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Forced Labor in the Third Reich

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Introduction

Toward the end of the timeframe in which Norbert Wollheim was working as a forced laborer at the Buna IV plant of I.G. Farbenindustrie in Monowitz, almost 9 million people in the German Reich were sharing the same fate. Approximately 700,000 men and women were, like Wollheim, used for forced labor in concentration camps. Another 2.2 million forced laborers had the legal status of prisoners of war, and almost 6 million were classified as foreign civilian laborers. Not all forced laborers were subject to such inhumane working and living conditions as those imposed on Norbert Wollheim, but they all had one thing in common: they were forced to work against their will and far from their home for the benefit of Germany's wartime economy.¹

After the first half of the nineteenth century, forced labor was no longer customary in Germany, except in penal institutions. Compulsory enlistment of human beings in labor did not resume until the 1880s, with the economic utilization of the newly acquired German colonies. Whether and to what extent colonial practices had an influence on labor policy in World War I is a topic that has not yet been researched. In any event, Germany put around 2.5 million prisoners of war to work, along with just under half a million foreign civilian forced laborers, mostly from Poland and Belgium.²

In World War II, the extent of the forced labor attained far greater dimensions. In general, three main groups of forced laborers are distinguishable: foreign civi-

1 On the definition of the term "forced labor," see Mark Spoerer: *Zwangsarbeit unter dem Hakenkreuz. Ausländische Zivilarbeiter, Kriegsgefangene und Häftlinge im Dritten Reich und im besetzten Europa 1939–1945* (Stuttgart: DVA, 2001), p. 15f. Beyond the borders of the Third Reich, many more millions of people had to do forced labor for the German occupying power, see *ibid.*, pp. 35–88; also, Spoerer: "Der Faktor Arbeit in den besetzten Ostgebieten im Widerstreit ökonomischer und ideologischer Interessen." In: *Mitteilungen der Gemeinsamen Kommission für die Erforschung der jüngeren Geschichte der deutsch-russischen Beziehungen* 2 (2006), pp. 68–93, here, in particular, p. 88f.

2 See Jürgen Zimmerer: "Der Wahn der Planbarkeit. Unfreie Arbeit, Vertreibung und Völkermord als Elemente der Bevölkerungsökonomie in Deutsch-Südwestafrika." In: *Comparativ* 13 (2003), no. 4, pp. 96–113; also, Zimmerer: "Die Geburt des 'Ostlandes' aus dem Geiste des Kolonialismus. Die nationalsozialistische Eroberungs- und Beherrschungspolitik in (post-)kolonialer Perspektive." In: *Sozial.Geschichte* 19 (2004), no. 1, pp. 10–43; Sebastian Conrad: "Eingeborenenpolitik" in Kolonie und Metropole. „Erziehung zur Arbeit“ in Ostafrika und Ostwestfalen." In: Sebastian Conrad / Jürgen Osterhammel, eds.: *Das Kaiserreich transnational. Deutschland in der Welt 1871–1914* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), pp. 107–148; Mark Spoerer: "Zwangsarbeitsregimes im Vergleich. Deutschland und Japan im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg." In: Klaus Tenfelde / Hans-Jürgen Seidel, eds.: *Zwangsarbeit im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts. Vergleichende Aspekte und gesellschaftliche Auseinandersetzung* (Essen: Klartext, 2007), pp. 187–226.

lians, both men and women, insofar as they were prohibited from returning to their homeland; prisoners of war; and camp prisoners, most of whom were inmates of concentration camps. In the case of the first group, it must be observed that some of the foreign civilians working in the German Reich in World War II had originally come there "voluntarily." Upon closer examination, however, the notion of "voluntariness" proves to be problematic, because the German occupation authorities exerted pressure on the population of the occupied areas of Europe. In the following material, "foreign workers" is used as an umbrella term for the three categories: (1) foreign civilians, both men and women (voluntary and involuntary), (2) prisoners of war (POWs), (3) camp prisoners (also including Germans, however). The term "forced laborers," on the other hand, includes, besides the POWs and the camp prisoners, only those foreign civilian laborers who were forced into work; that is, it excludes workers from neutral countries or countries that were friendly with the German Reich, as these people had the opportunity to return to their homelands.

By now, the fate of the people on whom unfree labor was forced in Germany during World War II has been well researched. Starting with the pioneering and still relevant work done by Ulrich Herbert, first published in 1985,³ hundreds of regional and local historical studies have appeared on this topic. While Herbert still was turned away by almost all the firms he approached, many have come to realize in the meantime that they can no longer keep silent about this part of their company's history. Around 2000, it was quite the "in thing" for numerous large concerns to commission independent historians to come to terms with the period of the Third Reich and in particular with the use of forced labor.⁴

Only the most significant results of the research can be summarized here. First, light is shed on the ideological and military-economic background of the use of foreigners. Next, the recruitment of the forced laborers is described. Then, in the

3 Ulrich Herbert: *Fremdarbeiter. Politik und Praxis des „Ausländer-Einsatzes“ in der Kriegswirtschaft des Dritten Reiches* (Bonn: Dietz, 1999) (first edition, 1985); Herbert, ed.: *Europa und der „Reichseinsatz“*. *Ausländische Zivilarbeiter, Kriegsgefangene und KZ-Häftlinge in Deutschland 1938–1945* (Essen: Klartext, 1991).

4 Chief among the pioneers were Daimler-Benz and Volkswagen; see Barbara Hopmann et al.: *Zwangsarbeit bei Daimler-Benz* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1994); Hans Mommsen / Manfred Grieger: *Das Volkswagenwerk und seine Arbeiter im Dritten Reich* (Düsseldorf: Econ, 1996); also, Klaus-Jörg Siegfried: *Rüstungsproduktion und Zwangsarbeit im Volkswagenwerk 1939–1945. Eine Dokumentation* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1986).

most extensive section, the specific working and living conditions are the focus of the portrayal. The deployment of concentration camp prisoners is treated in a separate section. Finally, some brief observations are made concerning responsibility for the use of forced labor.

The Ideological and Military-Economic Background for the Use of Foreigners

The National Socialist racial hierarchy recognized various categories: the "Nordic peoples," that is, the Scandinavians, Dutch, and Flemish; the "Romanic peoples," the Walloons, French, and Italians; the "Slavic *Untermenschen*," in particular the Poles and ethnic groups of the Soviet Union; and at the very bottom of the scale, the Jews and the "Gypsies." Despite occasional difficulties in assigning people to a group, as in the case of the Italians, who initially were allies, and citizens of vassal states in the Balkans, this hierarchy was the basis for the legal and actual treatment of foreigners throughout the entire war.⁵

At first, conflicts between the goals of racial ideology and economic objectives were rare. The National Socialists came into power when unemployment was at its peak, and employment of foreigners also was at a low point. By 1934, however, skilled workers in the metalworking industry were once again in short supply, and full employment was attained in 1936/37. The importing of foreign workers increased, but continued to be curbed by the Reich's chronic shortage of foreign currency.⁶

For this reason, the Reich government saw it as an obvious solution to satisfy at least part of the need for workers, which was growing apace in the course of the military build-up, by drawing on a domestic population group that had been deprived of almost all rights since 1933: the Jews. Increasingly robbed of all opportunities to earn their livelihood through work and thus dependent on welfare, German and Austrian Jews, as of fall 1938, were called upon by the state au-

5 See Herbert: *Fremdarbeiter*, esp. pp. 116–122; Spoerer: *Zwangsarbeit*, pp. 24–26.

6 On the growth in the numbers of foreigners employed in the German Reich before World War II, see Lothar Elsner / Joachim Lehmann: *Ausländische Arbeiter unter dem deutschen Imperialismus 1900 bis 1985* (Berlin: Dietz, 1988), pp. 387, 396f.

thorities for “work deployment in segregated groups” (*geschlossener Arbeitseinsatz*).⁷

In wartime, the allocation of workers, like that of raw materials and in part even of financial resources, was increasingly distanced from the market’s mechanisms of self-regulation and subjected to central planning. Competition, therefore, was far from being abolished; instead, it shifted from the anonymous marketplace to the corridors of the procurement departments of the Wehrmacht and the bureaucracy. The long-term perspective of the privately run firms was focused on the postwar period; the war economy was construed by them as an intermediate phase with very specific entrepreneurial opportunities and risks. Arms contracts were lucrative indeed, but the high profits could be distributed only in part and therefore were reinvested.⁸ By well-targeted acceptance of armaments contracts, accumulations of skilled workers, facilities, and stocks of goods could be retained or even built upon, and these would represent valuable start-up capital in peacetime.⁹

The year 1942 was a turning point in the German wartime economy. The authorities increasingly stripped away the workforces of firms that were unable or unwilling to manufacture products of significance to the arms industry. The smaller of these firms in particular now ran the risk of being shut down. Arms production had largely been made the responsibility of the Reich Minister for Armaments

7 Seminal work on this was done by Wolf Gruner: *Der Geschlossene Arbeitseinsatz deutscher Juden. Zur Zwangsarbeit als Element der Verfolgung 1938–1943* (Berlin: Metropol, 1997); Gruner: *Jewish Forced Labor Under the Nazis: Economic Needs and Racial Aims, 1938–1944* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), pp. 3–137.

