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Secret wartime refugees

Some 500 Nazis, Italian fascists and supporters of the French Vichy regime found shelter in Switzerland at the end of the Second World War, says the Swiss historian, professor Luc van Dongen. His recently published book, "Un purgatoire très discret" (A very discreet purgatory), is based on ten years' work going through archives in Bern, Berlin, London, Paris and Washington.

Among the better-known figures he exposes in his book are Mussolini's daughter, Edda Ciano, "Italian Goebbels" Dino Alfieri, Gestapo chief Rudolf Diels, SS officer Franz Sommer, as well as numerous Vichy regime ministers, industrialists, intellectuals, scientists and collaborators.

Until now little was known about sensitive refugee cases who were officially - but secretly - let into the country.

One hundred Germans were mostly economic refugees; they had belonged to the SS and the Gestapo, but were not major players. Many fled Germany in 1944-46 when the Allies carried out automatic arrests.

The biggest percentage of the one hundred Italians was made up of industrialists from northern Italy - Volpi, Cini, Benni, Marinotti - who were rich and influential with strong historical links to Swiss industry. There were also fascists who turned against Mussolini in 1943, and important neo-fascists from repressive paramilitary organisations.

Among the three hundred French were supporters of Marshal Pétain, Vichy officials, collaborators and militia members, and women who had relations with Germans. Three-quarters of the French refugees had problems with the political purge in France in 1945. The majority of these refugees, 95 per cent, were unknown to the general public and the Swiss parliament.

Up to 1948, requests by politically sensitive refugees were

made to the public prosecutor's office, either via foreign consulates, at the border or once they had arrived secretly in Switzerland. The foreigners' police, the public prosecutor's office and the cantons dealt with them on a case-by-case administrative basis. The public prosecutor's office was the most centralised body, but no lists were kept. The cantons and police chiefs knew about the cases under their charge but not those in other regions, so knowledge about them was very sketchy. In all, a maximum of 20 federal or cantonal civil servants knew about all 500 cases.

They tried to avoid publicity, as publicity risked sparking controversy and pressures both at home and abroad. When a case came to light owing to an accident, or someone was recognised by a journalist or member of the general public, normally they were quickly expelled.

Luc van Dongen points out that Switzerland took part in a so-called brain drain - something that was little known up to now. He identified around 100 specialists, technicians, engineers and scientists who came to Switzerland and worked for Brown Boveri, Bührle and the Federal Institute of Technology.

From 1943 the Allies called on neutral countries not to welcome war criminals and to be strict and tighten up controls on trains.

But there was another side to the political coin, especially with the Americans, which involved recuperating and benefitting from the interesting political or economic cases that came to Switzerland. They put pressure so certain people were expelled; some even ended up in the USA.

The general trend was a return to their home countries, but there were those who didn't want to reintegrate back home. Many found lasting refuge in Latin America.

from swissinfo

Appenzell-style pancakes

Prepare 8 pancakes with

150g plain flour
1/4 tsp salt
300ml milk
3 fresh eggs

Make a smooth batter, leave to stand for 30 min, then make 8 pancakes.

4 chopped tomatoes
150g Appenzell (or more realistically: Cheddar) cheese in 8 thin slices

Spread one eighth of the tomatoes on each pancake and top the tomatoes with a slice of cheese.

Fold the pancakes over and place them, overlapping, into a greased baking dish.

Cover the pancakes with a bit of grated cheese and a sauce prepared of

200ml cream
1 Tbs chopped parsley
1 Tbs chopped chives
Some salt and pepper

Bake for approx. 15 min in the middle of oven preheated to 220°C.

En guete!

Appenzöller Witz



En Appenzöller ischt of Zöri abi zome bekannte Spezialischt. De het en uusfroogt über sis Liide ond au über die Töktter, wo ee scho behandled heiid. De Puur säät droff, zletscht sei er no bime Naturarzt z Tüüfe gsee. Do isch de Toktor uufbrused ond het gsäät: "Ond was för en Blödsinn het eu dee aag-gee?" De Appenzöller droff: "Jo ebe, zue eu z goh!"