justin reflected this rivalry when she questioned the need for another person (Knobloch) to undertake research into Gypsy language and customs. She mused that Himmler had been influenced by amateurs — people other than Ritter and the RKPA, who had what she considered to be a more realistic approach to the Gypsy problem.<sup>15</sup>

According to Justin, Nebe is supposed to have said that he had no choice but to announce Himmler's fanciful plan, but that nothing much would come of it. He turned out to be right as regards the idea of allowing the Gypsies the right to itinerate, for it was never implemented. The instruction of 13 October did not specify where the pure Gypsies would exercise their newly granted freedom of movement. Rudolf Höss, the commandant of Auschwitz, in his postwar memoirs named the area of Lake Neusiedler on the border between Austria and Hungary as the place assigned to the pure Gypsies,<sup>16</sup> but we have no corroboration for this recollection. The RKPA is supposed to have thought of a reservation in the General Government and even to have proposed allowing the pure Gypsies to join an 'Indian Legion' recruited from Indian prisoners of war. However, for these schemes, too, we lack details.<sup>17</sup> On 10 February 1943, the issue of the 'settlement of the pure Gypsies' was discussed at a 35-minute meeting between Sievers and Nebe,<sup>18</sup> and that is the last time that this subject is referred to in any documentary source.

The nine spokesmen had been given their assignments at a meeting held in Berlin. A communication from the RKPA to the regional *Kripo* offices sent out

14 See, e.g., Robert Ritter, 'Die Bestandaufnahme der Zigeuner und Zigeunermischlinge in Deutschland', *Der öffentliche Gesundheitsdienst*, 6/B (1941), 477–89; idem, 'Die Zigeunerfrage und das Zigeunerbastardproblem', *Fortschritte der Erbpathologie, Rassenhygiene und ihrer Grenzgebiete*, 3 (1939), 2–20; and Ritter's lecture in Bremen, 'Das deutsche Zigeunerproblem der Gegenwart', n.d., Bundesarchiv (hereafter BA) Berlin, Zsg 142, Anh. 28, 211–14.

15 Justin's memo, 'Zigeunerforschung', is quoted in Joachim S. Hohmann, *Robert Ritter und die Erben der Kriminalbiologie: 'Zigeunerforschung' im Nationalsozialismus und in Westdeutschland im Zeichen des Rassismus* (Frankfurt/Main 1991), 496–7. Hohmann does not provide sources for his material, but there is no reason to question the authenticity of the memo.

16 Rudolf Höss, *Commandant of Auschwitz: The Autobiography of Rudolf Höss* (Cleveland, OH 1959), 138.

17 These ideas are mentioned in a handwritten memo of November 1942 by Eva Justin, BA Berlin, ZSg 142/21, cited by Michael Zimmermann, *Rassenutopie und Genozid: Die nationalsozialistische 'Lösung der Zigeunerfrage'* (Hamburg 1996), 299.

18 Sievers' diary for 10 February 1943, 45, NA Washington, Microfilm Publication T 175, roll 665.

on 11 January 1943 noted that so far only five of the nine spokesmen had submitted the lists of those to be accepted into the ranks of the racially pure Gypsies. Those lists that had been received would be sent out to the regional offices and were to be checked carefully in order to eliminate any *Zigeunermischlinge* with a criminal record. After making their decision, the *Kripo* were to summon the spokesmen and explain the reasons for accepting or rejecting a particular individual. In those instances where no lists had been put forth the *Kripo* were to compile their own list on the basis of available files and make a decision after hearing the opinion of the spokesman in question. No person was to be accepted into the ranks of the racially pure Gypsies over the objection of the spokesman.<sup>19</sup>

The memo of 11 January informed the *Kripo* of Frankfurt/Main, Cologne and Düsseldorf that the list submitted by their spokesman, Johann Lehmann, had been found to be 'unsuitable', that Lehmann had been dismissed and that Jakob Reinhardt had been appointed as his successor. Apparently Lehmann had taken money from persons who wanted to be put on his list.<sup>20</sup> There were other such cases of alleged wrongdoing. After the war, Gregor Lehmann, the spokesman for the Lalleri tribe, was denounced to the Russians by survivors for taking bribes, and disappeared into the Gulag.<sup>21</sup> Konrad Reinhardt, the spokesman for the Stuttgart area, was also accused of extorting money. He was interrogated by war crimes investigators, but the disposition of his case is not recorded.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, the spokesman for Berlin and Breslau, Heinrich Steinbach, was honoured after the war for his integrity.<sup>23</sup> At the time, the Gypsies may not have fully realized the consequences of not being included in the lists of the racially pure Gypsies, but, given their experience in the preceding years, they clearly had reason to be fearful. The absence of any definition of what constituted a 'good *Mischling*' gave the spokesmen tremendous power. Hence it is not surprising that the process of selection at times was beset by corruption; the stakes were very high.

