

UNITED STATES  
HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM  

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CENTER FOR ADVANCED HOLOCAUST STUDIES

**Forced and Slave Labor  
in Nazi-Dominated Europe**

Symposium Presentations

WASHINGTON, D. C.

**Forced and Slave Labor  
in Nazi-Dominated Europe**

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CENTER FOR ADVANCED HOLOCAUST STUDIES  
UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM  
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## Foreword

Civilians, including concentration camp prisoners, deportees, foreign nationals, and Jews, as well as prisoners of war were forced into the sprawling forced and slave labor system that encompassed Europe and supported the war efforts of the Nazi regime and Germany's Axis allies. Forced and slave labor was used in road-building and defense works; the chemical, construction, metal, mining, and munitions industries; in agriculture; at installations working at the highest levels of technology; and to perform menial tasks. Such labor was integral to concentration camps and their sub-camps, farms, ghettos, labor battalions, church institutions, prisoner-of-war camps, and private industries in Germany, other Axis countries, and Axis-occupied territories east and west.

The pervasive and in some instances undisguised nature of this system is striking. Forced and slave labor took place not only in closed facilities, such as concentration and prisoner-of-war camps hidden from public eyes, but in many instances was a visible presence in the fabric of daily life: in the countryside on farms; in towns and cities across Europe when members of localized labor battalions assembled in the early morning and returned to their homes at dusk; and in ghettos, where Jews, often segregated only by barbed wire and therefore highly visible to their non-Jewish neighbors, hoped that labor might mean life.

The Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies organized a symposium *Forced and Slave Labor in Nazi-Dominated Europe* in October 2002 to present new research into key elements of that system. The symposium was part of an ongoing series of programs organized by the Center to bring to bear the knowledge and insight of experienced Holocaust scholars regarding topics of major significance, and to provide an outlet for cutting-edge research being carried out by new scholars who will ensure the field's future. The mission of the Center is to promote and support research on the Holocaust, to inspire the growth of the field of Holocaust studies, and to ensure the ongoing training of future generations of Holocaust scholars.

Nine scholars presented their work at the symposium, as well as a Romanian survivor, whose descriptions of his ghetto forced-labor experiences added a profoundly personal perspective to the scholars' presentations. The symposium itself was preceded by three days of intense deliberation among the presenters, who discussed one another's work in detail, debated the major new scholarly findings stimulated by recent

public interest in Holocaust-era slave labor issues, and traced out the opportunities for potentially important future research on this topic.

The symposium itself was organized into three sessions. In the first, *Forced and Slave Labor in Germany*, Peter Hayes of Northwestern University, a member of the Academic Committee of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, assessed the challenges confronting scholars researching the field—these challenges a consequence of the topic’s enormity, heterogeneity, and profundity, and offered suggestions for improving our grasp of the full historical record. Michael Thad Allen of Georgia Technical University described the nature of the SS’s “corporate adventures” during the 1930s, concluding that they represented a mix of “economic aspirations and disciplinary predilections.” Paul Jaskot of DePaul University closed the session with an examination of the link between German National Socialist architecture and the punitive concentration camp system.

At the second session *Jewish Forced and Slave Labor*, Wolf Gruner, the 2002–2003 Pearl Resnick Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, took a comparative approach, analyzing forced labor both as a basic element of Nazi persecution of German Jews after 1938 and as one of the first anti-Jewish measures initiated in countries under German occupation or in the Axis orbit. Randolph Braham of City University of New York, a member of the Center’s Academic Committee and a survivor of the Hungarian Labor Battalions, provided an overview of the Hungarian labor service system from 1939 to 1945 in the context of a wider series of antisemitic policies pursued by Hungarian governments from the mid-1930s. Christopher Browning of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, relied heavily on extensive Jewish survivor testimony as a primary source base in his examination of a complex of slave labor camps in the town of Starachowice in the General Government of occupied Poland, bringing an experiential perspective to the symposium. Professor Browning was the 2003 Ina Levine Scholar at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies. The uniquely compelling nature of survivor memory was underscored in William Rosenzweig’s account of his deportation east from his native Czernowitz, Romania, and his slave labor experiences in Romanian-occupied Transnistria.

The final session *Forced and Slave Labor Across Europe*, began with Andrej Angrick’s (institution, place) discussion of the use of SS-assigned slave labor in the construction of DG-IV, a main transit road built by the Germans and essential to their assault on Stalingrad and the Caucasus. Sarah Farmer of the University of California–

Irvine then addressed the use of foreign labor (“Groupements de Travailleurs Etrangers”) in Vichy France. Finally, Rolf Keller of the Niedersächsische Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung examined the contradictory “racism-versus-pragmatism” policy applied to Soviet prisoners of war used as forced and slave laborers in Germany in 1941/42.

The articles in this collection are not verbatim transcriptions of the papers as presented. Some authors extended or revised their presentations by incorporating additional information and endnotes, and all of the contributions were copyedited. Although the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum makes every reasonable effort to provide accurate information, the Museum cannot guarantee the reliability, currency, or completeness of the material contained in the individual papers. The papers represent work in progress. The opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Museum.

The Center’s symposium on *Forced and Slave Labor in Nazi-Dominated Europe* was made possible through the support of the Helena Rubinstein Foundation. Many members of the Center’s staff deserve thanks for their work on the symposium and proceedings: Robert M. Ehrenreich, Suzanne Brown-Fleming, and Lisa Grandy for organizing the symposium; Peter Black, Wendy Lower, and Martin Dean for their smooth moderation of the three panels; and Ellen Blalock, Eliot Werner, and Laura Brahm for preparing the papers for publication. Finally, and most important, the speakers deserve our greatest thanks for their excellent presentations and their subsequent participation in the editing of those presentations for this publication.

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# PART I

## FORCED AND SLAVE LABOR IN GERMANY



**Forced and Slave Labor:  
The State of the Field  
Peter Hayes**

The topic of forced and slave labor in Nazi Germany has been the subject of much valuable research, some of it dating back forty years or more. Still, the phenomenon remains extraordinarily difficult to grasp or to generalize about, the subject of considerable popular misunderstanding, and not yet thoroughly accounted for. The chief reasons for these conditions are the enormity, heterogeneity, and profundity of forced and slave labor in the Third Reich—that is, the vast number of people subjected to it (approximately thirteen million), the variety of their experiences, and the disturbing breadth and depth of the questions that the applications of forced and slave labor raise about both German and modern industrial society.

The rubric “forced and slave labor” covers ordeals that varied greatly over time and from place to place according to the category of person involved and in consequence of the sort of assignment meted out. The principle of inclusion under the heading is clear: forced laborers were those set to work for, by, or in Nazi Germany under duress and on its terms. Yet considerable differences arise concerning everything from daily treatment and nourishment to ultimate chances for survival depending on whether the laborer was a Jew; male or female; a civilian, prisoner of war, or a ghetto or camp inmate; could or could not speak German; came from Western or Eastern Europe; and whether he or she had to toil in Germany or the occupied East, in agriculture or industry, directly for the SS or the Wehrmacht, in a state-owned or private enterprise, a large or a small one, and in construction or mining or on an assembly line. Even the moment at which a person was caught up in the system could alter one’s situation since Nazi policy toward forced laborers (even those from camps) went through relatively hard and soft phases that had important effects on what individuals suffered.<sup>1</sup> These variables could also interact in confusing and contradictory ways that further confound generalization. Deprivation and death were omnipresent in the Nazi forced labor system, but they were not equally distributed.

**Forced Labor and the Jews**

Writing in a fashion that does justice to the unevenness of this sordid reality tends to disintegrate and blur the outlines of it, to muddy the waters of perception and invite the

relativization or hierarchization of suffering. It is no wonder that researchers and audiences have fixed on the most horrible and apparently most uniform subset of the topic: the brutalization and “annihilation through work” of the Jews. Not only the most obviously and accessibly moving dimension of the forced labor program, the exploitation of the Jews also seems to have a direct narrative line of relentless escalation toward a clear and final end. The dramatic properties of this part of the story constitute one of the reasons why it has crowded out other strands of the tale and one of the reasons why we have made a 180-degree turn from the Nuremberg trials—at which the specifics of Jewish suffering tended to be obscured by perceptions of European-wide horror—to a situation in which the reverse impression prevails.

Despite the pains to which Edward Homze went in his book *Foreign Labor in Nazi Germany* (1967) to concentrate on the multinational reach of Nazi impressment, to lay bare its internal inconsistencies, and to point out that the forced labor system was a “microcosm of the Nazi world”; despite Ulrich Herbert’s path-breaking book *Fremdarbeiter* (1985), which sought to recover in differentiated fashion a sense of what life was like for non-Jewish foreigners deployed in the industries of the Third Reich; and despite these and other works stressing the diversity of people, policy, and practice covered by the term “forced and slave labor,” even literate laypeople—not just the proverbial taxicab drivers usually cited in this connection—understood the restitution discussions of the 1990s as largely a matter of indemnification for Jews, rather than for the non-Jews who will receive some 75 percent of the payments under the German *Stiftungsinitiative* because they made up (by far) the majority of those victimized by the forced and slave labor system.<sup>2</sup>

This is one aspect of a general problem that historians have had several occasions to notice during the 1990s, not least in connection with the reception of Daniel Goldhagen’s publications: the limited degree to which the detailed and nuanced findings of professional research have penetrated public consciousness. As with the “twisted road to Auschwitz,” historians have constructed an impressive edifice of studies that not only foreground the racist dynamic in Nazi policymaking and its pedigree, but also highlight the more mundane social, economic, and psychological mechanisms that facilitated its enactment. In the process scholars have developed quite convincing overarching responses to the enduring question of all Holocaust studies: “How was this possible?” The responses are complicated and run up against the public’s (and sometimes even the guild’s) impatient preference for simplicity. How

much more true that is of the particular subject of forced and slave labor, where we have not come nearly as far in explaining the widespread eagerness of German institutions to engage in its use and to do so with notable crudity.

Why or in what respects have we not succeeded in providing a compelling, generally comprehensible and accepted, and genuinely historical account of these matters? I draw attention to three aspects of the subject on which the literature needs improvement, and thus suggest some of the challenges that remain for this field of inquiry.