8 Essential on this topic: Willi A. Boelcke: *Die Kosten von Hitlers Krieg. Kriegsfinanzierung und finanzielles Kriegserbe in Deutschland 1933–1948* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1985); Christoph Buchheim / Jonas Scherner: “The Role of Private Property in the Nazi Economy: The Case of Industry.” In: *Journal of Economic History* 66 (2006), no. 2, pp. 390–416. On profits, see Mark Spoerer: *Von Scheingewinnen zum Rüstungsboom. Die Eigenkapitalrentabilität der deutschen Industrieaktiengesellschaften 1925–1941* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1996).

9 See Paul Erker: *Industrieeliten in der NS-Zeit. Anpassungsbereitschaft und Eigeninteresse von Unternehmern in der Rüstungs- und Kriegswirtschaft 1936–1945* (Passau: Rothe, 1994), especially pp. 67–75; Paul Erker / Toni Pierenkemper, eds.: *Deutsche Unternehmer zwischen Kriegswirtschaft und Wiederaufbau. Studien zur Erfahrungsbildung von Industrie-Eliten* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1999). On the particularly well researched firm Daimler-Benz, see Hopmann et al.: *Zwangsarbeit*, pp. 77–80, 489–492; Neil Gregor: *Stern und Hakenkreuz. Daimler-Benz im Dritten Reich* (Berlin: Propyläen, 1997), especially pp. 148–161, 368–377; and on Flick, Kim C. Priemel: *Flick. Eine Konzerngeschichte vom Kaiserreich bis zur Bundesrepublik* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007), pp. 502–507, 517–522.

and Munitions,¹⁰ who pushed through a severe rationalization program that also included leading industrialists (“the autonomous responsibility of industry”) and managed to bring about an impressive increase in the figures for finished production of armaments—albeit while neglecting the production of consumer goods.¹¹ In addition, in March 1942, Hitler named the Thuringian Gauleiter Fritz Sauckel to serve as General Plenipotentiary for Labor Deployment. Sauckel was tasked with solving one of the most pressing problems of the arms industry—the shortage of labor—while largely sparing German women from such labor for ideological and sociopolitical reasons.¹²

The large-scale deployment of foreign workers, which culminated after 1942 in the forcible recruitment of millions of people from almost every corner of Europe as a consequence of Sauckel’s initially very successful efforts, took place amidst the conflicting priorities of the National Socialists’ racial doctrine and the pragmatism of the military economy. In the deployment-related decisions, pragmatic considerations are seen to have been dominant at first, but the concrete, often counterproductive circumstances of the deployment were a concession to the ideologues.¹³ That will be examined in greater detail below.

The Recruitment of Workers in the “Greater European Economic Area”

Four basic methods of recruiting foreign civilian workers are distinguishable: (1) pure recruitment, (2) recruitment with significant influence on living conditions, (3) conscription, that is, roundup of entire age groups, with recourse to the local administration, and (4) deportation involving the indiscriminate use of force by German or German-allied occupation authorities. These four ideal types, which

10 Fritz Todt, from February 1942 Albert Speer, from November 1943 with the title of Reich Minister for Armaments and War Production.

11 See Jonas Scherner / Jochen Streb: “Das Ende eines Mythos? Albert Speer und das so genannte Rüstungswunder.” In: *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 93 (2006), no. 2, pp. 172–196.

12 An overview of the wartime economy is presented by Fritz Blaich: *Wirtschaft und Rüstung im „Dritten Reich“* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1987); Avraham Barkai: *Das Wirtschaftssystem des Nationalsozialismus. Ideologie, Theorie, Politik 1933–1945*, 2nd edition (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer TB, 1988); Adam J. Tooze: *Ökonomie der Zerstörung. Die Wirtschaft im Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Siedler, 2007). In addition, see Steffen Rassloff: *Fritz Sauckel: Hitlers „Muster-Gauleiter“ und „Sklavenhalter“* (Erfurt: Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 2007).

13 A fundamental work on the relationship between National Socialist ideology and the interests of the armaments industry is Ulrich Herbert: “Arbeit und Vernichtung. Ökonomisches Inte-

naturally intertwined in practice or existed side by side for some time, can be found in most parts of the "greater European economic area," depending on the harshness of the occupation regime.¹⁴

In the allied, officially sovereign countries of Southern and Southeastern Europe, the German recruiters could not apply direct pressure to the population. These countries were—in order of the recruitment figures actually recorded—Italy (until its capitulation in 1943), Croatia, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania. In order to engage in recruitment in these countries, the German Reich had to conclude bilateral agreements involving primarily the regulation of legal issues related to foreign exchange and social insurance.

The recruiting of industrial workers in cities was handled by having applicants present themselves at a German recruiting office and undergo medical and skill-specific examinations there. If both parties were in accord, the applicants signed a standard agreement, received the requisite exit papers from their government, and traveled at a stated time by special train to Germany, along with hundreds of other volunteers. Recruitment of agricultural workers proved to be far more troublesome for the recruiters. As the homes of the potential candidates were scattered all over the countryside and they came together in larger groups only to attend church services, recruitment in the villages frequently took place on Sundays. As in medieval times, the recruiters deployed drummers for this purpose. Those who allowed themselves to be convinced by the (often exorbitant) promises of the recruiters signed the standard agreement and then had to appear at an appointed time at a collecting point, usually a train station or a port on the Danube.¹⁵

The German authorities proceeded in a very similar fashion at first in the occupied regions of Western and Eastern Europe, except that in the case of direct German control, the stringent need for intergovernmental agreements was ab-

resse und Primat der ‚Weltanschauung‘ im Nationalsozialismus." In: Herbert, ed.: *Europa*, pp. 384–426.

14 See, for an overview, with several articles on manpower recruitment in each, Herbert, ed.: *Europa*; Richard J. Overy / Gerhard Otto / Johannes Houwink ten Cate, eds.: *Die „Neuordnung“ Europas. NS-Wirtschaftspolitik in den besetzten Gebieten* (Berlin: Metropol, 1997).

15 See *Runderlasse für die Arbeitseinsatz, Reichstreuhänder- und Gewerbeaufsichtsverwaltung* 1941, p. 391; Timm / Heimbürge: *Der Einsatz ausländischer Arbeitskräfte in Deutschland* (Berlin: no publisher given, 1942), pp. 57–76; John H.E. Fried: *The Exploitation of Foreign Labor by Germany* (Montreal: International Labour Office, 1945), pp. 256–263.

sent. Because the foreign workers, with the exception of the East Europeans, were assured of the same wage and working conditions as their German colleagues, and the unemployment rate was steadily rising in most of the occupied countries after the conquest, the German labor deployment authorities believed they would have an easy job of it. In no region, however, did the German recruiters succeed in meeting Berlin's ambitious expectations. Only a small percentage of the Western European industrial workforce could be induced to go to Germany by high wages and the actual or alleged accomplishments of National Socialist social policy (health care, occupational safety, supposed overcoming of the antithesis between capital and labor).

In the occupied territories, therefore, the German labor deployment authorities changed their tactics and began to use pressure and force. As the German occupiers had the right to issue directives to the authorities, they had many ways of applying pressure to the working population. In Poland, as was also the case later in the occupied territories of Western Europe and the Soviet Union, the occupation authorities' refusal to allocate essential preliminary products or issuance of direct orders to close down contributed to the crippling of businesses and the rise in the unemployment rate. If someone failed to register with the Labor Office (and thus risked being sent to Germany for compulsory service), the food stamps or social benefits for his family could be reduced or even denied altogether. This combination of reduction of local jobs, comprehensive administrative registration, and financial pressure on families prompted many younger, usually single, members of households to sign up for labor deployment, if need be, even for work in Germany. This demonstrates once again how problematic the notion of voluntariness is.

As these measures, too, failed to have the desired effect, the German occupiers finally proceeded to use overt forcible recruitment (conscription or deportation) in all the occupied territories, with the exception of Denmark. Assuming the Germans decided to leave the local authorities in office and only place them under their command or under that of a puppet government, on the one hand, this had an advantage: there was less resistance to be reckoned with. On the other hand, certain considerations had to be granted in order to induce the local authorities or their government to collaborate.