We know of one case where a German official sought to protect a Gypsy family by suggesting their inclusion in the exempt category. On 18 November 1942, the *Landrat* of Wolmirstedt near Magdeburg enquired at the RKPA in Berlin whether it might be possible to attach the *Mischling* family Oskar B. to a racially pure family. The reply must have been negative, for several months later the entire family — husband, wife and their eight children — was deported to Auschwitz. One of the daughters, the 16-year-old Marie B., died

19 'Einordnung von Zigeunermischlingen in die Sippen der reinrassigen Sinte- und Lalleri-Zigeuner', 11 January 1943, *Erlassungssammlung* Nr 15.

20 This information comes from the generally well-informed Hermann Arnold, *Die NS-Zigeunerverfolgung: Ihre Ausdeutung und Ausbeutung* (Aschaffenburg, n.d. [1989]), 19.

21 Reimar Gilsenbach, *Oh Django, sing deinen Zorn: Sinti und Roma unter den Deutschen* (Berlin 1993), 158.

22 The accusations by two survivors, made on 3 September 1946, and Reinhardt's response can be found in Holocaust Memorial Museum Archive, Washington, RG 06.005.07M, reel 1.

23 Gilsenbach, *Oh Django*, op. cit., 158.

in the concentration camp Ravensbrück in October 1944; the fate of the others is not known.<sup>24</sup>

It is likely that Himmler really believed the pseudo-scientific tale of the Aryan origin of the Gypsies and therefore wanted those considered racially pure preserved as a potentially valuable addition to the stock of Aryan blood. In Poland, Himmler pursued a policy of *Wiedereindeutschung* — the removal of every ‘valuable trace of German blood’ from Poland<sup>25</sup> — and it appears that he aimed at a similar goal with regard to the Gypsies. Initially the pure Gypsies were not to be allowed to mix with Germans, but *Ahnenerbe* was told to explore their language and customs. If this research confirmed Aryan roots, the pure Gypsies, presumably, could then be absorbed into the pool of German blood or at least be kept protected as a people closely related to the Aryans. The research of Johann Knobloch, which we have already mentioned, was to throw light on this question, as was the work of another researcher, Georg Wagner, originally a staff member of Ritter’s Institute for Criminal Biology.

In 1942, Wagner had done research on Gypsy twins in several concentration camps, including Mauthausen;<sup>26</sup> he received his PhD in 1943 for a dissertation, *Rassenbiologische Beobachtungen an Zigeunern und Zigeunermischlingen*.<sup>27</sup> In September 1943, Wagner became a researcher for *Ahnenerbe* to work on the Indo-Germanic roots of the Gypsies. His base was Königsberg in East Prussia and from there he travelled to Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Finland. Wagner was equipped with a pass that identified him as a racial biologist ‘who, on orders of the *Reichsführer-SS*, carries out research of a special and urgent nature about which details may not be divulged’. All civilian, police, SS and military authorities were asked to render him every possible assistance.<sup>28</sup> On account of Germany’s worsening fortunes in the war and the tightening of its pool of manpower, *Ahnenerbe* had come under pressure to cut back its work, but Wagner’s assignment was not affected by this new stringency. ‘Whatever men and departments are now still active in *Ahnenerbe*’, its chief Sievers had asserted in May 1943, ‘originates in the personal decision of the *Reichsführer-SS*.’ All purely scientific work had been limited and only policy-oriented work related to the war effort was still being pursued.<sup>29</sup> Even if we allow for the possibility that these assurances were hyperbole and the result of a bureaucrat seeking to protect his turf, Wagner’s hiring and retention during these years of cut-backs indicate the importance which Himmler attributed to this research. Wagner continued his work until practically the collapse of Nazi

24 Landeshauptarchiv (hereafter LHA) Magdeburg, C 29 Anh. II, Nr384.

25 Robert L. Koehl, *RKFDV: German Resettlement and Population Policy, 1939–1945* (Cambridge, MA 1957), 122. See also Jan Tomasz Gross, *Polish Society under German Occupation: The Generalgouvernement, 1939–1944* (Princeton, NJ 1979), 195.