### **Origins of Forced and Slave Labor**

First is the matter of the origins of forced and slave labor. Michael Allen and Paul Jaskot have taught us much about the ways in which the SS's own program took shape during the 1930s out of the peculiar mix of economic aspirations and disciplinary predilections that characterized that organization. Wolf Gruner has given us illuminating analyses of the emergence of compulsory labor for Jews in the expanded Reich even before the war began. Yet more encompassing forces and precedents should also receive prominence in accounts of the background to, for example, the infamous meeting of the Reich Defense Council in June 1939 at which Hermann Göring outlined sweeping plans for the use of compulsory civilian labor from occupied countries. Even Herbert's monumental work, which nods in this direction but takes (if anything) too long term a perspective, fails to note the ways in which the nationalization and militarization of labor in Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1939 laid the basis for the sort of thinking that was acted out on an ever-expanding scale after Poland and France fell.

The massive, semi-voluntary deployment of Germans into barracks and tent quarters and for the execution of putatively national projects became familiar practice to policymakers in Berlin during the 1930s. The Arbeitsdienst battalions that carried out riparian projects, the half-million people virtually conscripted to construct the Westwall in 1937–38, and the comparable numbers assigned to the Organisation Todt companies that laid down the Autobahnen—these were the mental models that not only inspired much of what happened later, but also accustomed Germans to both the arguments for such dragooning and its actual practice. It is impossible not to recognize the force of these examples in the first—and failed—SS work camps for Jews in Poland, of which Christopher Browning has written; in Oberführer Albrecht Schmelt's

activities in Silesia establishing the framework for the SS system of leasing Jews, first for road construction and then for industrial uses; and even in the large-scale disposition of forced laborers to *Durchgangstrasse* IV, the Atlantic Wall, and the new Führer Headquarters in Silesia (the aptly codenamed *Projekt Riese*).<sup>3</sup> The terms on which Germans were utilized bore no comparison to those that Germans exacted later, but these early and enormous *Arbeitseinsätze*—along with the programs that annually shipped German young people to the country to bring in the harvests—served to shade the lines of what was conceivable, permissible, and achievable in the minds of both Nazi policymakers and German civilians.

We can best explain how the forced and slave labor system took shape and how Germans became so complicit in it by documenting the way that forms of semi-forced labor of Germans elided into, paved the way for, and desensitized people to ever more extreme systems of compulsion—much as we do in explaining how mounting discriminatory practices toward Jews made possible what was done to them later. In this connection we need to make more explicit the role that POW labor played in the radicalization of the exploitative process and the ways in which the use of Polish and French POWs in agriculture and industry fostered plans—and not only within the Reich government—for the deployment of Russians, plans whose failure led rapidly to both the Sauckel actions and the metastasis of Auschwitz, Majdanek, and Stutthof.

### **Motives Behind Forced and Slave Labor**

On the closely related matter of the motives behind the forced labor system and its varying degrees of scope and intensity, the general interpretive emphasis in the literature is on the alternating priority of ideology and pragmatism and the inconsistencies generated by the influence of adherents to either at any given time. This is consistent with specialists' conviction that the Nazi regime was constantly caught in contradictions that produced inefficiencies, encapsulated in this instance by the mutually negating desires to extract value from foreigners but to keep them separate from and unequal to the German population. Yet the self-defeating nature of Nazi policy was apparent to contemporaries and is apparent to today's researchers. If—as Michael Allen has shown so well—that problem never really troubled the SS, which remained dedicated to destruction as its overriding priority, it did trouble the private industrial enterprises that increasingly partook of forced labor. Why did they nonetheless do so, indeed in increasingly savage forms?

The popular answers (even among historians) have become diverted along facile and sterile lines that stress the allegedly voluntary and profitable elements of the corporate recourse to forced labor. Industries supposedly clamored for ever more dragooned workers because they were cheap; and because they were cheap, industries did almost nothing effective to better the conditions that were undercutting their own efforts. The irrationality of the system thus became rational, all the more so in the final year of the war when the goal was not so much paper profits—which were likely to prove useless later—but the preservation of machinery and managers' positions for the better days to come.<sup>4</sup>

There is much truth in this depiction, but it also omits something decisive that we need to position more prominently in our interpretations of how the forced labor system functioned: the fact that in many cases, as Rolf Keller's paper shows, forced labor did not even pay for itself. In 1941 the managers of Philipp Holzmann (which was building the Kongresshalle in Nuremberg) calculated that employing POWs on stone-piling actually cost them more than using free German workers to move the same quantities.<sup>5</sup> And Bernd Wagner, the most recent and thorough student of the building of IG Farben's Monowitz factory near Auschwitz, has concluded that the huge slave labor force there managed to perform only about 15 percent of the construction work on the site, which probably could have been completed without them.<sup>6</sup>

These are not necessarily representative cases, but they point to something important: involvement in the slave labor system frequently had political and social causes rather than exclusively economic ones. For IG Farben at Auschwitz and for Degussa at its carbon black factory in nearby Gleiwitz, for example, the chief inducement to accept forced laborers was their political value in the context of the unavailability of other workers. Engaging forced labor functioned as proof that each firm was doing its utmost to achieve the production goals established by the regime, and thus that each was worthy of retaining its monopoly on manufacturing specific commodities essential to the war effort. We can follow this line of thinking a step further, as suggested by one of Helmuth Smith's formulations in his recent illuminating book on the antisemitic fever that gripped the Prussian town of Konitz in 1900. Smith notes that most Gentile townspeople came to reiterate and accept outrageous accusations against local Jews—even accusations that Prussian officialdom refused to credit—as “an act of allegiance to a community.”<sup>7</sup> In much the same way, German enterprises accepted and exploited the terms of the forced labor system even when

these made little economic sense—so little, in fact, that in the final year of the war, executives had to invent ways in which they did.

### **Applications of Forced and Slave Labor**

Finally, regarding the applications of forced labor in Nazi Germany, scholars have made much progress in recent years in demonstrating the ubiquity of the phenomenon; even the Christian churches are now known to have availed themselves of the system. Yet here too a good deal of work remains to be done. I am not familiar with a single military history of World War II that directs readers' attention to who built the bunkers that defended Normandy, though few fail any longer to comment on who assembled the V-2's and under what conditions. Even studies that center on forced and slave labor have trouble keeping track of its most horrible sites—the IG Farben factory at Auschwitz is always mentioned, but seldom that at nearby Blechhammer where the inmate construction force was larger and the death toll also may have been, at least in 1944. But in this connection, as regarding the subject of “Aryanization,” the literature has made great strides in demonstrating something long suppressed: few pockets of German society failed to gain something, at least in the short run, from the expropriation of the goods and labor of the subject populations in the New Order.

### **Coda**

Much work remains to be done to integrate what we have learned about these questions into a coherent picture, even if that process will never proceed far enough—and ought not to proceed far enough—to efface the vast discrepancies among individuals' fates. In short, with regard to the study of the Nazi forced labor system (a subject of great internal diversity and complexity), it is fair to say that the state of the field is strong but could be stronger, and I hope to have suggested useful ways in which we might advance it.

### Notes

1. On all of these matters, and for a more problematic definition of forced labor, see Mark Spoerer, *Zwangsarbeit unter dem Hakenkreuz* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2001).
2. Edward L. Homze, *Foreign Labor in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967); Ulrich Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter: Politik und Praxis des "Ausländer-Einsatzes" in der Kriegswirtschaft des Dritten Reiches* (Berlin: Verlag J. H. W. Dietz, 1985), which also appeared in English as *Hitler's Foreign Workers* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Gerald Feldman, "The Business History of the 'Third Reich' and the Responsibilities of the Historian" (Occasional Paper, Center for German and European Studies, University of California, Berkeley, January 1999).
3. See Christopher R. Browning, *Fateful Months: Essays on the Emergence of the Final Solution* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985); and Sybille Steinbacher, "*Musterstadt*" *Auschwitz: Germanisierungspolitik und Judenmord in Ostoberschlesien* (Munich: K. G. Saur Verlag, 2000). Two new works that point in the right direction in this regard are Manfred Pohl, *Philipp Holzmann: Geschichte eines Bauunternehmens 1849–1999* (Munich: C. H. Beck Verlag, 1999), pp. 192–280; and Manfred Pohl and Birgit Siekmann, *HOCHTIEF und seine Geschichte* (Munich: Piper Verlag, 2000), pp. 156–94.
4. See especially Neil Gregor, *Daimler-Benz in the Third Reich* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).
5. Pohl and Siekmann, *HOCHTIEF*, p. 182.
6. Bernd C. Wagner, *IG Auschwitz: Zwangsarbeit und Vernichtung von Häftlingen des Lagers Monowitz 1941–1945* (Munich: K. G. Saur Verlag, 2000), p. 290.
7. Helmuth Walser Smith, *The Butcher's Tale* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), p. 156.

## **The Business of Genocide**

**Michael Thad Allen**

It has been widely assumed that the SS sought to use prison labor to increase its influence over German corporations and, indeed, to control the German economy. But in fact German corporations such as Volkswagen and IG Farben went to the SS looking for labor, and these business partnerships began only toward the end of the Third Reich. The first tentative orders for slave labor, involving no more than a few thousand prisoners, began in 1941 when labor was desperately scarce. A network of satellite camps did not spread throughout the German war economy until 1944, after which scarcely any German factory of importance had not applied for concentration camp prisoners.