The classic example is the *Service du travail obligatoire* (STO), which was established in France in February 1943. Sauckel, who wanted to gain more and more French workers, especially skilled workers, for the German wartime economy, had increased the pressure on the Vichy regime to such a degree that it saw itself compelled to introduce a service obligation in September 1942, and this subsequently was institutionalized in the form of the STO. Even so, the blow of the Germans' demands could be cushioned by the STO—depending on the circumstances—in a socially acceptable way: entire age groups were called up, but exemptions (as of 1943, limited once again) were granted, for example, to married couples and family men or farmers and policemen. In total, more than 600,000 French workers went to Germany through the STO.¹⁶

Without trying to give even the appearance of quasi-legal administrative acts, the German labor deployment authorities in Poland and the occupied territories of the Soviet Union proceeded to engage in deportations, almost from the very outset. As early as September 1939, isolated raids and deportations took place. In the annexed Polish regions, the norm was conscription: the local administration summoned specific individuals for labor deployment, while the German labor deployment authorities in the Generalgouvernement banked at first on recruitment of volunteers and then, after the failure of this approach, switched to a ruthless policy of deportation.¹⁷ These methods were employed in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union as well. The lower-key variant consisted of imposing certain quotas for "volunteers" on regional or local administrative bodies. If the quota was not met, German security forces simply seized the required number of people in the villages in question or on farms. The even more ruthless variant consisted of raids in places such as villages, residential neighborhoods of towns, cafés, or movie theaters. Anyone unable to present papers proving that he or she was employed was simply picked up and taken to the nearest collecting point. Before the individual's departure in a transport, family members, if any,

16 See Yves Durand: "Vichy und der ‚Reichseinsatz‘." In: Herbert, ed.: *Europa*, pp. 184–199; Helga Bories-Sawala: *Franzosen im „Reichseinsatz“*. *Deportation, Zwangsarbeit, Alltag. Erfahrungen und Erinnerungen von Kriegsgefangenen und Zivilarbeitern* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1996), vol. I, p. 248; Bernd Zielinski: "Die deutsche Arbeitseinsatzpolitik in Frankreich 1940–1944." In: Overy / Otto / ten Cate, eds.: *„Neuordnung“ Europas*, pp. 109–131, here p. 123.

17 Czesław Łuczak: "Polnische Arbeiter im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland während des Zweiten Weltkriegs. Entwicklung und Aufgaben der polnischen Forschung." In: Herbert, ed.: *Europa*, pp. 90–105, here pp. 94–99.

still had an opportunity to bring their children or siblings some food for the journey, clothing, and personal-hygiene articles.¹⁸

Transport of Polish and Soviet forced laborers normally took place in closed freight cars, with a bucket in the corner where they could relieve themselves. In certain transit camps, especially Cracow, Lublin, Częstochowa, and Warsaw, the deportees were deloused and medically examined to determine their degree of fitness. Upon arrival in German transit camps, there generally was another round of delousing, followed by departure on foot or further transport to the respective German contractors (*Einsatzträger*): private entities ranging from an individual farmer to a major corporation, public enterprises, municipalities, church facilities, etc.

The transfer of captured enemy soldiers was handled in a similar way. After capture, they were brought behind the front lines to transit camps, where they were deloused, and then transported to POW camps for noncommissioned personnel (*Stalag, Stammlager*) or for officers (*Oflag, Offizierslager*), located in the Reich. If they were deemed fit for work, the prisoners of the Stalags were hired out in the form of labor battalions to the various contractors, with arrangements handled by the Labor Offices.

A different fate was destined for the Soviet POWs at first. The Wehrmacht, which had experienced no problems in the Western theater in 1940 when transporting more than 2 million French and Belgian POWs (the Dutch prisoners were directly released) into the Reich, allowed 2 million of the 3.35 million Soviet POWs to starve to death in the first few months of the Eastern Campaign. Not until late October 1941, when the German advance had bogged down, did Hitler decide to deploy Soviet POWs for labor within the Reich. Hitler was not the only one to whom this decision must have presented some difficulty: the German security agencies, too, were not happy that, in addition to the Poles, other Slavic *Untermenschen*, possibly "infected with Bolshevism," now were to find their way into

18 On Poland, see Łuczak: "Polnische Arbeiter," pp. 94–99; on the Soviet Union, Rolf-Dieter Müller: "Die Rekrutierung sowjetischer Zwangsarbeiter für die deutsche Kriegswirtschaft." In: Herbert, ed.: *Europa*, pp. 234–250; on Belorussia especially, Christian Gerlach: *Kalkulierte Morde. Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941–1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999), pp. 466–476.

the Reich.¹⁹ These ideological and racial misgivings were accommodated by ensuring correspondingly inhumane conditions of deployment. The mortality rate of the Soviet POWs far exceeded that of all other groups of forced laborers, with the exception of the concentration camp prisoners.²⁰

The fate of the camp detainees who were deployed as laborers was in most cases inconceivably terrible. Anyone who was placed in a German concentration camp was subjected at the very least to months of harassment and torment. Starting in 1941, Jews, who until then had been crowded together in ghettos or interned in forced labor camps similar to concentration camps, were transported to specially built extermination camps, all of which, with the exception of Chełmno, were situated within the Generalgouvernement. Anyone who came to Chełmno, Lublin-Majdanek, Sobibór, or Treblinka was, as a rule, murdered immediately. Auschwitz occupied a special position in the German concentration camp system. While the other camps listed above were pure extermination camps, Auschwitz used the infamous method of selections. Anyone whom the Germans deemed unfit for work went to the gas chamber. The others were either hired out through one of the Auschwitz camp's external detachments to employers in Upper Silesia or Moravia, or sent farther into the Reich, where they were assigned to one of the concentration camps there and then hired out. Thus there now were not only Slavs, but Jews again inside the Reich: for the National Socialist ideologues, another painful concession to the pragmatists in the armaments sector of the economy.

The allocation of the foreign workers, with the exception of the camp prisoners, to users of their labor in the Reich was handled by the Labor Office. In light of the increasing reduction in the German workforce due to the drafting of men into the Wehrmacht, these contractors asked the Labor Office for replacements, and when so doing they could assert certain priorities, in coordination with the local

19 On the National Socialist racial hierarchy and anti-Slavism in particular, see Herbert: *Fremdarbeiter*, pp. 59–61, 116–122; and on its popularity among the German population, Mark Spoerer: "Die soziale Differenzierung der ausländischen Zivilarbeiter, Kriegsgefangenen und Häftlinge im Deutschen Reich." In: Militärhistorisches Forschungsamt, ed.: *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*. Vol. 9/2: *Die deutsche Kriegsgesellschaft 1939–1945: Ausbeutung, Deutungen, Ausgrenzung* (Munich: DVA, 2005), pp. 485–576, here pp. 569–576.

20 Fundamental on this topic is Christian Streit: *Keine Kameraden. Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941–1945* (Bonn: Dietz, 1997) (first edition, 1978); on the mortality rate, see Spoerer: "Zwangsarbeitsregimes," p. 215.

command in charge of war-related production (*Rüstungskommando*). The Labor Office then assigned the contractors foreign civilian workers or, in coordination with the responsible Stalag, POWs. Concentration camp prisoners could be requested only in case of especially strategic needs and only from the Economic and Administrative Main Office (Wirtschafts- und Verwaltungshauptamt, WVHA) of the SS.

The total number of foreign civilian workers, POWs, and camp prisoners brought to Germany during World War II is around 13.5 million, of whom only 10 to no more than 20 percent are to be regarded as volunteers.²¹

The Working and Living Conditions of Foreign Workers within the Reich

In the German wartime economy, the fulfillment of the essential basic needs of the population—housing, food, and clothing—was increasingly regulated, especially where foreigners were concerned. This set of regulations, too, was an expression of the National Socialist racial hierarchy. That is reflected especially clearly in the special rights—rather, lack of rights—for certain groups of foreigners. To implement them in everyday life, under the “Polish Decrees” of March 1940 the Poles—in addition to numerous prohibitions and draconian penalties—were also visually stigmatized in particular by the introduction of a “P” badge to be worn on the chest; this was eighteen months before the introduction of the yellow Star of David in the *Altreich* (Germany with its pre-1937 boundaries). The *Ostarbeiter* (“Eastern workers”), too—civilian workers from the German-occupied territories of the Soviet Union—had to put up with wearing an “OST” (“EAST”) badge. The well-enforced requirement for the wearing of badges had a clear function: Poles and *Ostarbeiter* were meant to be not only marked in general as allegedly inferior human beings, but also immediately recognized and, should the occasion arise, turned away in shops, restaurants, and public means of transportation. Even for open-minded Germans, this made it more difficult to associate with members of these two groups.

21 Mark Spoerer / Jochen Fleischhacker: “Forced Laborers in Nazi Germany. Categories, Numbers, and Survivors.” In: *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 33 (2002), no. 2, pp. 169–204; Spoerer / Fleischhacker: “The Compensation of Nazi Germany’s Forced Labourers. Demographic Findings and Political Implications.” In: *Population Studies* 56 (2002), no. 1, pp. 5–21.

Only a small percentage of the foreign civilian workers had the option of looking for a place to live outside the barracks camps; as a rule, these were the Dutch, Flemish, Danes, or citizens of allied countries. The norm was housing in camps, usually in barracks, sometimes also in gyms or large restaurant rooms. The furnishings of these camps were sparse, particularly in the camps for Soviet POWs, where a much higher occupancy rate was planned for the barracks. Not only was there no privacy of any kind in the camps, but the inmates also had to expect theft and deal most notably with vermin and epidemics.

Only the camps for POWs and prisoners were guarded; camps for civilian workers generally were not guarded. In early 1942, however, the first *Ostarbeiter* came upon barbed-wire-enclosed camps that were guarded, which they could leave only under watch. After a few months, however, the German authorities recognized that there was no need for direct guarding. Indeed, where could foreign workers have escaped to? Their homeland was either still under German occupation or on the other side of the front. Therefore, many of the escape attempts that nonetheless occurred had as their goal merely a change to a job within the Reich that offered more tolerable conditions.