26 Ritter to commandant of Mauthausen, 11 September 1942, Dokumentationsarchiv des Österreichischen Widerstandes, *Widerstand und Verfolgung im Burgenland 1934–1945* (Vienna 1979), 280–81.

27 Heuss, ‘Kulturpolitik im Dritten Reich’, op. cit., 105.

28 NA Washington, Microfilm Publication T 580, roll 156, folder 256.

29 Sievers to *Chef des SS-Hauptamtes* Berger, 21 May 1943, *ibid.*, T 175, roll 80, folder 66.

Germany. Another pass issued to him on 9 January 1945 stated that Dr Wagner carried out an 'urgent cultural task' which on account of its importance deserved the 'special support of all authorities'.<sup>30</sup> Himmler himself by that time undoubtedly had other more important things on his mind. He never got the answer to the question of the Aryan roots of the Gypsies he had sought for so long. Meanwhile, however, a substantial number of Gypsies had escaped deportation and likely death.

In autumn 1942, plans were under way to deport the *Zigeunermischlinge* to a special Gypsy family camp in Auschwitz. Those considered socially adjusted as well as 'pure Gypsies' and 'good *Mischlinge*' were to be exempt. In a letter dated 3 December 1942, Martin Bormann, the head of the party chancellery who also held the title of 'Secretary to the *Führer*', complained to Himmler about the arrangements for the racially pure Gypsies. He had heard about the plan from his own expert on these matters who had met with Nebe. It was envisaged, he wrote, to let these Gypsies cultivate their 'language, rites and customs' and even itinerate freely and join special units of the armed forces. This exceptional treatment was said to be justified because these Gypsies had generally not conducted themselves in an asocial manner and because 'their system of belief preserved valuable Germanic customs'.

I consider this view of your expert as overblown. Such a special treatment for the racially pure Gypsies would represent a fundamental departure from presently applied measures for fighting the Gypsy plague and would not be understood by the population and the lower ranks of the party leadership. The *Führer*, too, would not approve of it if a segment of the Gypsies is given back their old freedoms.

Bormann ended by saying that these proposals appeared to him to be 'improbable' and asked for clarification.<sup>31</sup>

In the bureaucratic chaos that was Nazi Germany, Bormann was a rising star. His complaint to Himmler about the new Gypsy policy was an example of the power he claimed and exercised. After the disappearance of Hess in May 1941, Bormann increasingly controlled access to the *Führer*. He was in charge of Hitler's dwindling contacts with the outside world, while he himself was well informed about the mood of the country. His assertion that the lower ranks of the party leadership and the population as a whole would have little sympathy for Himmler's new plan for the Gypsies was probably correct. For several years many individuals inside and outside the party and government had demanded tough measures against the 'Gypsy plague'. To grant special privileges to even a part of this despised group of social outcasts was not a popular idea.

Himmler met Hitler on the afternoon of 6 December and Bormann the same evening.<sup>32</sup> No record of the content of these conversations has been preserved,

30 Ibid., T 580, roll 156, folder 256.

31 Bormann to Himmler, 3 December 1942, BA Berlin, NS 19/180.

32 Sonderarchiv Moscow, 1372/5/23, Himmler-calendar, cited by Zimmermann, *Rassenutopie und Genozid*, op. cit., 300.

though we have a handwritten note by Himmler on Bormann's letter which reads 'Führer. Aufstellung wer sind Zigeuner' (Führer. Tabulation who are Gypsies). This was probably to remind Himmler that he needed data on the Gypsies when he met Hitler. It appears that Himmler was able to overcome Bormann's objections and any reservations Hitler may have had, for the decree of 13 October was never retracted and racially pure Gypsies were exempted from deportation to Auschwitz. A memo prepared in the Ministry of Justice on 27 February 1943 took note of information received from Bormann's party chancellery: 'New research has shown that among the Gypsies are racially valuable elements.'<sup>33</sup>