This process was halting and slow, for even after the German transition to total war, the SS constantly tried to keep its prisoners to itself. Here again, SS motives have been largely misunderstood. Many have assumed that the SS embarked on slave labor ventures out of pure greed. Rudolf Vrba, an extraordinarily courageous man who escaped from Auschwitz and brought word of the Holocaust to the Slovakian resistance movement, spoke of the “commercialism” of Birkenau’s extermination machinery and the SS’s desire to extract the ultimate profit. This assumption—and not Norman Finkelstein’s inflammatory book—initially defined the “Holocaust industry.” “Killings were carried out with an efficiency which few time-and-motion experts would fault, and they paid rich dividends.”<sup>1</sup> Historians such as Robert Koehl have also suggested this straightforward motive. SS businessmen “can neither be described as ideologically motivated nor as misfits of the depression, but simply as very ruthless entrepreneurs who, quite clear-eyed, saw opportunities for profit in the exploitation of concentration camp labor.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Case Study: Kurt Wisselinck**

In 1944 SS manager Kurt Wisselinck went out of his way to intervene in the SS’s corporate operations at Gross-Rosen. SS apprentices had brought the camp to his attention, complaining “that they are being withheld additional portions of potatoes with the justification that there are no more left, while it can be observed that the prisoners receive the additional food.”<sup>3</sup>



Anyone who has seen documentary footage knows what prisoners began to look like in 1944: emaciated skin stretched over skeletal bodies. Mortality rates, which fluctuated wildly, were approximately 10 percent a year at Gross-Rosen and were carefully tracked by SS management.<sup>4</sup> A steady diet—even of leftovers—might have benefited production; Gross-Rosen’s managers had stated this but to no avail. Wisselinck wrote reports, compiled statistics, called in his superior, and in the end demanded the “rationalization” of the camp’s kitchen to ensure that such “embezzlement” could not happen again.<sup>5</sup>

If efficiency could be so easily brushed off over a few potatoes, what then were the motives of the SS’s business entrepreneurs? In spring 1944 Wisselinck wrote in a lengthy memorandum, “The business undertakings of the Schutzstaffel are the best means to . . . break through to new directions in the area of applied socialism. We must live socialism as the deed! Through our example [we must] spur other corporations forward . . . in order to see the growth of a healthy, satisfied, and happy *Volks*.”



(sketch by Kurt Wisselinck, 1944, courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, microfilm collection T-976, roll 18)

This crusade emphasized the *socialism* in National Socialism, but Wisselinck was no less hostile to Marxism. Before Hitler's rise to power, Wisselinck claimed, "primitive housing" had proved to be a "feeding ground [*Nährboden*] of immorality" and Marxism. He also blamed banks, thus condemning communism and capitalism in the same breath.<sup>6</sup> He declared that SS companies had to provide settlements to encourage Aryan families "rich in children." If this logic verged on incoherence, it could still make the distribution of leftover potatoes seem like an issue of national renaissance.

Hannah Arendt's concept of the "banality of evil" cannot capture the heroic self-image of men such as Wisselinck or their motives. In 1944, as the invasion of Normandy loomed and Germany faced Red Army offensives in the East, Wisselinck (a compulsive doodler) took the time to turn out this sketch, an excellent representation of SS industrial management. The handsome, square-jawed man drawn on office stationery gazes sidelong with focused intensity down a string of telephone poles. Rings beneath his eyes betray fatigue, but his determination is undimmed. He holds a telephone to his ear, and it is impossible to say whether he is giving or receiving orders, but the pose—ready for action—portrays virtues that SS managers wished to see in themselves. The man is dynamic, the master of modern technology, and—with his high forehead and perfectly straight nose—a model of Teutonic racial fortitude.<sup>7</sup>

Ironically, at the margin is scribbled an almost unreadable note about some kind of reimbursement for twenty-five Reichsmark petty cash. The drawing shows the heroic ambiance imagined by SS officers in managerial tasks—the kind that led Wisselinck to intervene angrily at Gross-Rosen—but at the same time the trivial paper pushing that filled their days, even as they presided over the life and death of human beings. Historians have often dwelt on the latter, but the history of the SS's corporate empire owed much more to the former.

### **SS Companies**

The SS's corporate adventures began in the earliest years of the Third Reich. The first, Nordland Verlag, was founded in the last weeks of 1934 and released approximately 200 publications during the next ten years; it promised to "bring the SS worldview to the SS membership and to the people."<sup>8</sup> Such political pretensions provided one of the few constants of SS enterprise for the next decade, and more often than not it led the

SS's business executives to override more traditional motives such as profit, often to the detriment of their own balance sheets.

These SS ventures often substituted pretension for sound business. Perhaps most improbable of all, in September 1936 Anton Loibl—one of Hitler's chauffeurs and a self-styled independent inventor—convinced Heinrich Himmler to invest in a research-and-development firm for “technical articles of all kinds.”<sup>9</sup> Loibl himself held only a bogus patent for a bicycle light, but here was another preoccupation of SS business: an almost childish fascination with technological novelties and the “German inventive spirit.” By the end of the Third Reich, this attitude would express itself in Himmler's bid to control the V-2 rockets, a genuinely high-tech project. But in the early 1930s the bicycle light proved to be one of a number of SS debacles. Accountants later brought in by the chief executive officer of all SS business, Oswald Pohl, referred to these early companies as “worse than wretched.”<sup>10</sup>

None of them employed prisoners, a practice that began only in 1937–39. Even then prison labor remained confined to SS corporations and state-owned companies and was not available to private businesses. Their influence in the larger German economy was insignificant. Nevertheless, the SS now converted the concentration camps into slave labor combines. Here the SS made choices that were not incidental. Building supply industries formed the most important sector of SS holdings, and in April 1938 the SS founded the German Earth and Stone Works. This company expected to sell its products to various monumental building programs throughout the Reich; the most important, examined best by historian Paul Jaskot, were Albert Speer's plans for “Führer buildings.” Speer even offered an advance sum of 9.5 million Reichsmark for brick and stone, a payment that amounted to an interest-free loan. By September 1941 Speer had contracted with the SS for the exclusive rights to the rare red granite quarried at Natzweiler for use in the German Stadium.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the fees that changed hands, the SS tried to make contempt for profit into a virtue. “The SS fundamentally avoids business endeavor for the sole purpose of earning money,” wrote Pohl in 1941. “The very fact of our cultural goals leads our companies down certain paths that a purely private businessman would never dare and this causes losses from time to time.” Should some ventures actually make money, “It is the will of the Reichsführer-SS that profits from lucrative corporations be diverted to cover the losses of others. These must labor under the constraints of their non-capitalistic [*nicht privatwirtschaftliche*] end goals. At times these goals damn our

corporations to years of future losses.”<sup>12</sup> Supposedly the German Earth and Stone Works would fulfill this mission by supplying bricks and stone for Hitler’s monumental buildings.

By 1939–40 another even more massive building project began to consume the SS’s passion for “cultural goals.” On October 7, 1939, directly after the conquest of Poland, Hitler granted Himmler the title “Reich Commissar for the Strengthening of German Nationhood.” As Reich Commissar Himmler began to plan a vast ring of utopian Aryan settlements in German-occupied Poland. These would “surround” native Polish and Jewish populations in order to “gradually crush them to death economically and biologically.”<sup>13</sup> Such bloody-minded utopian vistas expanded with German conquests in the East.

Thus, far from responding to the war economy’s pragmatic calculations, Himmler and Pohl sought to expand the SS’s slave labor empire well into 1942 and beyond. The German Commercial Operations, an SS holding company founded in 1939, seized brick and cement factories from Jews for this social engineering project. Likewise, the SS also confiscated furniture companies and retooled them to produce “settler furniture.” In January 1942 Himmler demanded the immediate expansion of the German Commercial Operations to meet a minimum of 80 percent of the SS’s settlement construction needs. “If we do not [expand],” Himmler warned, “we will never . . . get houses for our SS men in the Reich, nor will I, as Reich Commissar for the Strengthening of German Nationhood, be able to erect the homes that we will need in order to make the East German.”<sup>14</sup>

By early 1942 Pohl had recruited Hans Kammler, a civil engineer with substantial experience in settlement construction; together they erected a vertically integrated SS construction combine. Kammler proposed to organize SS Building Brigades and asked for upward of 160,000 fresh prisoners to man them, “POWs, Jews, and otherwise incarcerated foreigners, etc.”<sup>15</sup> These Building Brigades construct settlements for Himmler’s Reich Commissariat for the Strengthening of German Nationhood. The SS’s industrial holdings, which also employed thousands of prisoners, were to provide the building supplies and raw materials. Himmler believed that only a completely integrated slave labor empire could contribute to the success of the SS’s cultural mission after the war—a point he constantly reiterated.

The war will have no meaning if, twenty years hence, we have not undertaken a totally German settlement of the occupied territories. . . . If we do not provide the bricks here, if we do not fill our camps full with

slaves [to] build our cities, our towns, our farmsteads, we will not have the money after the long years of war in order to furnish the settlements in such a fashion that truly German men can live in them and can take root in the first generation.<sup>16</sup>

Pohl and Kammler worked feverishly on the SS's construction needs, submitting a budget of thirteen billion Reichsmark in January 1942; despite this sizable sum, however, Himmler asked them to think bigger. The sheer scale of their plans is dumbfounding, especially when one considers that in early 1942 the German economy was in the midst of a painful transition to total war. Yet Kammler dutifully projected more than double the initial volume for construction. Still Himmler crossed out an estimate of 20–30 billion Reichsmark and penciled 80–120 billion (approximately 50–80 percent of Germany's 1942 gross domestic product) in the margin.<sup>17</sup> By comparison, Germany's total industrial investment in 1942 was 5.9 billion Reichsmark, an investment surpassed only in 1953.<sup>18</sup>

These plans also explain Himmler's well-known allusion to "great industrial projects" in a January 26, 1942, order to Richard Glücks, inspector of concentration camps. "In the coming days I will send . . . 100,000 Jews and up to 50,000 Jewesses. In the next few weeks the concentration camps will be assigned great industrial tasks. SS Major General Pohl will inform you of the details."<sup>19</sup> Historians have suspected that Himmler's statement was mere camouflage, meant to conceal his real intention of sending Jews east to the killing camps; others speculate that the SS planned to use these Jewish workers to build armaments factories in order to transform itself into a state within the state. But there can be little doubt that Himmler intended these prisoners to serve in the massive construction program that he proposed for the Aryan settlements.

None of these plans interfered with genocide. In fact, slave labor and genocide continued simultaneously throughout the history of the Holocaust. The 150,000 "Jews and Jewesses" alluded to by Himmler represented only a small portion of even the Western European Jews. The SS never intended to set aside as many Jews for labor as it intended to murder outright, but this 150,000 almost exactly matched the number of prisoners proposed by Kammler for the SS Building Brigades.

### **Conclusion: Total War**

The more grandiose "peace-building" plans became, the grimmer Germany's prospects in war turned out to be. Still there were some disturbing continuities. The SS began its slave labor empire to serve the megalomaniac construction projects of the Führer; this

never changed during wartime. By 1944 the vast majority of the SS's captive laborers were working on and in eerie underground factory halls as part of a rush fighter-airplane manufacturing program named the "Jäger Staff." This would consume roughly one-third of Germany's total construction volume in 1944 (1.15 billion Reichsmark) but it promised even more.