The main problem for most foreign workers was obtaining food. The basic meals were provided by the firms and eaten in camp or at the plant. Some of the foreign workers, particularly those from allied countries, also received food ration cards in addition, depending on where they were housed, and they could in any case use their wages to buy extra foodstuffs in shops and on the burgeoning black market. Poles and *Ostarbeiter*, in contrast, received markedly less food and food of inferior quality, no ration cards, and lower wages besides. While most Poles worked in the countryside, and more food thus came their way on the farms, hunger was the constant companion of the *Ostarbeiter*, who were deployed primarily in industry. The same was true for the Soviet POWs, the Italian military internees, and the concentration camp prisoners. There are many eyewitness accounts stating that members of these four groups used to fight over food scraps or break out of the camp at night, risking their lives to steal potatoes, cabbage, or turnips in the surrounding fields. Theft and betrayal were endemic in the camps because the gnawing hunger was stronger than the sense of solidarity; female *Ostarbeiter* prostituted themselves to the better-provisioned Western workers in return for a loaf of bread. For the clearly better-fed German

population, these behaviors, which sprang from a poverty that threatened the workers' very existence, merely served as confirmation of racist prejudices.

Foreigners received, as a basic principle, no ration coupons for the purchase of clothing. The clothing they had brought from home was subjected to wear and tear, mainly at work, and in many cases it could not be replaced. By winter, if not sooner, this shortage was keenly felt, especially by forced laborers who had been seized on the spot and deported in summer. The absence of replacement clothing, particularly of underwear, led to unpleasant body odor, especially when open wounds festered. Here too, the degree of medical care provided, which varied in accordance with the racial hierarchy, turned out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. While the Western workers and Western POWs frequently managed to avoid vermin infestation and keep their clothing clean, this was generally impossible for groups that were far less well provided for: *Ostarbeiter*, Soviet POWs, Italian military internees, and concentration camp prisoners.

Contact with POWs, prisoners, Poles, and *Ostarbeiter* was off limits for the Germans in the workplace, apart from the giving of actual instructions. For male members of those groups, except for non-Soviet POWs, the exposure of sexual contacts with German women normally resulted in the death penalty. The minimum punishment faced by German women was stigmatization (shorn head, being paraded around the village), while German men ran the risk of being sent to a concentration camp.²²

Because of the many changes over the passage of time alone, an entire book could be written about the complex of material rewards offered in return for the work performed, including money wages, payment in kind, and social insurance rights.²³ In general, it can be said that in principle, civilian workers, with the exception of the Poles and *Ostarbeiter*, received the full German wages for the same work. The employer had leeway, however, in assigning the foreign workers to wage brackets and distributing special bonuses. Conversely, because of sepa-

22 See Diemut Majer: „Fremdvölkische“ im Dritten Reich (Boppard: Boldt, 1981), p. 307f., 674; Bernhild Vögel: „Entbindungsheim für Ostarbeiterinnen“. Braunschweig, Broitzemer Strasse 200 (Hamburg: Inter-Abo-Betreuungs-GmbH, 1989), p. 134; Stefan Maiwald / Gerd Mischler: *Sexualität unter dem Hakenkreuz. Manipulation und Vernichtung der Intimsphäre im NS-Staat* (Hamburg: Europa, 1999), p. 130.

23 The most comprehensive portrayal continues to be that given by Fried: *Exploitation*, pp. 107–136; for a few corrections in this regard, see Spoerer: *Zwangsarbeit*, pp. 151–166.

ration allowances, it was even possible for Western European foreigners to be paid a higher amount than their German colleagues.

Poles and *Ostarbeiter* received the same standard gross wage as Germans; *Ostarbeiter*, however, were taxed in accordance with Tax Bracket I (single with no children), regardless of their actual family status. In addition to the tax on wages, the Poles also had to pay a discriminatory special tax, the 15-percent "Social Equalization Tax" (*Sozialausgleichsabgabe*), and the *Ostarbeiter* were required to pay the even higher "Eastern Workers' Tax" (*Ostarbeiterabgabe*). Because the employers further were allowed to deduct 1.50 RM for room and board from the pay of both these groups, the Poles and *Ostarbeiter* received only a few RM or even just a few groschen at the end of the week, while a German or West European skilled worker was paid around 40 to 50 RM per week.

But most other foreign workers, too, were deprived of a not inconsiderable part of their wages when they transferred their savings to their home countries. As a result of the occupation policies of the Germans, high inflation prevailed in most of the occupied territories. Actually, that should have led to an upward revaluation of the Reichsmark vis-à-vis these currencies, but the Reichsbank kept the exchange rate of the Reichsmark artificially low. Thus the foreign workers paid RM amounts into a German bank, and the bank notified the foreign bank through the appropriate bilateral clearing house, so that the foreign bank—on the basis of the unfavorable rate of exchange—could pay out a corresponding amount in the local currency to the family members. Because of the inflation prevailing there, however, the purchasing power was less than in the Reich, which meant, in real terms, a severe devaluation of the sum remitted. The difference in buying power stayed with the German Reich.²⁴

Although the foreign civilian workers had to pay social insurance contributions (including unemployment insurance!), they were discriminated against in terms of benefits, especially in the case of the Poles and *Ostarbeiter*. In hospitals, they officially ranked as second- or third-class patients, behind the Germans. In case of impairments to health that led to the expectation of a lengthy absence from

24 See Fried: *Exploitation*, pp. 159–182; Karl Heinz Roth: "Dreifache Ausbeutung der Fremdarbeiter. Eine Dokumentation über Ökonomie und Politik des Lohnersparnisstransfers in der ‚europäischen Großraumwirtschaft‘ 1940–1944." In: *Mitteilungen der Dokumentationsstelle zur NS-Sozialpolitik* 7/8 (1985), pp. 69–100.

work, they were simply sent home, where medical care was distinctly poorer, also as a result of the German occupation. The same policy was applied to pregnant women at first.

The handling of pregnant women from Poland and the East and their newborn infants is an especially ugly chapter in the treatment of female forced laborers. The living and working conditions of many girls and women were so harsh that many deliberately got pregnant in order to be sent home. In late 1942, after this had come to the attention of the German authorities, they disallowed deportation to the women's home countries. The Polish women and female *Ostarbeiter* were urged or even forced to have abortions, though for German women, abortion carried severe penalties, even including the death penalty. If they wished and were able to give birth to the child nonetheless, then they had to continue working until just before the due date. The children of many such women were taken away from them shortly after birth. If the child was "suitable for Germanization" according to racial criteria, but the mother was not, then the child was put up for adoption by a German couple without informing the mother. Otherwise, the children were placed in a "boarding home for foreigners' children," where the female forced laborers could visit them in their time off from work, if distance permitted. Because these homes generally did not even have enough milk available, the mortality rate for children of women from Eastern Europe was many times that for German children: 25 to 50 % was supposedly the norm. How many thousands of these children were forcibly adopted or starved to death or perished in some other manner is a subject that has not been systematically researched to date.²⁵

The offense of which forced laborers most often were accused was "labor contract violation." This was used as a blanket term to cover any and all labor-law-related violations of the harsh conditions of the deployment of foreigners. The penalties ranged from warning and deductions from wages all the way to as-

25 See Raimond Reiter: *Tötungsstätten für ausländische Kinder im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Zum Spannungsverhältnis von kriegswirtschaftlichem Arbeitseinsatz und nationalsozialistischer Rassenpolitik in Niedersachsen* (Hannover: Hahn, 1993); Gisela Schwarze: *Kinder, die nicht zählten. Ostarbeiterinnen und ihre Kinder im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Essen: Klartext, 1997); Gabriella Hauch: "Zwangsarbeiterinnen und ihre Kinder: Zum Geschlecht der Zwangsarbeit." In: Oliver Rathkolb, ed.: *NS-Zwangsarbeit: Der Standort Linz der „Reichswerke Hermann Göring AG Berlin“ 1938–1945*. 2 vols. (Vienna: Böhlau, 2001), pp. 355–448.

signment to concentration camps or work education camps (*Arbeitserziehungslager*, AEL). The AELs had arisen since 1939 and were subordinated to the Gestapo. The conditions of detention corresponded roughly to those in the German concentration camps, but generally the period of confinement was limited to three to eight weeks at most. After confinement there, the AEL prisoners usually returned to their old place of employment. From the standpoint of the firms, which obviously were actively involved in developing the rapidly expanding network of AELs,²⁶ that was the great advantage over admission to a concentration camp. Once the SS got hold of workers with whom it could expand its economic empire, it generally did not part with them again. In addition, the firms expected the sight of the gravely maltreated returnees to have a disciplinary effect on the other workers, doubtless with some success.