In November 1942 the RKPA had given the number of racially pure Gypsies as 1097; it was estimated that some 3000 'good *Mischlinge*' would be added, thus bringing the total number of those falling under the protective provisions of the decree of 13 October to more than 4000.<sup>34</sup> This surely was not a handful as has often been asserted. Himmler, it has been said, wanted to keep alive just a few pure Gypsies as a kind of live museum or as 'rare animals', an insignificant and meaningless exception to his plan to destroy the Gypsy people.<sup>35</sup> But if Himmler indeed sought to save only a handful, why did he authorize the elaborate scheme of taking 'good *Zigeunermischlinge*' into the ranks of the racially pure Gypsies? According to two highly-placed RKPA officials in early November 1942, Himmler had given orders to the RSHA 'to regulate the treatment of the Gypsies in Germany in a new manner'. The implementation of this plan would involve the expulsion of around 20,000 Gypsies, leaving 'about 5–8000' in the Reich for whom no special administrative measures would be necessary.<sup>36</sup> Another indication of the large number of Gypsies left in the Reich can be found in the Auschwitz registry of inmates. The official *Hauptbücher* of the Auschwitz Gypsy camp, buried by prisoners who were office clerks and salvaged after the war, show that 13,080 Gypsies from Germany and Austria arrived in Auschwitz in several transports.<sup>37</sup> This would mean that about 15,000 Gypsies remained in the Reich after the mass deportation of March 1943. For a variety of reasons, we cannot be sure about the accuracy of this figure; neither do we know how many of those exempted from deportation were 'pure Gypsies' or 'good *Mischlinge*'. Still, it is clear that a substantial number of Gypsies, perhaps even a majority, were able to escape deportation.

33 BA Berlin, R 43 II/1512.

34 The figure of 1097 appears in a memo 'Historisches zur Zigeunerfrage' composed in the RKPA, probably with the help of Ritter. The estimate of those to be added is in a handwritten memo of Eva Justin. See Zimmermann, *Rassenutopie und Genozid*, op. cit., 151 and 299.

35 Ian Hancock, 'Responses to the Porrajmos: The Romani Holocaust' in Alan S. Rosenbaum (ed.), *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide* (Boulder, CO 1996), 47; Wolfgang Wippermann (ed.), *Kontroversen um Hitler* (Frankfurt/M. 1986), 48.

36 Memo of Minister of Nutrition and Agriculture, 14 November 1942, BA Berlin, R 14, Nr 156. The meeting referred to in this memo took place on 4 November.

37 Bernhard Streck, 'Zigeuner in Auschwitz: Chronik des Lagers B II e' in Mark Münzel and Bernhard Streck (eds), *Kumpania und Kontrolle: Moderne Behinderungen zigeunerischen Lebens* (Giessen 1981), 115.

For many months after the deportation of March 1943, the spokesmen and the *Kripo* continued to process applications from *Zigeunermischlinge* who sought to be accepted into the ranks of the protected Gypsies. This status meant not only exemption from deportation but also protection against the threat of sterilization that hung over the *Mischlinge*. The regulations for the selection of 'good *Mischlinge*', issued by the RKPA on 11 January 1943, had warned against the acceptance of Gypsies with a criminal record, and this provision for the most part appears to have been observed. Christian S. of Cologne, a '*Zigeunermischling* with predominantly Gypsy blood', was accepted into the ranks of the pure Sinti on 5 May 1943. His record stated that he had never been in conflict with the law and that he had held regular jobs since the age of 14.<sup>38</sup> His brother Wilhelm, on the other hand, after serving a prison term of one year for having lived off the earnings of a prostitute, was branded a 'career criminal' and sent to Auschwitz on 30 April.<sup>39</sup>

There were exceptions. On 15 May 1943, Jakob Reinhardt, the spokesman for Frankfurt/Main, Cologne and Düsseldorf, applied for the release of Zacharias L. from the concentration camp Oranienburg and his acceptance into the 'clan of the racially-pure Sinti-Gypsies'. In March 1934, L. had been sentenced to a prison term of three months and two weeks for the illegal possession of a firearm; in June 1938 he had been sent to a concentration camp as an asocial person. But Reinhardt argued that L. was known to him as 'a good Gypsy' and that he was prepared to assume responsibility for him. The *Kripo* of Cologne approved L.'s release.<sup>40</sup>