By March 1944 Hitler decided that Germany's armaments factories must be invulnerable to bombing raids. The Armaments Ministry projected a series of up to nine impregnable factory buildings of 600,000 square meters each (dubbed the "Construction Program of the Führer"). This would have used up more cement than existed in the entire German building economy. The plan was as unrealistic as Himmler's own fantasies of spending 80–120 billion Reichsmark for SS settler homesteads in the East, but once again architectural fantasies spurred the SS's managers to feverish activity. Kammler took charge of the most important project in this "Führer program," an underground complex located in the Harz Mountains, where the SS worked with the German Army, Air Force, and private corporations to build the "Wonder Weapons"—the V-1 and V-2 rockets. Using teams of prisoners, Kammler eventually completed 500,000 square meters of factory space. In the process thousands of prisoners were worked to death, making the V-2 rocket (as Michael Neufeld states) the only modern weapons system to kill more victims in production than it killed when deployed against the enemy in combat.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout the war the SS never abandoned its plans for a utopia of race supremacy. As final victory proved ever more elusive, Pohl, Kammler, and Himmler continued to refer to the New Order that they intended to impose on the East; they merely desisted from talking about such plans as if they would be immediately realized. If the utopia of the Reich Commissariat for the Strengthening of German Nationhood faded, it did not disappear: what SS managers called the "Peace Program" or "Peace Construction" continued to spur the imagination of SS industrialists. As late as summer 1943, with the Soviets preparing to pound the Germans at Kursk, Kammler wrote to Himmler about the SS's "gigantic program after the conclusion of war." The SS required "the preconditions for a quick victory" in order to secure "in this way the facilities . . . for Peace Work [*Friedensarbeit*]." <sup>21</sup>

It is popular to view the SS as a marauding institution within German society, one bent on taking over rival agencies, but it would be a gross mistake to believe that Kammler's efforts were antagonistic to Germany's industrial managers or that his

fixation on SS “peace projects” alienated the war planners in Speer’s Ministry of Armaments and War Production. Joseph Goebbels wrote in his diary, “In the deployment of [the rockets] one must recognize that it is always only one individual who has really achieved a great and unique thing . . . Kammler.”<sup>22</sup> This was an all too typical, not an exceptional, SS relationship with corporations and Nazi ministries seeking slaves. The SS chief manager of labor allocations to German industry, Gerhard Maurer, also received glowing praise. “It has been reported to me that we owe the smooth operation of this action [the SS concentration camp labor action] essentially to your competence and cooperation,” wrote the head of German aircraft production in spring 1943.<sup>23</sup>

Such comments suggest how slave labor in the Third Reich became a routine business of genocide. SS men such as Pohl, Kammler, and Wisselinck were real (not metaphorical) engineers and managers of death. If one abiding uniqueness of the Holocaust remains the Nazi drive to manage industrial work in tandem with no less factory-like murder, this was largely their doing.

### Notes

1. Rudolf Vrba, *I Cannot Forgive* (New York: Grove Press), p. 266; Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London: Verso, 2000).
2. Robert Koehl, *The Black Corps: The Structure and Power Struggles of the Nazi SS* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), p. 170.
3. Wisselinck, "Ernährung und Ausbildung der Lehrlinge: Deutsche Erd- und Steinwerke Granitwerk Gross-Rosen," March 2–7, 1944, National Archives and Records Administration, T-976/18. See also Wisselinck, "Aktenvermerk Granitwerk Gross-Rosen," March 30, 1944, T-976/18; and another similar case, Opperbeck to Chef Stab W, Obf. Baier, "Bericht des Hauptbetriebsobmannes SS-Ostuf. Wisselinck vom 13/9/44 über den Besuch im Werk Butschowitz am 31/8/44," October 3, 1944, T-976/18. By contrast, Wisselinck praised SS companies that withheld rations from their prisoners and made efforts to secure extra rations for civilians (see Wisselinck to Chef Stab W, Obf. Baier, "Granitwerk Gross-Rosen," February 29, 1944, T-976/18, and Wisselinck's reports throughout this collection). Paul B. Jaskot, "The Architectural Policy of the SS, 1936–45" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1993), pp. 100–159, contains an excellent analysis of the SS's stone quarries.
4. Götz Aly, Susanne Heim, Miroslav Kárný, Petra Kirchberger, and Alfred Konieczny, *Sozialpolitik und Judenvernichtung: Gibt es eine Ökonomie der Endlösung?* (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1987), pp. 140–41, 144, 147.
5. Wisselinck to Stab W, "Vorschläge zur weitgehendsten Ausschaltung von Veruntreuungen in der gemeinschaftsverpflegung," unspecified, sometime in March 1944, T-976/18.
6. All quotations in Wisselinck, "Die SS-Siedlungen bzw. die Werksiedlungen in den wirtschaftlichen Unternehmungen der Schutzstaffel," May 17, 1944, T-976/18.
7. Sketch, sometime in 1944, T-976/18.
8. Enno Georg, *Die wirtschaftlichen Unternehmungen der SS* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1963), p. 15.
9. Unsigned reports and balance sheets on Anton Loibl GmbH, 1936–41, NARA T-976/7. NO-542 Salpeter, undated (mid-1939), "Tasks, Organization and Finance Plan of Office III-W of the RFSS."
10. NARA NO-542 Salpeter, undated (mid-1939), "Tasks, Organization and Finance Plan of Office III-W of the RFSS."



11. Here and elsewhere when I discuss the German Earth and Stone Works, architecture, and the German building economy, I am relying on Paul B. Jaskot's excellent work *The Architecture of Oppression: The SS, Forced Labor, and the Nazi Monumental Building Economy* (London: Routledge, 2000). This also gives me opportunity to point out a mistake in my own book, *The Business of Genocide: The SS, Slave Labor, and the Concentration Camps* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), p. 60, where I—following the previous errors of other architectural historians—identified the Reich Chancellery as the destination of Natzweiler's red granite. I thank Jaskot for pointing out that the intended use was, instead, the German Stadium.

12. Pohl to Reichskommissar für die Preisbildung, September 19, 1941, "Erklärung nach §22 KWVO der dem VuWHA angeschlossenen Gesellschaften," NARA T-976/3.

13. Quotation in Josef Marszalek, *Majdanek Konzentrationslager Lublin* (Warsaw: Verlag Interpress, 1984), p. 18.

14. Himmler reply to Pohl and Kammler, January 31, 1942, NARA BAK NS19: 2065. Note here again the total absence of preoccupation with SS armaments factories.

15. NO-1292, Kammler to Glücks, March 10, 1942, "Einsatz von Häftlingen, Kriegsgefangenen, Juden usw. für die Durchführung des Bauprogrammes des SS-WVHA, Amtsgruppe C 1942."

16. Himmler's speech on June 9, 1942, quotation in Götz Aly, *"Endlösung" Volkerverschiebung und der Mord an den europäischen Juden* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer, 1995), p. 292.

17. Himmler's notes on Kammler to Himmler, February 10, 1942, "Aufstellung von SS-Baubrigaden für die Durchführung von Bauaufgaben des RFSS im Kriege und Frieden," BAK NS19/2065.

18. I thank Mark Spoerer for these estimates of German gross domestic product. See also Christoph Buchheim, "Die Wirtschaftsentwicklung im Dritten Reich mehr Disaster als Wunder. Eine Erwiderung auf Werner Abelshauer," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 49 (2001), p. 659.

19. Himmler to Richard Glücks, January 26, 1942, BDC Hängeordner 643; see also Arthur Liebehenschel to all KLs, January 19, 1942, "Überstellung von Juden," printed in Harry Stein, *Juden in Buchenwald* (Weimar: Gedenkstätte Buchenwald, 1992), p. 119. This decree orders the immediate transfer of the "number of Jews able to work to the POW Camp Lublin as reported by teletype" (received on January 26). It mentions a

teletype from December 8; note that this predated serious talks of KL armaments works with Speer or Walther Schieber. I thank Peter Witte for providing this document.

20. Michael Neufeld, *The Rocket and the Reich: Peenemünde and the Coming of the Ballistic Missile Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 260–65. On the networks of private firms and extensive cooperation at Mittelwerk-Dora, see Jens-Christian Wagner, *Production des Todes: Das KZ Mittelbau-Dora* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2001).

21. Kammler to Himmler, July 1, 1943, BAK NS19/2065

22. From March 31, 1945, in Elke Fröhlich, ed., *Die Tagebücher von Josef Goebbels*, vol. 15 (Munich: Institut für Zeitgeschichte, series began in 1987), p. 647.

23. Erhard Milch to Maurer, April 13, 1943, T-175/80.

# **Cultural Policy and Political Oppression: Nazi Architecture and the Development of SS Forced Labor Concentration Camps\***

**Paul B. Jaskot**

Beyond its use as propaganda, art was thoroughly integrated into the implementation of Nazi state and party policies. Because artistic and political goals were integrated, art was not only subject to repressive policies but also in turn influenced the formulation of those very repressive measures. In the Third Reich, art policy was increasingly authoritarian in character; however, art production also became one means by which other authoritarian institutions could develop their ability to oppress.

## **The Problem**

We can analyze the particular political function of art by looking at the interest of the SS in orienting its forced labor operations to the monumental building economy. The SS control of forced labor concentration camps after 1936 linked state architectural policy to the political function of incarcerating and punishing perceived enemies of National Socialist Germany.<sup>1</sup> The specific example of the Nuremberg Reich Party Rally Grounds reveals three key aspects of this SS process of adaptation.

The first aspect is the relationship between architectural decisions at Nuremberg and developments in the German building economy during the early war years. Before the turning tide of the war led to a cessation of work at the site, agencies and firms involved with the design and construction of the Nuremberg buildings secured a steady and profitable supply of work as a result of Hitler's emphasis on a few large architectural projects.

The second aspect focuses on how the SS quarrying enterprises in the forced labor concentration camps were comparable to their private-sector competitors. At the height of their optimism, SS administrators pursued stone orders from Nuremberg and—through their firm the German Earth and Stone Works (*Deutsche Erd- und Steinwerke* [DEST])—made organizational decisions for the camps in relation to the monumental building economy.<sup>2</sup> Led by its administrative chief Oswald Pohl, the SS used the DEST to link its steadily increasing political authority to architectural policy

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in National Socialist Germany. By 1941 the SS had secured contracts for specific buildings at the Nuremberg site and began to organize the forced labor in the camps in accordance with these prestigious commissions. Reconstructing this history exposes the extent of DEST economic operations and of SS ambitions to adapt its ventures to specific architectural projects.