As the military prospects worsened, the regime attempted to play off not only the Western Europeans but also the Eastern Europeans against the advancing Red Army, especially as it had been recognized in the meantime that disproportionate increases in labor productivity could be achieved with better nutrition and higher wages.²⁷ In late March 1944, the wage conditions of the *Ostarbeiter* were largely brought in line with those of the Polish civilian workers, and in August 1944 the daily rations of the *Ostarbeiter* were aligned with those of the other POWs. In addition, the "OST" badge was replaced with little triangles that indicated the ethnic affiliation (Russian, Belorussian, Ukrainian) of the wearers. Until the end of the war, the rations were increasingly brought into conformity with those of the West European workers—at least on paper.²⁸ Finally, in March 1945, even the social equalization tax was dropped. Whether there was a definite improvement in the living and working conditions, however, is unclear.²⁹ In eyewitness accounts, at any rate, it plays almost no role. Quite probably, another factor here is the fact that Poles and Soviet citizens had neither any knowledge of the new regulations nor any entity to which they could complain, so that business-

26 See Gabi Lotfi: *KZ der Gestapo. Arbeitserziehungslager im Dritten Reich* (Stuttgart: DVA, 2000), p. 316f.

27 See Dietrich Eichholtz: "Die ‚Krautaktion‘. Ruhrindustrie, Ernährungswirtschaft und Zwangsarbeit 1944." In: Herbert, ed.: *Europa*, pp. 270–294; Spoerer: *Zwangsarbeit*, pp. 127–135.

28 Herbert: *Fremdarbeiter*, pp. 306–313.

29 See Annette Schäfer: *Zwangsarbeiter und NS-Rassenpolitik. Russische und polnische Arbeitskräfte in Württemberg 1939–1945* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2000).

men, as well as the frequently corrupt camp and kitchen personnel, did not feel obligated to abide by the new, milder regulations. Here there is clear evidence that the racial hierarchy of the German population was in no way forced upon the country by the National Socialists, but was shared by the majority.

In many interviews with contemporary witnesses, it has been confirmed that the formative impressions of the forced laborers in Germany were marked by hunger, cold, racial discrimination, and fear of air raids. Depending on nationality and status, these four factors played roles of varying importance.³⁰ Toward the end of the war, when scarcely any place in Germany was safe from low-flying Allied aircraft, hardly any of the almost 9 million foreign workers are likely to have been in Germany of their own free will.

The Labor Deployment of Concentration Camp Prisoners

When the first concentration camps came into existence in 1933, the German penal system introduced conditions of imprisonment such as neither the Weimar Republic nor the German Empire had known. They must be understood only against the backdrop of an ideology that assigned no value to the individual as such. Anyone who violated certain, allegedly fundamental, norms of the social existence of his people had placed himself outside the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the "ethnic community." Therefore he had to be reeducated—or exterminated.

Therefore, from the legal standpoint, a concentration camp prisoner was in principle an outlaw, considered fair game. As of 1934, assignment to a camp was made at the request of the Secret State Police Office (Gestapo) or, later on, the Reich Security Main Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, RSHA), which was established four weeks after the war began, as a way of uniting the Criminal Police (Kripo), Security Police (Sipo), and Secret State Police (Gestapo) under a single roof. The concentration camps were subordinated to the Inspector of Concentration Camps, who in turn reported immediately to Himmler until 1942, and from then on to the Economic and Administrative Main Office (WVHA) of the SS.

The WVHA was established in February 1942 by SS-Gruppenführer Oswald Pohl at Himmler's request, to coordinate the economic activities of the SS. When

30 See Hopmann et al.: *Zwangsarbeit*, pp. 483–489.

Himmler, one month later, also placed the concentration camps under the control of the WVHA, Pohl set up a new departmental group, *Amtsgruppe D*, in Oranienburg near the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. The group was headed by SS-Brigadeführer Richard Glücks, until then the Inspector of Concentration Camps. Responsibility for the hiring out of concentration camp prisoners fell to Amt D II, led by SS-Obersturmbannführer Gerhard Maurer, one of the few trained businessmen in the WHVA, which employed as many as 1,500 people.³¹

For Himmler, throughout the entire duration of the National Socialist regime the concentration camp prisoners represented a disposable body that he could bring into play for his frequently changing political plans. Once a prisoner was in the concentration camp system, bribery or good contacts could help him gain release in exceptional cases, but normally he was at the mercy of the camp SS, for better or worse. Of the approximately 1.65 million people who were put into the concentration camps between 1933 and 1945, only about 100,000 were released through normal procedures before the war ended.³²

From the outset, the forced labor of prisoners played a role in the concentration camps. In the first phase, from 1933 to 1936, however, work was primarily a means of discipline and humiliation, frequently a form of pure harassment.³³ The beginning of the second phase in 1937 coincides, not by chance, with the achievement of full employment and the start of the manpower shortage. The objectives of "education," punishment, and extermination continued to be the focus of forced labor in concentration camps, of course, but now the SS availed itself of the prisoners' manpower to create an economic mainstay. Most of the SS-owned enterprises founded since 1938 were "earth- and stone-works companies," which on the one hand were intended to be suppliers for Hitler's gigantic building projects, and on the other were well suited for abandoning undesirable prisoners to "extermination through work." In June 1938, Reinhard Heydrich,

31 See Jan-Erik Schulte: "Das SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt: Zentrale der Zwangsarbeit von KZ-Häftlingen." In: Ulrike Winkler, ed.: *Stiften gehen. NS-Zwangsarbeit und Entschädigungsdebatte* (Cologne: PapyRossa, 2000), pp. 85–107, here pp. 91–93.

32 See Joseph Billig: *Les camps de concentration dans l'économie du Reich Hitlérien* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1973), p. 94; Karin Orth: *Das System der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager. Eine politische Organisationsgeschichte* (Munich: Pendo, 2002), pp. 340–343.

33 See Falk Pingel: *Häftlinge unter SS-Herrschaft. Widerstand, Selbstbehauptung und Vernichtung im Konzentrationslager* (Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe, 1978), pp. 35–39.

head of the Sipo and the Gestapo, for the first time described the deployment of forced labor as the essential purpose of the concentration camps.³⁴ In the following years, the enterprises of the SS expanded vigorously. However, it was not possible to build up an effective economic concern with the SS guard forces, which in most cases were very simple in structure. They were out of their depth as management personnel, so that the well-practiced rituals of violence persisted even long after it was obvious that they were economically dysfunctional. Of course, after the subordination of the Inspector of Concentration Camps to the WHVA in March 1942, there was an extensive replacement of the camp commandants, but the plan to get rid of corrupt and ineffective despots and have a new, elite group of SS officers capable of thinking in economic terms lead the camps in a more tightly organized way proved to be illusory. Corruption, maltreatment, and murder continued to characterize the concentration camp system.³⁵

The systematic use of concentration camp prisoners in the arms industry began late in the summer of 1942. Since March 1941, however, two pilot projects had been under way at the construction sites of I.G. Farben in Auschwitz-Monowitz and of Steyr-Daimler-Puch in Steyr. In fall 1941, the aircraft manufacturer Heinkel also began deploying prisoners.³⁶

I.G. Farbenindustrie AG, a giant chemical corporation created by a merger in 1925, is the very symbol of the entanglement of private industrial firms with the National Socialist regime. Even before the war, owing to its significance for the synthesis of fuel and rubber (Buna), I.G. Farben had been tightly woven into the

34 Martin Broszat: "Nationalsozialistische Konzentrationslager 1933–1945." In: Hans Buchheim / Hans A. Jacobsen / Helmut Krausnick: *Anatomie des SS-Staates*, 2nd edition (Munich: dtv, 1979), vol. 2, pp. 11–133, here p. 91 (with list of sources).

35 See Karin Orth: "Die Kommandanten der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager." In: Ulrich Herbert / Karin Orth / Christoph Dieckmann, eds.: *Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager. Entwicklung und Struktur* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1998), vol. 2, pp. 755–786, here p. 758f.

36 On I.G. Farben, see Peter Hayes: "Die IG Farben und die Zwangsarbeit von KZ-Häftlingen im Werk Auschwitz." In: Hermann Kaienburg, ed.: *Konzentrationslager und deutsche Wirtschaft* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1996), pp. 129–148, and also Karl Heinz Roth: "I.G. Farbenindustrie AG in World War II." Fritz Bauer Institut / Goethe Universität Frankfurt am Main: Norbert Wollheim Memorial, 2011, http://www.wollheim-memorial.de/files/1062/original/pdf_Karl_Heinz_Roth_IG_Farbenindustrie_AG_in_World_War_II.pdf; on Steyr-Daimler-Puch, see Bertrand Perz: "Der Arbeitseinsatz im KZ Mauthausen." In: Herbert / Orth / Dieckmann, eds.: *Nationalsozialistische Konzentrationslager*, vol. 2, pp. 533–557; on the Heinkelwerke, see Orth: *System*, pp. 175–179.

country's rearmament efforts, especially since the (second) Four Year Plan of 1936.