Once a Gypsy had been accepted into a 'racially pure' clan, he was often treated more leniently than other *Mischlinge*. August W. in Berlin had been picked up by the police for malingering and staying away from work. In a memo signed by him on 19 May 1943, W. promised to mend his ways. 'I know that according to the regulations I should have been sent to a Gypsy camp. This has not happened only because I am a racially pure Sinti.' Three months later, W. was again in trouble. Riding in the subway, he had failed to yield his seat to a German woman. A policeman, who had thought him to be a foreigner, had asked him to do so, but W. had refused on the grounds that he was a German. He also had failed to show up for work. Once again, W. promised that this kind of behaviour would not be repeated. Otherwise, he acknowledged, he would be sent to a concentration camp. W. emerged from these incidents with a mere warning.<sup>41</sup>

Helene W., 22 years old and residing in the Berlin Gypsy camp of Marzahn, together with other family members had been accepted into the Lalleri clan. In September 1943 she was sentenced to a prison term of two months for theft. After her release, she promised to become a conscientious worker, but a year later her employer complained that W. sometimes did not show up at all or

38 Hauptstaatsarchiv (hereafter HSTA) Düsseldorf, BR 2034, Nr 1180.

39 Ibid., Nr 1179.

40 Ibid., Nr 1024.

41 LHA Potsdam, Rep. 30 Berlin C, Nr 142.

that she was late in the morning or left work early at the end of the day. Summoned to the police, W. admitted that she had no excuse for this behaviour and pledged to do better in the future. As a check on her conduct, Gregor Lehmann, the spokesman for the Lalleri, was asked to submit her wage record every two weeks, and that was the end of the affair.<sup>42</sup>

Despite the advantages of being accepted into a 'racially pure' clan, not all those eligible agreed to this change of status. The Berlin musician Wadosch B. in January 1943 was ordered to stop playing music and accept regular employment. B. had been assessed as a '*Zigeunermischling* with predominantly Gypsy blood', but when given the opportunity in May 1943 he declined acceptance into the ranks of the 'racially pure Gypsies' on the grounds that he had been living in Berlin since 1903, had a regular job and maintained no links with the Gypsies.<sup>43</sup> A similar case is reported from Nuremberg. As Eduard Siebert, the spokesman for the area, explained to the *Kripo* in July 1943, Peter W. had been contacted by him, but had shown no interest in being accepted into a 'racially pure clan'. It appears that W. had been exempted from deportation on the grounds that he was socially adjusted, and he, like B. in Berlin, had no interest in being too closely identified with the Gypsy people.<sup>44</sup>

Not surprisingly, the spokesmen used their position of influence to benefit members of their family, but this endeavour was not always successful. After his appointment as spokesman for the Stuttgart area, Konrad Reinhard requested the release of a nephew, Michael R., from a concentration camp. R. had been imprisoned several times for vagrancy and similar offences and in 1938 had been sent from Cologne to the concentration camp Neuengamme. In November 1942 he had been transferred to Sachsenhausen. His uncle argued that R. was a decent person, that he had spent four years in a camp and deserved to be given his freedom. He also suggested that the spokesman for Cologne be asked for his opinion on the case, but the *Kripo* of Cologne did not think much of this suggestion. If R. was to be released from Sachsenhausen, they wrote to the *RKPA* in May 1943, he should be sent to the Gypsy camp in Auschwitz. Altogether it was not a good idea for the spokesman in one area to plead for persons in the jurisdiction of another spokesman who would find it difficult to reject such a request. Furthermore, releasing R. would encourage Reinhard to seek permission for the return of his brothers and sisters sent to the General Government. The *RKPA* agreed with this view and suggested that Jakob Reinhardt, the spokesman for Cologne, be instructed to turn down the request of his colleague from Stuttgart. And this is how the affair ended. On 13 May 1943, the spokesman for Cologne stated for the record that Michael R. had no next-of-kin in Cologne. 'For this reason I have no interest in accepting him into the clan of the racially pure Sinti-Gypsies in Cologne.'<sup>45</sup>

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42 Ibid., Nr 162.