Because the forced labor of prisoners was key to these ambitions, investigating how labor was mobilized, utilized, and maximized is crucial to exploring the relationship between the SS and the monumental building economy. Hence the attitude toward and use of forced labor for architectural projects represents the final aspect of the issue. As Michael Allen has pointed out, SS middle managers may have had grand schemes but they were often ignored at the camp site by the commandants and SS personnel who were not going to stop abusing and killing prisoners simply to serve some bureaucratic economic agenda.<sup>3</sup> Still (at least until 1942) SS administrators followed Heinrich Himmler's lead in viewing labor not as individual workers who could be made more or less efficient based on changing incentives or conditions, but rather as another resource in the production process. Because of its control over an ever increasing number of people, the SS concerned itself less with the attrition of its workforce in the harsh conditions of the camps than with the productivity of its economic ventures. The efficiency of the worker became less an issue the further that worker was from representing the racist or political ideal of the Nazi state. Rather, the political goal of punishing camp inmates coalesced with the economic expansion of SS ventures in a narrow focus on the productivity of the prisoner in the service of the building economy.

### **The Party Rally Grounds at Nuremberg and the Building Economy (1933–1945)**

The SS decision to focus some of its forced labor operations on buildings for Nuremberg had much to do with the aesthetic and organizational development of the site from 1933 to 1939, the point at which the SS became involved with the project. By December 1934 Albert Speer had finished the first complete layout of the grounds, which featured four basic elements—the Luitpoldhain arena, Zeppelin Field, Congress Hall (designed by Ludwig Ruff), and March Field for military exercises—arranged along a central axis. Further, both the need to guarantee financing and the increase in planning tasks led in March 1935 to the founding of a separate administration—the Reich Party Rally Grounds Association Nuremberg (*Zweckverband*

*Reichsparteitagsgelände Nürnberg* [ZRPT])—to oversee all aspects of the building process. As a public corporation, the ZRPT approved contracts, obtained financing, and administered the building process according to Speer’s demands.<sup>4</sup> The city’s Office of Structural Engineering (Hochbauamt), led by Walter Brugmann, handled on-site construction and stone procurement.

Speer and his staff had a free hand in the building design, subject only to Hitler’s approval and his preference for a stripped-down neoclassicism. In 1937 Speer began designs for the German Stadium, the last major building added to the plan. Due to its size, the German Stadium posed a greater technical and financial problem for the ZRPT than even Congress Hall. The stadium was to be constructed with a brick and stone core and a granite face, thereby avoiding the use of steel or reinforced concrete. This aesthetic and method of construction served a dual purpose. First, the use of granite and brick followed a well-established ideological campaign to promote the use of classical building techniques derived from ancient Greek and Roman sources. As Alex Scobie notes, the German Stadium is a conflation of a horseshoe-shaped Roman circus and the Greek use of a propylaeum placed at the intersection of the stadium with the main axis of the Nuremberg grounds. This conflation allowed for the competing and often contradictory claims made about monumental architecture by National Socialist cultural administrators: Greek to emphasize the supposed racial connections between contemporary Germany and its “Aryan” ancestors, Roman to buttress the claims of Nazi Germany as a new and powerful empire. Further emphasis on the Roman derivation of the building came from the construction of the core out of a series of masonry barrel vaults.<sup>5</sup>

Yet the use of granite and brick construction was not simply ideologically significant; it also corresponded to the needs of the broader German building economy. The second purpose served by this type of construction was to avoid the use of iron and steel, building materials needed for factories and weapons production under the rearmament program established by the Four-Year Plan in 1936. Technically a building with the scale of the German Stadium could be constructed more quickly and at less labor expense with a structural skeleton of steel or reinforced concrete, but with the demand for steel by the armaments industries, these materials became politically regulated by Hermann Göring’s Office of the Four-Year Plan. Hence it was no coincidence that in 1937 Speer turned to a propaganda strategy emphasizing classical construction techniques (e.g., the use of Roman barrel vaults) to show how the Roman

Empire could function as a model for the German Reich. The politicization of sectors of the German building economy required that architects seek alternative materials, a search that was easily justified by the ideological implications associated with masonry construction.<sup>6</sup>

On September 1, 1939, however, war brought an abrupt halt to the speedy construction of the Party Rally Grounds. The energy and resources for construction were routed to other, no less urgent components of the monumental building economy, including planning and stone procurement.<sup>7</sup> In the early war years, National Socialist architects relied on—and believed in—a German victory and saw the war as a temporary situation that meant a reorientation of their goals and interests for a short period of time. Certainly the ZRPT's confidence corresponded to the military advances of the German Army through September 1940. With the occupation of Paris and the June 22 truce signed with France, Hitler rescinded the restriction on construction but only for the "Hitler cities"—Berlin, Munich, Linz, and Hamburg—and the Party Rally Grounds at Nuremberg.<sup>8</sup> The military victories were picked up in the administrative correspondence, as bureaucrats increasingly spoke of the assured outcome of the war in favor of Germany and its implications for further planning and building in the presumed forthcoming peace. The procurement of stone and the revival of construction activity sustained the importance of architectural policy in a Germany that anticipated a quick victory.

Thus the architectural history of wartime National Socialist Germany is less a history of design than production, of how certain high-profile projects such as the buildings at Nuremberg were realized through the mobilization of resources, materials, labor, and administration of the construction site. Acquiring the high-quality stone designated by Hitler for particular projects and facilitating its placement at the building site took priority. In 1940 deliveries for Nuremberg totaled 19,075 cubic meters (including 3,408 cubic meters for the German Stadium). Simultaneously Brugmann's office prepared technical drawings and constructed the necessary rail spurs for delivering stone to the German Stadium site. All stone orders were arranged through Speer's staff in Berlin.<sup>9</sup> During 1941 Speer's largest project at Nuremberg took precedence in stone procurement.

Yet the realities of a protracted war finally affected the Party Rally Grounds in 1942 as resources and state funding were directed toward the military economy. Work came to a halt and laborers were transferred to armaments industries or other important

war-related tasks. By 1943 neither Brugmann nor Speer worked with the ZRPT, which had become a shadow organization with a minimal staff still attempting to maintain the earlier war optimism and to proceed with work on the Party Rally Grounds.

The prewar and wartime history of the Reich Party Rally Grounds indicates how the design process (particularly in relation to the choice of materials and scale) could lead to other decisions that produced building conditions amenable to the economic function of the SS forced labor concentration camps. The exponential increase in the cost of the building complex made it the most attractive commission (along with Berlin) in all of Germany. That a good percentage of this cost was devoted to the massive amounts of stone required—particularly for the German Stadium—would give stone quarries with contracts a substantial and secure income for several years. This stone had to be of a certain quality and conform to a particular aesthetic as designated by Hitler. Further, the size of the complex also ensured those firms a steady, high-profile assignment. Finally, the speed and extent of construction favored those quarrying and construction firms that, through their control of labor, could focus their resources on production quotas. As an institution with complete control over punishing prisoners in concentration camps, some of which were specifically located with the monumental building economy in mind, the SS seemed to fill these requirements particularly well.

### **SS Economic Goals and the Party Rally Grounds**

By the late 1930s, the SS had focused its most ambitious plans for expanding the economic function of the forced labor concentration camps into the monumental construction projects of the party and state. The outbreak of hostilities on September 1, 1939, had little initial impact on the continuation of work—especially in the quarries—since both SS and private quarries were protected from closing and from the transfer of their official SS personnel. Production was sustained not only by the persistence of stone orders and the renewal of construction projects after the 1940 victory in France, but also by the influx of political prisoners from throughout Europe. The nature of the concentration camps as institutions designed to punish or kill their inmates perversely guaranteed that the production of building materials would continue. Punitive political goals combined with economic policy in the harsh labor conditions of the stone quarry concentration camps. During this period DEST administrators had little concern with efficiency in the economic sense of the term—i.e., through the maximization of labor.

Rather, effective utilization of labor meant both increasing output through sheer numbers of forced laborers and punishing this labor force to the point of death through extreme conditions and unreasonable production quotas. While the intent to kill was never an explicit forced labor policy, the politically driven indifference to the fate of the burgeoning camp populations made physical hardship and death a daily reality for the inmates.

Whereas the SS had a specific and immediate interest in the building plans for Berlin from DEST's inception in 1938, the particular connection of DEST concerns to the Party Rally Grounds came only in this period of military optimism. From 1941 to 1943, the ZRPT ordered stone for the German Stadium from the quarry camps at Flossenbürg, Gross-Rosen, and Natzweiler.<sup>10</sup> Natzweiler in particular was planned in relation to the construction of the German Stadium in Nuremberg, and its development as a stone quarry/forced labor camp paralleled the fortunes of the stadium's construction into the war years.

After the victory over France, the SS founded the new camp in Alsace as a forced labor center and collection point for prisoners captured in occupied Western and Northern Europe.<sup>11</sup> No sooner was this camp founded than Himmler and Pohl decided to direct the quarry work at Natzweiler toward the Party Rally Grounds. When the SS resolved to establish more camps in 1940, Himmler and Pohl went to Speer to inquire about the best locations for the camps—that is, in areas where the stone would be particularly suitable to Speer's plans in Nuremberg and Berlin. Natzweiler was on a site that offered a rich and unusual type of red granite suitable for the German Stadium. That Natzweiler was built to punish prisoners through the production of material specifically for this project was confirmed by a contract for stone signed on September 4, 1941; it secured the entire output of red granite at the quarry exclusively for the stadium.<sup>12</sup> With their decision to locate the camp according to Speer's aesthetic material needs, Himmler and Pohl connected the political function of the camp to the privileged position of the German Stadium and its subsequent history. The amount of finished stone from Natzweiler for the ZRPT (though small) rose substantially in 1941–42 and then declined in 1943, paralleling the chronological development of the German Stadium construction, after which the camp forced labor turned to armaments work.<sup>13</sup>

With the opening of Natzweiler and the expansion of the forced labor concentration camp system during 1939 to 1942, the SS attempted to establish an eventual peacetime role by involving itself with important aspects of the German



building economy. Yet the pursuit of these interests at the height of wartime optimism engendered not only more stone quarry camps like Natzweiler, but also a diversification of labor at those quarries. In late 1940 the SS set up stonemason workshops at Flossenbürg and planned to establish similar units at the camps at Natzweiler, Gross-Rosen, Mauthausen, and Oranienburg II (part of Sachsenhausen). The SS used stonemasonry programs created for such commissions as the German Stadium to integrate into and even dominate parts of the building economy through the exploitation of forced labor.