In 1940, when I.G. Farben was planning a site for a new plant to produce Buna and synthetic fuel, it decided on Auschwitz. A crucial factor in this decision was the concentration camp then under construction, which from then on made prisoners available as construction workers. At the beginning, the firm still lodged protests against the poor health situation of the prisoners, but a process of inurement quickly came into play. In mid-1942, the Auschwitz main camp even set up a subcamp of its own in Auschwitz-Monowitz, right next to the plant grounds. Of the total of around 35,000 prisoners made to work for I.G. Farben in Auschwitz-Monowitz, between 23,000 and 30,000 died.³⁷ In the nearby subsidiaries of the plant, Farben deployed 6,000 additional concentration camp prisoners, most of whom perished. Another 11,000 concentration camp prisoners worked at the Leuna, Wolfen, and Munich plants. Overall, at its numerous plants, Farben used at least 60,000 foreign civilian workers, 10,000 POWs, and 52,000 concentration camp prisoners.³⁸

The SS was interested in far more than the mere hiring out of prisoners, however: it also wanted to solicit armaments orders itself and have them filled in the concentration camps. It attempted this in the Buchenwald and Neuengamme camps, where it had arms manufacturers produce small arms, definitely with an eye to supplying itself as well. But after only a few months, in September 1942,

37 According to the statement of the former clerk in the Labor Deployment Department at the Buna/Monowitz concentration camp, Ervin Schulhof, between October 1942 and January 1945 around 35,000 prisoners passed through the Buna/Monowitz concentration camp, see Ervin Schulhof, affidavit, June 21, 1947, NI-7967. Archiv des Fritz Bauer Instituts, Nürnberger Nachfolgeprozess Fall VI, PDB 74 (g), pp. 128–133, here p. 130. For the various estimates of the number of prisoners murdered, see Peter Hayes: *Industry and Ideology. IG Farben in the Nazi Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987), p. 359; Raul Hilberg: *Die Vernichtung der europäischen Juden* (first edition, 1961) (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1990), p. 994; Karl Heinz Roth: "I.G. Auschwitz. Normalität oder Anomalie eines kapitalistischen Entwicklungssprungs?" In: Hamburger Stiftung zur Förderung von Wissenschaft und Kultur, ed.: *„Deutsche Wirtschaft“. Zwangsarbeit von KZ-Häftlingen für Industrie und Behörden* (Hamburg: VSA, 1991), pp. 79–95, here p. 87; Bernd C. Wagner: *I.G. Auschwitz. Zwangsarbeit und Vernichtung von Häftlingen des Lagers Monowitz 1941–1945* (Munich: Saur, 2000), p. 281f; see also Florian Schmaltz: "The Buna/Monowitz Concentration Camp." Fritz Bauer Institut / Goethe Universität Frankfurt am Main: Norbert Wollheim Memorial, 2010, http://www.wollheim-memorial.de/files/1057/original/pdf_Florian_Schmaltz_The_BunaMonowitz_Concentration_Camp.pdf.

38 See Hayes: "IG Farben," p. 129, and especially Wagner: *IG Auschwitz*, p. 336. On the history of I.G. Farben in general, Hayes: *Industry and Ideology*; Gottfried Plumpe: *Die I.G. Farbenindustrie AG. Wirtschaft, Technik und Politik 1904–1945* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1990).

the bold plans of the SS for setting up an economic empire of its own, founded on the labor of prisoners, ran aground. On the one hand, even simple orders required the acquisition of machines and tools, which proved difficult in light of the chronic bottlenecks in this sector. On the other hand, neither the Ministry of Armaments nor private industry could get anything out of these plans. Gnashing their teeth, Himmler and Pohl were forced to settle for the relatively modest role of the WVHA as lender of a workforce.³⁹

The third phase of the deployment of concentration camp prisoners as laborers began in September 1942, when the WVHA switched to hiring out greater numbers of prisoners than ever before to the arms industry and other contractors. In contrast to the civilian workers and POWs, who were provided through the local Labor Office, concentration camp prisoners could be obtained only from a centralized source, through the WVHA's Amtsgruppe D in Oranienburg. Interested parties conveyed their needs to the appropriate *Rüstungskommando*, which verified the degree of urgency. If the *Rüstungskommando* was in agreement, then the commandant of the concentration camp concerned and its supervisor of labor deployment checked on the deployment conditions at the location, including the type of work done and the facilities for feeding and sheltering the prisoners. Then Pohl, as head of the WVHA, decided whether to approve the deployment. If he gave his assent, representatives of the contractors, usually employees at the junior- or middle-management levels, went to the appropriate concentration camp and picked out the desired number of prisoners there, using training and state of health as the decisive criteria. The process frequently was reminiscent of ancient or medieval slave markets: The prisoners, men and women alike, stood naked in front of the representatives of industry, who insisted on having a look at each person's set of teeth.⁴⁰

As in the case of the POWs, an external work detachment (*Aussenkommando*) then was formed, set up on the plant grounds themselves or in the vicinity. The contractor provided the housing; the SS was responsible for the transportation,

39 See Miroslav Kárný: "Das SS-Wirtschaftsverwaltungshauptamt. Verwalter der KZ-Häftlingsarbeitskräfte und Zentrale des SS-Wirtschaftskonzerns." In: Hamburger Stiftung, ed.: „*Deutsche Wirtschaft*“, pp. 153–169.

40 This recruiting practice has been described many times, see, for example, Hopmann et al.: *Zwangsarbeit*, p. 93.

guarding, feeding, clothing, and medical care of the prisoners, with varying regulations with regard to particulars, especially in the last year of the war. The accounting method, too, was similar to that used for the deployment of POWs. The contracting parties were the Reich and the contractor, who paid a fee for the use of the prisoners. The fee varied over time, and after October 1942 it was set at 4 RM per day for unskilled workers and women and 6 RM for skilled workers. This equated to between 45 and 65 percent of the pay of a German worker.⁴¹ Of these per diem rates, the SS at first passed on nothing at all to the prisoners; later, as an incentive to boost performance, it gave them a tiny amount in the form of camp money. The remainder, after deduction of expenses, had to be paid into the public purse of the Reich. It was thus not the SS, but the Reich Ministry of Finance, which was completely uninvolved in the entire operation, that received the lion's share of the fees paid for hiring concentration camp prisoners.⁴² The benefit for the SS lay in the gain in power, as the organization had at its disposal absolutely the last labor reserves.

Until fall 1944, Oswald Pohl made the final decision on the deployment of prisoners, though many an industrialist assured himself of the support of even higher authorities when he wanted to lend special weight to his requests. For example, Ferdinand Porsche intervened with Himmler personally on behalf of the Volkswagen plant. In September 1944, however, Speer decreed that from October on, his Reich Ministry for Armaments and War Production reserved the right to make the final decision on the allocation of concentration camp prisoners. This amounted to a de facto disempowerment of the WVHA in the area of labor deployment, and it underscored the increasingly significant role of the armaments bureaucracy under Speer.⁴³

For Jewish concentration camp prisoners, deployment at forced labor initially meant only a postponement of the death sentence. But the other concentration camp prisoners, too, were under constant threat of death. If they were assigned

41 See Mark Spoerer: "Profitierten Unternehmen von KZ-Arbeit? Eine kritische Analyse der Literatur." In: *Historische Zeitschrift* 268 (1999), no. 1, pp. 61–95, here p. 68.

42 Hermann Kaienburg: „Vernichtung durch Arbeit“. *Der Fall Neuengamme. Die Wirtschaftsbestrebungen der SS und ihre Auswirkungen auf die Existenzbedingungen der KZ-Gefangenen* (Bonn: Dietz, 1990), p. 287, in particular, fn. 26.

43 See Kárný: "SS-Wirtschaftsverwaltungshauptamt," p. 162; Mommsen and Grieger: *Volkswagenwerk*, p. 43; Schulte: "SS-Wirtschaftsverwaltungshauptamt," S. 99.

to construction detachments, they were nothing more than "human material." With scant protection from the thin prisoner's work coat, they were forced to do heavy labor in all weathers. If a prisoner fell ill or was injured, and therefore was unfit for work, he was transported back to the main camp or even to one of the infamous "sick camps," which often were actually death camps. The mortality rate of the so-called *Bauhäftlinge* ("construction prisoners") was immensely high; the average life expectancy was only a few months. Particularly in the case of construction prisoners, business calculation even contributed to the worsening of their survival chances. For the Buna/Monowitz concentration camp, I.G. Farben won out over the SS and got its way: the sickness absence rate was not allowed to exceed 5 percent, and Farben did not have to pay per diem rates for sick prisoners for more than 21 days. As a result, prisoners who were ill were sent back to Auschwitz and exchanged for "fresh" ones.⁴⁴

If concentration camp prisoners were assigned to production work in a plant building, however, they did have a chance, and not only because they were protected from the elements. Even for simple activities, they had to be broken in, and such training could take several weeks. Thus, in the eyes of the contractors, the prisoners represented human capital. Therefore they were not readily replaceable, and that gave them a chance to survive. Courageous businessmen like Berthold Beitz and Oskar Schindler managed to use this argument successfully against the SS, even in the case of Jewish prisoners in the Generalgouvernement.⁴⁵ In fact, even with all the differences in detail, the mortality rates in production detachments were markedly lower. Female concentration camp prisoners were usually deployed at production work, and therefore they had a relatively high chance of survival, especially as the harassment of women by the guards and German foremen also was less pronounced. As a rule of thumb, one can say that the more skill required by the job to be done, the greater the chance of survival; that is, survival was more likely if the contractor had a vested interest in the individual worker.