43 Ibid., Nr 75.

44 STA Nürnberg, Polizeipräs. Abg. 1983, Kripo-Insp. Nürnberg, Nr 352.

45 HSTA Düsseldorf, BR 2034, Nr 133.

In December 1942, the Ministry of the Interior, wanting to halt the propagation of the Gypsies, had issued an order that marriages between *Zigeunermischlinge* were to be prevented. *Mischlinge* accepted into the 'racially pure' Gypsy clan, on the other hand, not only were allowed to marry but those living together according to Gypsy custom (what the officials called a 'Gypsy marriage') were encouraged to formalize their ties. Thus, for example, in June 1944, the *Kripo* in Berlin issued permissions to marry to two such couples. An entry in their file noted: 'In view of their clan membership and [the possibility of] children their marriage is desirable.'<sup>46</sup>

Himmler's protection of the 'pure Gypsies' continued to be criticized. Writing in 1943, a German official noted that Gypsies were 'asocial and hereditarily inferior nomadic people' who, like the Jews, represented 'alien blood' within the meaning of the existing racial legislation. Since the 'Gypsy problem' was biological and social in nature, rather than political and economic as in the case of the Jews, many of the special measures taken against the Jews were not necessary. Still, he concluded, a 'further extension of the special legal status of the Jews to the Gypsies is to be expected'.<sup>47</sup>

That was also the view of Bormann and Justice Minister Thierack who considered Himmler's protection of the 'racially pure' Gypsies an eccentric idiosyncrasy and did their best to undermine it. The 12th amendment to the German citizenship law, issued by the Ministry of the Interior on 25 April 1943, can be considered part of this endeavour. The citizenship law of 1935 had not specifically mentioned Gypsies, even though quasi-official commentaries and actual practice in the following years had made it clear that Gypsies had a legal status very similar to that of the Jews. The ordinance issued in spring 1943 now clarified any remaining ambiguities: 'Jews and Gypsies cannot become German citizens.' They also could not acquire the lower status of 'Revocable Citizenship [*Staatsangehörigkeit auf Widerruf*]' and 'Protected Person [*Schutzangehöriger*]'.<sup>48</sup> Significantly, the new rule made no distinction between different kinds of Gypsies, as most of Himmler's measures had done, and treated all Gypsies in the same discriminatory manner.

Another decree continued the trend, begun in 1942, of putting Gypsies and Jews on an equal footing with regard to social legislation. On 3 October 1944, it was announced that when workers were quarantined for typhus, they were to receive financial aid to make up for lost wages. 'However, this support is not to be given to Jews and Gypsies.'<sup>49</sup> It probably was in opposition to the tendency to treat Jews and Gypsies the same way that Himmler issued a decree on 10 March 1944, his last known pronouncement on the subject:

46 LHA Potsdam, Rep. 30 Berlin C, Nr 62 and 127.

47 Werner Feldscher, *Rassen- und Erbpflege im Deutschen Recht* (Berlin 1943), 26 and 28.

48 *Zwölfte Verordnung zum Reichsbürgergesetz*, 25 April 1943, RGBl. I, 268. A facsimile of the ordinance can be found in Romani Rose (ed.), *Der Nationalsozialistische Völkermord an den Sinti und Roma*, 2nd rev. edn (Heidelberg 1995), 36.

49 This ruling was issued by Fritz Sauckel, the *Generalbevollmächtigte für den Arbeitseinsatz*, and can be found in NA Washington, Microfilm Publication T 301, roll 22, fr. 836.

The separately published decrees and rules governing the life of Poles, Jews, and Gypsies within the jurisdiction of the Reich have frequently led to equal treatment for these groups as far as prohibitions of the sale and utilization of certain items, public announcements, and in the press, etc., are concerned. This attitude does not correspond with the differentiated political position to be granted to these groups now, and in the future.

Altogether, Himmler added, 'the accomplished evacuation and isolation of these groups' had made the publication of special directives no longer necessary.<sup>50</sup>

By stressing the different treatment to be meted out to Poles, Jews and Gypsies, 'now, and in the future', Himmler sought to reaffirm his own approach to the 'Gypsy problem' which not only involved treating Gypsies differently from Jews but differentiated between 'good' and 'bad' Gypsies. Even the lot of the 'good' Gypsies — allowed to stay in the Reich but isolated from the rest of the population — was far from enviable, but it surely was better than the fate of the Jews which was physical destruction pure and simple. There can be little doubt that Himmler's fascination with the Gypsies was one of the main reasons for this different outcome.

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50 Himmler to the 'Obersten Reichsbehörden', 10 March 1944, Nuremberg document NO-3719, NA Washington, RG 238, box 70. A bad English translation is given in PS-664, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals under Control Council Law No. 10* (Washington 1946–49), vol. 3, 713.