Stonemasonry was a crucial service of larger quarry firms since it meant that blocks of cut stone could be dressed at least to the general specifications of the intended building projects before shipping, requiring only minimal work at the site itself. The SS established its first stonemason workshop at Flossenbürg in October 1940. By April 1942 some of the high-quality stone being quarried and cut by forced labor at Flossenbürg was going to fulfill contracts for the German Stadium. By the end of 1942, the total number of prisoners being trained in the SS system reached a high of 2,238, the largest population of stonemasons active in a single German firm.<sup>14</sup> Stonemason workshops solidified the connection between SS economic concerns and projects such as the Party Rally Grounds.

The initial impetus for a stonemason program came from the need to provide stonemasons for the SS's own architectural projects, which were intended to be numerous after the war. SS administrators quickly supplemented this goal with a plan to secure an undisputed position within the private stonemason industry, competing for representational building commissions such as the Party Rally Grounds. In a secret memorandum of December 5, 1941, to Reinhard Heydrich, Richard Glücks, and all concentration camp commandants, Himmler outlined these strong ambitions.

The building plans of the Schutzstaffel [SS], especially after the war, demand that even now far-reaching preparatory measures be taken. With this belongs first the provision of the necessary building labor force. The Schutzstaffel is in the exceptionally favorable position to train and to extract this labor force from the prisoners in the concentration camps.

I have therefore commissioned the Chief of the Economic-Administrative Main Office [Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt], SS-Gruppenführer Pohl, to train before the peace agreement (for the monumental buildings beginning thereafter): 1) at least 5,000 stone masons, 2) at least 10,000 bricklayers. If one considers that throughout Germany before the war there were only about 4,000 trained stonemasons, the extent of this educational task is easy to recognize and

to survey. But we will use these 5,000 stonemasons, as an order from the Führer already exists for which the *Deutsche Erd- und Steinwerke GmbH* (as a concern of the Schutzstaffel) has to deliver with the beginning of peace at least 100,000 cbm [cubic meters] of granite yearly for the monumental buildings of the Führer. That is more than all stone quarries in the old Reich [pre-1938 Germany] had supplied before the war!<sup>15</sup>

Here Himmler clearly attempted to justify the plan in terms of the building economy as a whole and described the explicit connection between SS concerns and monumental building in Germany. Comparing the number of potential prisoner stonemasons with those in private enterprises indicates that, with the completion of these plans, Himmler wanted to secure a dominant place for the SS in the building economy. Coupled with the anticipated production of stone, Himmler's optimism encouraged the SS attempt to link economic interests to the monumental building plans of the party and state. Uniting the policing, administrative, and economic authority of Heydrich, Glücks, and Pohl under a common stone-production effort would further strengthen SS chances of receiving a larger percentage of Nuremberg contracts. Himmler's letter outlined specific goals for the SS enterprises that would enable them to compete successfully with—and even dominate—private industry.

### **Conclusion**

Thus the SS attempted to establish a large and rationalized quarry and stonemason industry through the forced labor of the camps. Simultaneous with the culmination of German military advances and SS optimism, the central economic administration pressured the concentration camps to increase the prisoners' output. The creation of stonemason programs in the camps corresponded to the reinstatement of construction at the Party Rally Grounds and the approval of further funds for stone contracts. The DEST had gained German Stadium contracts for all of Natzweiler's production and part of Gross-Rosen's and Flossenbürg's. That the SS rationalized and expanded its quarry industry system in the same years when privileged architectural projects narrowed to those at Nuremberg and Berlin was no coincidence. Rather, the expansion of the SS system and the continuation of stone orders and construction for the German Stadium were two processes controlled by administrators working together to further their interests.

Forced labor policies were formulated through a step-by-step process in which increasingly radical alternatives to what Henry Friedlander has identified as a "politics

of exclusion” could be achieved.<sup>16</sup> Individuals and institutions could position themselves within this process of radicalization, taking advantage of particular openings within developing state policy or promoting specific ideological goals not yet made official at the state level. Radicalization thus allowed for a great deal of flexibility on the part of SS administrators; it also allowed for the targeting of public architectural policy at the same time that Himmler and Pohl were reorganizing and extending the economic function of the camp system. Certainly if they had not chosen the building economy, some other large-scale government initiative—such as the armaments trade that was incorporated into forced labor operations later in the war—would have been targeted by SS leaders. In the formation of the DEST in 1938, however, the SS (not surprisingly) chose the highest-profile peacetime interest of Hitler, a move that seemed anything but a gamble. That the results of such a reorientation of forced labor were variable is an understatement, but that the results did include an increasing level of productivity and an intensification of oppression—granite is a very labor-intensive and difficult stone to quarry and cut—explains the continued pursuit of the building economy by the SS well into the early years of World War II.

It also led to the death of thousands of inmates. Death at Mauthausen and Flossenbürg often accompanied the orientation of the camp economy to the architectural projects of the party and state. Ten percent of the approximately 30,000 deaths at Flossenbürg and 25–30 percent of the over 113,000 deaths at Mauthausen can be accounted for in the period 1938–43. These percentages seem low only because the vast majority of deaths at the camps occurred in the last few months of the war, when the SS was herding inmates in from the East in huge numbers (with hygienic conditions deteriorating even further). From 1938 to late 1944, however, these percentages were high in relation to deaths recorded after armaments work began in 1943.<sup>17</sup>

Architects and SS administrators focused their concerns on material resources and labor productivity to such a degree that these factors became rationalized justifications for the irrational exploitation of concentration camp inmates. While most camp commandants and ideological zealots within the SS still saw the camps as primarily political institutions to incarcerate, punish, and even destroy unwanted populations, the majority of SS bureaucrats (beginning with Himmler) saw the practical purposes to which this political oppression could be put. Once the initial decision was made to use camp inmates to produce building materials, the SS geared its enterprises

to contracts such as Speer's German Stadium in order to ensure that forced labor policy developed with and profited from state architectural concerns.

### Notes

1. This paper is an abbreviated and modified version of arguments published in my book. For additional sources, documents, and a more comprehensive analysis of the SS interest in the building economy, see Paul B. Jaskot, *The Architecture of Oppression: The SS, Forced Labor, and the Nazi Monumental Building Economy* (London: Routledge, 2000).

2. Though many historians mention the DEST, few texts have dealt directly with this aspect of SS economic policy. Four exceptions should be noted: Michael Thad Allen, “Engineers and Modern Managers in the SS: The Business Administration Main Office [Wirtschaftsverwaltungshauptamt]” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1995); Enno Georg, *Die wirtschaftlichen Unternehmungen der SS* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1963); Hermann Kaienburg, “Vernichtung durch Arbeit”: *Der Fall Neuengamme* (Bonn: Verlag J. H. W. Dietz, 1990); and Miroslav Kárný, “Das SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt: Verwalter der KZ-Häftlingsarbeitskräfte und Zentrale des SS-Wirtschaftskonzerns,” in “*Deutsche Wirtschaft*”: *Zwangsarbeit von KZ-Häftlingen für Industrie und Behörden*, ed. Hamburg Stiftung zur Förderung von Wissenschaft und Kultur (Hamburg: VSA-Verlag, 1991), pp. 153–70. While each of these authors deals with the role of the DEST, their interests remain on the SS administration rather than a systematic investigation of the relation between the DEST and the monumental architectural projects. Allen has updated and greatly expanded his argument in his recently published book *The Business of Genocide: The SS, Slave Labor, and the Concentration Camps* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). See also Jan Erik Schulte, *Zwangsarbeit und Vernichtung: Das Wirtschaftsimperium der SS* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 2001). Note, however, that Schulte’s text covers much of the same terrain as Allen’s original dissertation.

3. See in particular Allen’s discussion of the “primacy of policing” in regulating the camp environment in Allen, “The Banality of Evil Reconsidered,” *Central European History* 30 (January 1998), pp. 260–68.

4. Discussion and draft of the law from the Ministry of the Interior (approved by Hitler) for the creation of the ZRPT in BundesArchiv, Koblenz, R2/11901.

5. Alex Scobie, *Hitler’s State Architecture* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), pp. 75–80.

6. Whereas construction would be slowed, the choice of stone and brick for the German Stadium satisfied several criteria: the personal aesthetic of Hitler, the ideological claims made for monumental architecture, and the conditions of the prewar German building economy with which Speer had to contend. Many Nazi critics emphasized the conjunction of these factors when discussing architectural policy in the late 1930s and into the war. See, for example, Werner Kleine, “Die Aufgabe der Natursteinbeschaffung,” *Der Deutsche Baumeister* 2 (August 1940), pp. 9–13; Erich

Simon, "Baugestaltung und Bauwirtschaft," *Der Deutsche Baumeister* 1 (March 1939), pp. 5–8; and Albert Speer, "Stein statt Eisen," *Der Vierjahresplan* 1 (1937), pp. 135–37. For a discussion of the material needs of the Westwall and the political influence on the building materials market, see Franz W. Seidler, *Die Organisation Todt: Bauen für Staat und Wehrmacht 1938–1945* (Koblenz: Bernard & Graefe Verlag, 1987), pp. 15–18.

7. Accounts of National Socialist architecture frequently mention that building or planning continued through the first year of the war but discuss this period of activity as the fallacious pursuit of architectural policy in an already failing Germany. This conclusion, however, rests on the hindsight of historians aware of the fate of the German military drive, as well as that of art historians who limit themselves to an explanation based solely on design. See, for example, the discussion by Christian Koch that dates the end of work on the Party Rally Grounds as 1940 (Christian Koch, "Bauen in Nürnberg 1933–1945," in *Bauen in Nürnberg 1933–1945*, ed. M. Diefenbacher [Nuremberg: W. Tümmels Buchdruckerei und Verlag, 1995], p. 23).