44 Wagner: *IG Auschwitz*, p. 175.

45 See Thomas Sandkühler: *„Endlösung“ in Galizien. Der Judenmord in Ostpolen und die Rettungsaktionen von Berthold Beitz 1941–1944* (Bonn: Dietz, 1996); "Ich musste es einfach tun." Interview with Berthold Beitz. SZOnline, February 1, 2008. <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/wirtschaft/artikel/97/155689/> (accessed on April 2, 2008).

Under such circumstances, there was hardly any thought of resistance, particularly sabotage. The frequency of acts of sabotage and other forms of collective political resistance seems to have been far lower than the German security agencies had feared. Shortly after the war, the former head of the foreigners' division at the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) estimated the number of acts of sabotage committed by foreigners at an average of 6,800 per annum. Even the usually paranoid RSHA attributed them almost without exception to personal motives.⁴⁶

Naturally, little is known about the extent of the successful acts of sabotage. Special significance was assigned to sabotage at the Mittelwerk (Central Works), where, since August 1943, tens of thousands of concentration camp prisoners and other forced laborers had been at work, first building the facilities for production of the V-1 flying bomb and the V-2 rocket (A-4) and then manufacturing the units themselves. The WHVA set up a special concentration camp for the prisoners: Mittelbau-Dora, which was a branch of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp at first, but then was continued as an independent concentration camp. The prisoners worked in 12-hour shifts for months on end, without coming outside into the fresh air. Thousands died of hunger, epidemic disease, and murder. Even the prisoners were swept away by the myth that Nazi propaganda built up surrounding these "retaliatory weapons." Believing that they were helping to build a miracle weapon that could decide the outcome of the war—a weapon that impaired their own chance of release and also threatened their families and friends back at home—they founded an international resistance organization and sabotaged production. In fact, many V-1 bombs and V-2 rockets failed to reach their targets.⁴⁷

46 See Ulrich Herbert: "Von der ‚Arbeitsbummelei‘ zum ‚Bandenkampf‘. Opposition und Widerstand der ausländischen Zwangsarbeiter in Deutschland 1939–1945." In: Klaus-Jürgen Müller / David N. Dilks, eds.: *Grossbritannien und der deutsche Widerstand 1933–1944* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1994), pp. 245–260, here pp. 254–257.

47 See Walter Bartel: "Neue Forschungsergebnisse über den gemeinsamen Kampf deutscher und ausländischer Antifaschisten in Deutschland gegen den faschistischen Raubkrieg." In: *Bulletin des Arbeitskreises „Zweiter Weltkrieg“*, 1965, no. 4, pp. 1–19, here p. 14f.; Manfred Bornemann: *Geheimprojekt Mittelbau. Vom zentralen Öllager des Deutschen Reiches zur größten Raketenfabrik im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, 2nd edition (Bonn: Bernard & Graefe, 1994), p. 102; Rainer Fröbe: "Hans Kammler – Technokrat der Vernichtung." In: Ronald W. Smelser / Enrico Syring, eds.: *Die SS. Elite unter dem Totenkopf. 30 Lebensläufe* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000), pp. 305–319, here p. 312.

For most of the concentration camp prisoners, however, the daily struggle for survival was all that counted. One of the chief problems from their point of view was the discrepancy between the meager food rations on the one hand and the greatly increased caloric requirements resulting precisely from hard, heavy labor. To spare their dwindling reserves of strength, the prisoners did as little work as possible. To forcibly goad all of them to work harder would have required a far greater number of guards. Therefore, in 1942, the management of I.G. Farben's Buna plant at Auschwitz-Monowitz suggested increasing the concentration camp prisoners' will to work by introducing an incentive plan, cynically termed *Frauen, Fressen, Freiheit* ("women, chow, freedom"). Indeed, in May 1943, Oswald Pohl issued a corresponding decree promising certain benefits to prisoners with above-average performance, including extra food and brothel visits, but excluding the prospect of release. Subsequently I.G. Farben introduced an incentive plan for the concentration camp prisoners at its construction site in Auschwitz-Monowitz. The camp money could be used by the prisoners to buy stationery, toothpowder, cigarette papers, and the like in the camp canteen. They also could use it to visit the brothel, set up as part of this same scheme—which many prisoners declined to do, however. But they could not buy what they needed most of all: foodstuffs. Therefore the system of rewards did not result in the increase in labor productivity sought by the firm. Other chemical companies in the region had the same experience. Not until late in 1944 did representatives of the Upper Silesian chemical concerns openly state that it was food, rather than money, that had an obvious correlation with work performance. Thereupon they decided to introduce a policy of *Leistungsernährung*, or performance-related nutrition. This inevitably would have resulted in the survival of the fitter prisoners at the expense of the weaker ones. Shortly thereafter, however, the Red Army liberated the Auschwitz concentration camp and its subcamps.⁴⁸

With the advance of the front line, the situation of the prisoners deteriorated drastically. The SS destroyed not only many documents that would have re-

48 See Pingel: *Häftlinge*, pp. 132, 283f.; Streit: *Keine Kameraden*, p. 214; Piotr Setkiewicz: "Häftlingsarbeit im KZ Auschwitz III-Monowitz. Die Frage nach der Wirtschaftlichkeit der Arbeit." In: Herbert et al.: *Konzentrationslager*, vol. 2, pp. 584–605, here pp. 597, 600. On the development of forced prostitution in the German concentration camps, see Baris Alakus / Katharina Kniefacz / Robert Vorberg: *Sex-Zwangsarbeit in nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern* (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2006).

vealed their crimes, but also, in many cases, the witnesses themselves. Anyone who lagged behind on the evacuation marches, known with good reason as death marches, was murdered by the guards. Therefore the mortality rate among the concentration camp prisoners soared to new heights once again in the final months and weeks. Though the concentration camps had still contained 511,537 men and 202,674 women in mid-January 1945, no more than 475,000 of them survived the war. Many thousands died in the weeks and months following liberation, victims of the direct consequences of forced labor and the death marches.⁴⁹

Responsibility for the Deployment of Forced Laborers

The gigantic program of forced labor that the Germans developed, especially from 1942 on, is without precedent in the history of the twentieth century. In terms of scope, there may have been programs of similar size in the Soviet Union and China, but their victims were predominantly nationals of those countries, rather than foreigners. The illegal nature of this program was apparent to contemporaries in the Reich, as is indicated by the destruction of huge numbers of documents regarding labor deployment in government offices and private firms immediately before the approach of Allied troops. The mass deportations of civilians from occupied countries and the circumstances of forced labor deployment were among the main charges in the Nuremberg Trials. Representatives of the German state and of German industry (Flick, I.G. Farben, and Krupp) were convicted of participation in the forced labor program.⁵⁰

49 On the numbers, see Billig: *Camps*, p. 95; Henry Friedlander: "Darkness and Dawn in 1945: The Nazis, the Allies, and the Survivors." In: *1945. The Year of Liberation* (Washington, D.C.: USHMM, 1995), pp. 11–35, here pp. 13, 23f.; Johannes Tuchel: *Die Inspektion der Konzentrationslager 1938–1945. Das System des Terrors* (Berlin: Ed. Hentrich, 1994), p. 213; Spoerer / Fleischhacker: "Forced laborers"; Spoerer / Fleischhacker: "Compensation."

50 Benjamin B. Ferencz: *Less than slaves: Jewish Forced Labor and the Quest for Compensation* (first edition, 1979) (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2002); Constantin Goschler: "Streit um Almosen. Die Entschädigung der KZ-Zwangsarbeiter durch die deutsche Nachkriegsindustrie." In: *Skavenarbeit im KZ. Dachauer Hefte 2* (1986), pp. 175–194. On the Nuremberg Trial involving I.G. Farben, see also Karl Heinz Roth: "Case VI. The I.G. Farben Trial at Nuremberg." Fritz Bauer Institut / Goethe Universität Frankfurt am Main: Norbert Wollheim Memorial, 2010, http://www.wollheim-memorial.de/files/1060/original/pdf_Karl_Heinz_Roth_Case_VI_The_IG_Farben_Trial_at_Nuremberg.pdf.

If one attempts, at a remove of more than six decades, to make a normative and moral assessment of the deployment of forced labor, two elements must be distinguished: first, the deployment per se, and second, the circumstances of the deployment, that is, the living and working conditions.

It is not subject to doubt that the chief responsibility for the deployment of forced laborers and its attendant circumstances was borne by the German state. The government planners of war production identified the manpower shortage as a crucial bottleneck and took corresponding steps to remedy the situation. The initially hesitant firms came to terms with the use of foreigners, quickly realized the new opportunities being offered to them, and soon became the scheme's most zealous champions. This is in line with the more recent image, gained from research, of the relationship between the state and the economy in the Third Reich, according to which the state specified the parameters. Within this framework, however, the representatives of large concerns in particular could gain considerable influence. The big businesses were, to adapt a formulation of Avraham Barkai's, junior partners.⁵¹

How did this shared responsibility look in concrete terms? For the second question—the responsibility for the circumstances of forced labor deployment—this is less difficult to answer than for the first question, as an impressive number of regional and local case studies have become available in the meantime. Indeed, the National Socialist state attempted to regulate the deployment of foreigners to the maximum extent, right up to and including their private life; with regard to Poles and *Ostarbeiter*, this can be described, without any exaggeration, as apartheid. In the end, however, the contractors retained quite a lot of room for maneuver in dealing with the forced laborers, particularly on the important issue of their diet.⁵² All extremes can be discerned, ranging from brutal exploita-

51 Barkai: *Wirtschaftssystem*, p. 23, uses the expression "sleeping partner." See also Buchheim / Scherner: "Role," pp. 410–412.

