

Land Laws Pertaining to Germans in the Southwest Provinces,  
Kiev, Podolia and Volhynia  
1864-1915

(mostly based on descriptions in Dietmar Neutatz, Die "Deutsche Frage", Stuttgart, 1993)

- I. December 12, 1865      Persons of Polish extraction forbidden to acquire landed property , except through inheritance, in the western provinces--Volhynia, Podolia, Kiev, Vilna, Kovno, Grodno, Minsk, Mogilev and Vitebsk. (A similar law had been issued against Jews, July 10, 1864)
- II. May 3, 1882            Jews forbidden to settle and to take out mortgages on real estate outside of cities.
- III. December 27, 1884    Persons of Polish extraction forbidden to rent or take liens on property outside of cities in the nine western provinces.
- IV. November 1, 1886     Gave the Governor-General of the Southwest Provinces (Kiev, Podolia and Kiev) the "discreet right" to arbitrarily approve or disapprove any land purchase .
- V. March 14, 1887        All subjects of foreign states forbidden to acquire ownership or rights of usufruct (rent) on real estate in Russian Poland, the Southwest Provinces, Vilna, Grodno, Kovno, Minsk, Vitebsk, Kurland, Livland and Bessarabia. The only exception was by right of inheritance in direct line, but only for people already living in Russia before March 14, 1887. In all other cases, the inheritor must vacate the property within 3 years. Existing rental agreements had force, but could not be renewed. The law applied also to foreign trading and industrial companies. In Poland, subjects of foreign states were forbidden to serve as administrators of foreign-owned landed properties.
- VI. March 14, 1892        All persons of foreign lineage, *including those with Russian citizenship*, forbidden to settle outside of urban settlements in Volhynia, as well as to acquire rights of ownership, possession or usufruct of real estate outside of urban settlements in Volhynia, except by legal inheritance. Persons of Orthodox faith excepted. People already settled in Volhynia and possessing or renting property could keep them. The Governor of Volhynia given power to administratively expel anyone who settled in Volhynia in contravention of this law.
- VII. March 19, 1895        Revoked the Law of 1892. Foreign settlers with Russian citizenship and "re-settlers" from the "Vistula Government" forbidden to purchase or rent landed property outside of cities in Volhynia. Differed from the 1892 Law chiefly in that it did not apply to persons settled in Volhynia before March 19, 1895, nor to their descendants (Article 2). The Governor of Volhynia was empowered to administratively expel anyone who, in opposition to the laws of 1887 and 1895, occupied land by an informal agreement. The Governor General of the Southwest Provinces was authorized to interpret this law (Article 5).  
On the basis of Article 5 and the Law of Nov. 1, 1886, General Governor Dragomirov in 1898 instructed the Governor of Volhynia to allow the purchase only of land previously rented.
- VIII. May 1, 1905         Law of Nov. 1, 1886 repealed. The new Governor General, Suchomlinov, instructed the Governor of Volhynia to allow pre-1885 (1895?) settlers to purchase any land they wanted. (German colonists had complained to the Russian Senate of harsh treatment by local authorities).
- February 5, 1909         Governor General Trepov asked for reinstatement of the Law of 1892 (that is, the repeal of Article 2 of the Law of 1895), and its extension to Kiev and Podolia Provinces.
- (IX.) September 28, 1910   Interior Minister Stolypin's Law brought before Duma. Neutatz calls it the harshest law

brought against German colonists. All foreign settlers with Russian citizenship and re-settlers from the Vistula Government, along with their non-Orthodox descendants, forbidden to purchase or rent landed property outside of cities in Volhynia, Kiev and Podolia. Inheritance allowed only to direct descendants and between married couples. Exempted from the law were settlers of Russian or Czech extraction from Lublin and Siedlce. The Governors of Volhynia, Kiev and Podolia would be given authority to administratively expel all persons who occupied land by informal contract.

A somewhat altered version of this proposal (altered by a Duma commission), exempting settlers who came to Russia before June 15, 1888 (the date of the law incorporating German settlers into the volost system), and excluding the clause on the Governors' discretionary power as an unjustified infringement of the rights of Russian citizens, brought before Duma on May 5, 1911. On May 18, Stolypin withdrew the proposal.

The proposal again brought to Duma, February 22, 1912; withdrawn again by Interior Minister Makarov in May.

The proposal again brought to Duma, December 14, 1912. The law would now extend to Bessarabia, where, in addition to other restrictions, owners of land were not allowed to rent it to others (because of reports that the Germans in the area were "systematically" doing this near the border). Persons who had inherited land in other than the direct line would have to sell it within 3 years.

The proposal died soon after this.

X. February 2, 1915

Provided for the liquidation of rural landed property of Russian citizens of German, Austrian, Hungarian or Turkish extraction located within a long stretch of border area between Finland and the Caucasus. Persons settled before 1880 were exempted. The affected area extended either 100 versts (66 miles) or 150 versts (99 miles) from the border. Persons in the 100 verst area had 16 months to voluntarily sell their land; those in the 150 verst area had 10 months. After this, if not sold, the land was to be put up for public auction.

On December 13, 1915, the affected area was broadened to include all of Finland, 29 provinces in western and southern Russia, the entire Caucasus and the Amur territory. On August 2, 1916, the province of Kharkov and parts of Tomsk and Tobolsk were included, and in early 1917, the law was applied to nearly the whole empire.

The law was inefficiently enforced, and was the subject of intense debates in the Duma. Only a small percentage of German-owned land was actually forfeited. The law was repealed by the Provisional Government on March 11, 1917.

Treatments of the expropriation law of 1915 in English can be found in:

David G. Rempel, "The Expropriation of the German Colonists in South Russia During the Great War," Journal of Modern History, IV (1932), pp. 49-67, and

Baron Boris E. Nolde, Russia in the Economic War. New Haven, 1928, pp. 103-115.

Ingeborg Fleischhauer, Die Deutschen im Zarenreich, 2nd ed., Stuttgart, 1991, treats the 1915 law and the Duma debates on pp. 495-523.

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