8. For a summary of plans for the "Hitler cities" and documents related to those plans, see Jost Dülffer, Jochen Thies, and Josef Henke, eds., *Hitlers Städte: Baupolitik im Dritten Reich* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1978).

9. See the annual report of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Natursteinlieferungen Reichsparteitagsbauten Nürnberg in BA, R120/3941d, pp. 13–14.

10. See the stone test results in Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, C32 Z/RPT, p. 238. For reports on finished work at Gross-Rosen and Natzweiler, as well as an agreement between the German Stadium administrators and Flossenbürg, see BA, NS3/1225; NS3/1259; NS/1347, p. 195.

11. At least in the first two years of its existence, the camp notably did not serve its purported political purpose in relation to this designated population. That is to say, until August 1942 prisoners were coming from other concentration camps and were overwhelmingly of German or Eastern European origin. A brief overview of the camp's early history as well as population statistics can be found in Wolfgang Kirstein, *Das Konzentrationslager als Institution totalen Terrors: Das Beispiel des KL Natzweiler* (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus-Verlagsgesellschaft, 1992), pp. 1–4, 60–70. While Kirstein's book offers a full analysis of the social, psychological, and punitive experience of the prisoners, he spends little time on the labor in the camp or its connection to SS economic interests. For DEST and SS policy, he relies predominantly on Georg and additional secondary literature.

12. For a discussion of the signed contract, see Speer's letter of September 1941 to Pohl, in BAP (Bundesarchiv, Abteilung Potsdam [now Bundesarchiv Berlin]), 46.06

GBI/25, p. 181. Georg, *Die wirtschaftlichen Unternehmungen der SS*, p. 45. Insofar as I am aware, the original contract no longer exists.

13. Production statistics in BA, NS3/32, p. 22; NS3/1225.

14. See discussions of contracts and prison populations in monthly reports of 1942 and 1943, in BA, NS3/1346, pp. 60, 150, 187; NS3/1347, pp. 6, 195, 236.

15. BA, NS4 GR/6. To my knowledge the order for the 100,000 cubic meters of stone has not survived. For a discussion of the SS's own building plans, especially in relation to the work of SS engineer Hans Kammler, see Allen, "Engineers," pp. 260–306.

16. Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

17. Hans Marsalek, *Die Geschichte des Konzentrationslagers Mauthausen* (Vienna: Österreichische Lagergemeinschaft Mauthausen, 1974), pp. 71–2; G. Rabitsch, "Das KL Mauthausen," in *Studien zur Geschichte der Konzentrationslager* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1970), pp. 63–78, 89; Toni Siegert, "Das Konzentrationslager Flossenbürg," in *Bayern in der NS-Zeit*, vol. 2, ed. Martin Broszat and Elke Fröhlich (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1979), pp. 441–44, 489–92. The death statistics are approximate because the deliberate obfuscations in the SS records make it impossible to know the precise extent of killings in the camps. Historians who study these camps acknowledge this fact but, as in the case of Rabitsch and Siegert, realize that they can also arrive at reasonably close and verifiable estimates.

## PART II

### JEWISH FORCED AND SLAVE LABOR



## **Jewish Forced Labor as a Basic Element of Nazi Persecution: Germany, Austria, and the Occupied Polish Territories (1938–1943)**

**Wolf Gruner**

Although the term “Jewish forced labor” usually suggests slave labor in concentration camps or ghettos in Poland, it also refers to the origins of Nazi forced labor: the compulsory labor system for German and Austrian Jews. Created by the Nazis in late 1938, this program was organized by the German labor offices (Arbeitsämter<sup>1</sup>) as a separate entity from the concentration camp system and the other forced labor camp systems developed by the SS. Beginning in 1939 the labor offices deployed thousands of men and women for forced labor in private and public enterprises. In summer 1941, two months before the mass deportations started, almost sixty thousand German and Austrian Jews performed heavy forced labor in the Third Reich. These Jews were separated from other workers and often compelled to live in newly erected, segregated labor camps. Forced labor had become a daily reality for almost all Jewish families.

Compulsory labor was one of the most important elements of a changing anti-Jewish policy after the notorious *Kristallnacht* pogrom of 1938, long before the Nazis decided to exterminate European Jewry. Historians have failed to investigate this stage in the persecution process due to the dominant postwar idea that rational economic goals contradict the irrational aims of extermination. As a result, most historians see forced labor as only a temporary measure before extermination and view the SS as the sole responsible institution. Analyzing the development and function of forced labor from its earliest inception, however, can contribute to our understanding of the persecution process as a whole.

### **Years of Introduction (1938–1939)**

Forced labor was used as a tool to persecute Jews and other victims throughout Nazi-dominated Europe. However, when the Nazis came to power in 1933, they had no plans to introduce forced labor as a policy affecting the German Jewish population; rather, their aim was to expel all Jews from Germany. After the annexation of Austria to the Reich in March 1938, the number of Jews living in Germany increased by 200,000. This fact contradicted the expulsion policy that had been in effect since 1933; moreover, most Austrian Jews were poor. Recognizing this new situation, Nazi leaders

tried to enforce expulsion through violence or (alternatively) to centralize and coordinate all state measures in order to avoid further unexpected consequences.<sup>2</sup>

During the 1930s one crucial problem evolved: every measure to expel Jews created only increased pauperization within this targeted population. With this phenomenon of growing social dependency on the part of thousands of needy Jews, the overall plan was subjected to unanticipated contradictions within the framework of an explosive social sphere. Hence the rapid process of Jewish impoverishment played an increasingly significant role in the strategy discussions within the National Socialist leadership and at the ministerial level, a fact that historians have rarely appreciated.<sup>3</sup>

Nazi leaders understood that to leave tens of thousands of people without money and work for an extended period could create internal political risks. Under these circumstances the first notion of forced labor programs as a new element of persecution developed in September and October 1938. The first attempt by a labor office to organize such a program for unemployed Jews took place in Austria, where in September 1938 the Vienna labor office subjected “all Jews supplied by public funds” to a segregated labor conscription system. Drawing on this initiative, the Reich Institute for Labor Placement and Unemployment Insurance (Reichsanstalt für Arbeitsvermittlung und Arbeitslosenversicherung) drafted a plan to introduce conscripted labor for all unemployed registered Jews. At the same time, the SS discussed plans to introduce for German Jews a general forced labor policy that would concentrate them in special forced labor camps in case of war. Consequently the SS began to accept forced labor as a possible means for avoiding great security risks, while the initiatives of the Reich Institute were aimed at keeping cheap manpower in an increasingly tight German labor market.<sup>4</sup>

After Kristallnacht, which did not appreciably accelerate the expulsion of German Jews, Nazi leaders reoriented their efforts toward a strict segregation policy that paralleled their policy of forced emigration. Under the supervision of Ministerpräsident Hermann Göring, the Nazi state stripped Jews of their property and further isolated them from the general population. Jews were forced to create autonomous educational, cultural, and welfare institutions. A specific division of labor on the part of the persecutors was significant during the next few years: the Gestapo and SS controlled the Jewish organizations, municipalities organized the ghettoization of the Jews, and the ministries orchestrated expropriation and forced “Aryanization.”<sup>5</sup>

In the long run, as stated by Chief of the Security Police Reinhard Heydrich in the first central strategy session of Nazi leaders on November, 12, 1938, “countless Jews” would remain in Germany anyway. As a result of new measures, especially expropriation and a prohibition on trading, Jews who stayed behind would be among the long-term unemployed and would thus be “proletarianized.”<sup>6</sup> The introduction of compulsory labor was intended to counter their new social dependence on the Third Reich. The Reich Ministry of Labor was granted full authority to implement and shape this program. On December 20, 1938, the Reich Institute for Labor Placement and Unemployment Insurance introduced segregated and compulsory labor (*Geschlossener Arbeitseinsatz*) for those unemployed German and Austrian Jews registered with the labor offices (Arbeitsämter), since the National Socialist state had “no interest” in supporting Jews fit for work “from public funds without receiving anything in return.”<sup>7</sup> This measure originated from the policy of segregated mandatory labor that had been applied to Jews by local German welfare offices since the mid-1930s.

Although the first central decree of December 1938 did not discuss how to organize this program or the legal conditions of such a system, it became the basis for Jewish forced labor for almost three years. Local labor offices gained full authority to design and organize compulsory labor. Survivor Heinz Rosenberg described his conscription in Hamburg in spring 1939, only months after *Kristallnacht*.

I finished my apprenticeship in March 1939 and went immediately to a work camp for Jews 200 miles from Hamburg. We had to dig small channels for water drainage. I lived in a barrack[s] with 50 other Jewish workers. The food and conditions were terrible. Once a month, we could visit our families if the digging quota was fulfilled.<sup>8</sup>

All conscripted Jews usually earned only minimal wages and were forced to work in menial jobs and in gangs separated from other employees.

Not only were private firms interested in exploiting Jewish work gangs, but many German municipalities were as well. At a time when a serious lack of manpower existed, Jews were welcomed as an available and cheap workforce to construct roads or dams or to collect garbage. Some towns developed initiatives that went beyond the discriminatory measures required by the Nazi state. When the mayor of Kelkheim/Taunus heard about the introduction of compulsory labor for Jews, he requested Jewish labor for road building. The Hesse labor office sent him twenty unemployed Jewish men forcibly recruited in Frankfurt. The mayor set up a “camp” in the ballroom of the local inn, which was inspected each week by a different town

councilor. Although there were no corresponding official guidelines, the men of this “Jewish crew” (*Judenkolonne*) received extremely low wages, were forbidden to move about freely, and were strictly separated from local residents.<sup>9</sup>

During summer 1939 innumerable German municipalities—or more precisely their building, garden, park, and cemetery departments—employed thousands of Jewish forced laborers in cemeteries, garbage dumps, and fairgrounds; for the construction of streets, parks, sports fields, and stadiums; for cleaning streets or removing snow; and for work in municipal power plants and gasworks.