52 This is primarily the result of comparative regional studies, such as that by Roland Peter: *Rüstungspolitik in Baden. Kriegswirtschaft und Arbeitseinsatz in einer Grenzregion im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1995); Andreas Heusler: *Ausländereinsatz. Zwangsarbeit für die Münchner Kriegswirtschaft 1939–1945* (Munich: Hugendubel, 1996).

tion to collegial treatment, friendly dealings, and, in the countryside, even acceptance into the family.⁵³

In general, it can be stated that the chance of being treated decently decreased as the size of the company increased. It made a difference whether a farmer or patriarchal medium-sized entrepreneur had direct contact with "his" foreign workers, or whether several institutionalized levels of hierarchy, which inevitably produced anonymity, lay between the company management and the foreigners. Then the employees were far more likely to have to deal with a convinced racist or simply unscrupulous opportunists in the company hierarchy above them or around them, which they could bypass to make improvements for their foreign workers only at the risk of potentially dangerous conflicts. In many large firms, therefore, the attitude of the company management, as well as mid-level and junior management, toward the foreigners was plainly characterized by indifference. Then the foreign workers were exposed to the caprices of the camp and canteen personnel or, in the workplace, to those of the foreman or master craftsman.

It is far more difficult to answer the question of the extent to which the contractors must bear a share of the responsibility for the deployment of forced laborers. Most companies saw themselves faced with two trends over the course of the war: First, the focus of production increasingly shifted away from consumer goods to armaments. This process as such was probably inevitable, because production of consumer goods not viewed as essential by the authorities was increasingly restricted or prohibited altogether. The companies had, at most, latitude for deciding to what extent and on what terms they would dedicate themselves to armaments production.⁵⁴

53 See Ela Hornung / Ernst Langthaler / Sabine Schweitzer: "Zwangsarbeit in der Landwirtschaft." In: *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, vol. 9/2 (Munich: DVA, 2005), pp. 577–666; Oliver Rathkolb: "Zwangsarbeit in der Industrie." In: *ibid.*, pp. 667–727.

54 See Mark Spoerer: "Zur Verantwortlichkeit privatwirtschaftlicher Industrieunternehmen für den Einsatz von NS-ZwangsarbeiterInnen. Das Beispiel Daimler-Benz." In: Gabriella Hauch, ed.: *Industrie und Zwangsarbeit im Nationalsozialismus* (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2003), pp. 37–47; Jonas Scherner: "„Ohne Rücksicht auf Kosten?“ Eine Analyse von Investitionsverträgen zwischen Staat und Unternehmen im ‚Dritten Reich‘ am Beispiel des Förderprämienverfahrens und des Zuschussvertrags." In: *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 2004, no. 2, pp. 167–188. As an informative case study, see Lutz Budrass / Manfred Grieger: "Die Moral der Effizienz. Die Beschäftigung von KZ-Häftlingen am Beispiel des Volkswagenwerks und der Henschel Flugzeug-Werke." In: *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 1993, no. 2, pp. 89–136.

Second, the situation most likely was similar for the deployment of foreign civilians and POWs. The state of research on this point remains unsatisfactory, of course, probably in part because of the lack of sources. Still, certain dilemmas can be deduced from the fact that toward the end of the war there most likely was not a single relatively large firm in the manufacturing sector that did not use foreign workers.⁵⁵ As the length of the war increased, the Wehrmacht drafted more and more German workers. Then the companies requested replacements from the Labor Office and were initially given foreign civilian workers who had come to Germany of their own free will, or POWs, whose labor deployment—with some restrictions—was fully backed by international law. In 1942 or 1943 at the latest, the firms received foreign civilian workers, both men and women, who definitely were not in the Reich voluntarily, as it quickly became clear.

As far as is known, this caused no ethical problems for most contractors. From a formal legal standpoint, there was nothing wrong with the deployment of foreigners, and the participation of the firm, in fact, was highly desirable from the state's point of view. And apart from that, it soon was evident that working with forced laborers was better in quite a few respects, because they were easier to discipline, the industrial safety regulations were looser, and they had little if any ability to defend themselves against the breach of legal regulations, due to their lack of knowledge or legal representation. Therefore, after initial hesitation, most contractors competed vigorously for allocation of forced laborers.

But if a businessman felt bound to an ethos that the National Socialists despised as old-fashioned or "liberalist," he faced a difficult decision. Armaments orders were lucrative, but as the war wore on they could be filled only by using forced laborers. Thus anyone who wanted to keep his integrity had to allow the less scrupulous competitors to pass him by. After the war ended—the postwar perspective was always significant for privately run companies—these competitors would have a better starting position. Because of the continuing drain on the German workforce, such a firm was threatened with even greater danger, however. Idled machinery and vacant operational sites undoubtedly would have brought the local armaments command and then the Gestapo as well into the arena. They would have had little understanding for the businessman's scruples,

55 Also according to Herbert: *Fremdarbeiter*, p. 430.

and would have appropriated the machines or factory sites, if any, and leased them to the competitors for the duration of the war or even sold them. Arguably, the fact that businessmen, faced with the alternative of on-site contraction or deployment of forced labor, opted for the latter and then tried to treat the allocated forced laborers decently can seem reprehensible only if one applies very rigorous ethical postulates.

In fact, however, it was the big firms in particular that obviously had no reservations of that kind. Rather, they vied actively for the allocation of additional manpower, even after the forced nature of the labor deployment had long been obvious. The dreadful point of culmination was the deployment of concentration camp prisoners, which, interestingly, by no means every large company considered unavoidable. Adam Opel AG, for example, otherwise not squeamish about deploying forced laborers, used no concentration camp prisoners, in contrast to almost all its competitors (including Ford).⁵⁶ The many allied companies of the chemical and nonferrous metal-producing and -processing industry, too, under the Metallgesellschaft umbrella, forewent, as far as is known, the use of concentration camp prisoners. Despite the strategic importance of their products, these companies obviously did not feel compelled to enter into such an extensive entanglement with the crimes of the National Socialist regime, whatever the reasons may have been. Other companies are known concretely to have successfully refused a deployment of concentration camp prisoners, despite pressure from the authorities and with no discernible consequences. Conversely, only a very few cases are known in which firms—possibly because the body of source material is not conclusive—felt compelled to request concentration camp prisoners.⁵⁷ But these were exceptions. In the vast majority of cases, in fact, these were companies that had backed the National Socialist armaments boom from the outset and now, in light of the foreseeable outcome of the war, saw a chance of

56 See Reinhold Billstein et al.: *Working for the Enemy: Ford, General Motors, and Forced Labor in Germany during the Second World War* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2000), p. 12; Henry A. Turner Jr.: *General Motors and the Nazis. The Struggle for Control of Opel, Europe's Biggest Car-maker* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2005), p. 145f.

57 Mark Spoerer: "Profitierten Unternehmen." An alleged across-the-board compulsory framework for the deployment of foreigners is emphasized by Werner Abelshäuser in particular: "Rüstungsschmiede der Nation? Der Kruppkonzern im Dritten Reich und in der Nachkriegszeit 1933 bis 1951." In: Lothar Gall, ed.: *Krupp im 20. Jahrhundert. Die Geschichte des Unter-*

saving their valuable machinery from the Allied airstrikes, with the help of concentration camp prisoners.⁵⁸ Starting in mid-1943, entire plants were moved underground in hazardous relocation projects. For the terrible living conditions to which the "construction prisoners" were subjected during the building of the gigantic tunnel facilities, the relocating firms and in particular the construction companies most certainly share the responsibility in large part.

Regardless of the question of the attitude of individual firms toward the deployment of forced laborers, sixty years after the fact it is indeed impossible to construe a legal obligation, though a moral obligation clearly can be construed. Armaments orders were profitable, but could be filled only by deploying forced laborers. As the rising profits could not be fully distributed and it was advisable anyway, because of the hidden inflation, to reinvest them in capital expenditures, most industrial firms, especially the large ones, emerged from the years of war, rent control, and currency reform as relative winners. In 1948, the capital assets of West German industry were 20 percent greater and distinctly younger than before the war, despite the air war and dismantling.⁵⁹ Today's shareholders and employees of industrial firms receive dividends and salaries from capital assets whose foundations could be laid and developed in the last years of the war only with the help of forced laborers.

(Translated from German by Kathleen Luft)

nehmens vom Ersten Weltkrieg bis zur Gründung der Stiftung (Berlin: Siedler, 2002), pp. 267–472, here p. 430f.

58 Spoerer: "Verantwortlichkeit."

59 See Werner Abelshauser: "Kriegswirtschaft und Wirtschaftswunder. Deutschlands wirtschaftliche Mobilisierung für den Zweiten Weltkrieg und die Folgen für die Nachkriegszeit." In: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 47 (1999), no. 4, pp. 503–538, here pp. 524, 535f.