The municipality of Vienna also employed hundreds of Jews, but since there were not enough sites available in the city for separate work gangs, the Vienna labor office invited private German enterprises to select Jews from its workforce. The transfer of Austrian Jewish laborers to Germany started in spring 1939, and by that summer nearly 1,000 Austrian Jews were performing heavy labor in Germany—mostly in Lower Saxony at road and dam construction sites—living for months in newly erected segregated labor camps. Meanwhile, in Austria a few hundred Jews were forced to work at the Reichsautobahn and at several hydroelectric dam construction sites. By summer 1939, shortly before the war started, more than 20,000 Jews (most of them men) were already conscripted in the Reich. By this time more than thirty special labor camps for German and Austrian Jews existed managed by private or public enterprises or even by municipalities.<sup>10</sup>

### **Years of Expansion (1940–1941)**

As part of their war strategy, Nazi leaders had developed vague plans to introduce a general forced labor system for all German and Austrian Jews. Hitler himself wanted to make the decision on this issue, but in view of the blitzkrieg in Poland, he and other Nazi leaders decided to deport all remaining Jews from the Reich to the East. Hitler demanded that the security police transport 300,000 Jews, most of them impoverished, from Germany and Austria to Poland. This directive superceded the earlier plans to establish a generalized forced labor system within the Reich.

The first deportations were soon suspended and postponed until spring 1940. At the end of October 1939, the Ministry of Labor ordered the *Arbeitsämter* to continue conscripting Jews. With the failure in spring 1940 of the central plan to deport most of the Jews, the Reich Ministry of Labor tried to profit from this situation. In addition to this unanticipated development, the demand for manpower increased substantially due

to the mass mobilization for the attack against France. The Labor Ministry decided to extend the number of conscripted Jews: now all able-bodied Jewish men and women were obliged to work.

Hence the general introduction of forced labor for German Jews took place in April and May 1940, not in March 1941 as is often stated. This new stage of persecution was implemented without a decree. This contradictory process vis-à-vis the deportation plans resulted from the strictly organized division of tasks among the several institutions involved in persecution measures and was driven by the wartime need for manpower, especially in industry. This development was accompanied by a second change within the conscripted labor program: for the first time, German labor offices started the mass conscription of Jews for industry. During summer 1940, for example, Siemens employed five hundred Jews in segregated departments in its Berlin plants.

In fall 1940 German labor offices organized the next wave of mass conscription. Nearly all able-bodied Jews were now forced to work almost exclusively in war plants. Instead of being forced to perform unskilled labor, many Jews now received technical training in order to meet economic and war-related demands. Within industry, however, Jewish forced laborers were still separated and stigmatized. They were forced to work in segregated departments or shifts and use segregated restrooms, locker rooms, and cafeterias.

In February and March 1941, the number of forced laborers in Austria declined as five thousand Jews were deported from Vienna to Poland. The opposite situation happened in Germany, however, and in spring 1941 new mass conscriptions occurred. Most historians interpret this development as constituting the introduction of forced labor in Germany, but in reality it was only at this point that the conscripted labor program (which had existed for more than two years) reached its climax. In summer 1941 almost sixty thousand Jews—men and women, the elderly and children—performed heavy forced labor in Germany and Austria. Forced labor dominated the daily life of almost every Jewish family.

Now for the first time the Arbeitsämter and Gestapo coordinated their actions. The latter started to prepare the mass deportations from Germany and ordered a massive reduction in personnel in all Jewish institutions. In doing so, it saved money and transferred manpower to the forced labor program. The same developments spurred

the creation of a new camp system. This dual purpose—deportation and forced labor—led for the first time to the construction of labor camps for entire Jewish families.

The erection of nearly forty such camps marked the final stage of the ghettoization process that had been taking place since November 1938. In fall 1941 most Jews in Germany and Austria were living in buildings to which Jews were restricted (“Judenhäuser”) or in forced labor camps. The introduction of the yellow star demonstrated this total isolation. With the failure of expulsion as a long-term objective, the main goal of the 1939–41 period shifted to segregation, and the compulsory labor program was a basic feature of this process. After three years of forced labor of German and Austrian Jews, this program was finally legalized by central decree on October 3, 1941—two weeks before the mass deportations started.<sup>11</sup>

### **Years of Destruction (1942–1943)**

By fall 1941 2,000,000 foreign laborers (*Fremdarbeiter*) were already doing forced work in Germany. In comparison to this huge population, Nazi leaders viewed the small number of Jewish forced laborers (approximately 60,000) as insignificant for the German labor market. Thus Nazi leaders found no economic reason to delay implementation of the long-planned deportations.

However, the deportations caused problems at the regional and local level since a number of plants depended on the Jewish workforce. Labor offices, the Wehrmacht, and municipalities were normally involved in the decision-making process; how the Gestapo scheduled the transports depended on their influence and/or economic needs. In Vienna, Hamburg, and Frankfurt, the Gestapo deported the last Jews in fall 1942. In Berlin, with its concentration of industry, the Gestapo—in coordination with the labor office—postponed the deportation of most Jewish forced laborers, many of whom remained employed by the war industry until the beginning of 1943.

At the end of 1942, 20,000 Jewish forced laborers remained in Germany, most of them in Berlin. On February 27, 1943, the Gestapo undertook the notorious “Factory Action” and removed all Jewish forced laborers from the plants. More than 12,000 Jews were deported from the Reich; only Jews in mixed marriages were excluded from the transports to Auschwitz. After several weeks this remnant was forced to work again, but now exclusively in hard labor outside industry. Forced labor constituted a basic element of persecution for these remaining Jews until the end of the war.<sup>12</sup>

### **Beyond the Border: The Occupied Territories of Poland**

The persecution policy developed in Germany was an important precondition for the Holocaust throughout Europe. German practices laid the foundation for racist politics in the occupied territories, where not only the SS but many state and municipal officials applied their practical experience in the Reich to administering the occupied countries.

The Labor Department was one of the first functioning administrations of the newly installed government in the occupied territories of Poland. As part of the civil occupation regime, local labor offices played a hitherto underestimated role in organizing the forced labor of Polish Jews. These offices registered and distributed Jewish manpower among public and private enterprises for road construction, dam projects, or railroad building. Labor offices were even involved in organizing the forced labor of ghetto inmates and forced labor camps erected by the SS.<sup>13</sup>

Occupation and persecution were shaped and practiced in different forms throughout Poland. In the Warthegau, annexed to the Reich, early plans to transfer all Polish Jews to the Generalgouvernement failed. With the “Aryanization” of stores and jobs, the pauperization of this remaining population rapidly increased and forced labor was introduced to alleviate the risky social situation. Since no official rules existed, two different labor systems for Jews were established in this region:

(1) The well-known labor program of the notorious Lodz ghetto. Less known is the fact that the *Wirtschaftsamt* (the economic enterprise office) of the Lodz municipality controlled the forced labor of the ghetto inmates, even outside in several labor camps.<sup>14</sup>

(2) The forced labor program for the rest of the Jewish population throughout the Warthegau managed by the Labor Administration. Local and regional labor offices recruited Jews for compulsory work in separate gangs (both in and outside towns) for road construction and the like. Many of them were forced to live in Jewish labor camps.

Similar to businesses in the Reich, enterprises had to pay wages. Following a decree issued by *Reichsstatthalter* Arthur Greiser on July 27, 1940, Jews received only 35 percent of the payment; 65 percent of the wages were confiscated and deposited into special accounts of the district administrations.<sup>15</sup> At the end of 1940, the *Reichsarbeitsverwaltung* (Reich Labor Administration) began organizing the transfer of thousands of ghetto inmates to new camps erected at the construction sites of the *Reichsautobahn* in the old Reich. This experience led to the idea, developed by the Reich Ministry of Labor and *Reichsstatthalter* Greiser in February 1941, to transfer

70,000 Jews as forced laborers from the Warthegau to the Reich. Driven by his goal to expel all Jews from Germany, however, Hitler rejected this plan immediately.<sup>16</sup> Thereafter, between October 1941 and May 1942, the labor offices of several Warthegau districts recruited more than 13,000 Jewish forced laborers and sent them to camps inside the annexed territory.<sup>17</sup> Thus it was the labor offices, rather than the SS, that organized the forced labor program in the Warthegau.

The situation was different within the Generalgouvernement since this territory was first supposed to accept all Jews from Germany and the annexed territories. In one of the first measures of the newly installed civil government, in October 1939 Hans Frank officially introduced forced labor for all Jews. This decree handed over to the SS authority for the forced labor program and introduced a practice different from that in Germany, Austria, and the Protectorate. During the ensuing months, wholesale recruitment of Jews took place. Since the SS did not pay wages and Jewish families were left without income, impoverishment increased rapidly. At the same time, a growing number of non-Jewish Poles were brought into the Reich and, as a consequence, the Polish labor market lacked manpower.

Both the politically risky social situation of the Jews and economic need led to a change. After discussions between the SS and the government of the occupied territories, in 1940 the SS ceded authority to the latter.<sup>18</sup> The Generalgouvernement Labor Department distinguished between two forms of labor suitable for Jews: on the one hand, forced labor in camps—obviously camps managed by the SS—in which Jewish inmates would not earn wages; and on the other hand, free labor outside these camps. Under a “free contract,” Jewish forced laborers would be paid 80 percent of the wages earned by non-Jewish Poles.<sup>19</sup> In fact the term “free labor” was a euphemism, since in reality such employment meant conscripted labor adapted from the model practiced in Germany where Jews were employed in segregated work gangs, earned reduced wages, and often were forced to live in segregated labor camps. Under the authority of the Labor Administration, more than 700,000 Polish Jews had been recruited to work in the occupied Polish territories by the end of 1940.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, and resulting from its strong position within the occupation system, the SS intervened in individual cases and in certain local areas. In some areas of the Generalgouvernement, the SS created special forced labor camp systems under the authority of the civil administration—such as the *Burggraben* project in Lublin in 1940 and the *Durchgangsstraße* IV in Galicia in 1941—that paralleled the new camp



systems for Jews. In summer 1942, following the start of the extermination process in Poland, the SS regained the authority to run the forced labor program but had to consult with the army and the Labor Administration. The SS now had the power to organize both the extermination and labor exploitation of the Polish Jews. Since economic needs could not be totally overruled, the Jewish labor force in fall 1942—still 300,000 highly skilled men and women—kept its important place in the labor market of the Generalgouvernement. The SS finally gained undisputed authority during the course of 1943, when all forced labor camps were incorporated into the concentration camp system.

In recent years historians have published a number of excellent studies on persecution in Poland, but excluding those of Christopher Browning, they barely discuss the phenomenon of forced labor programs organized by the Labor Administration.<sup>21</sup> In particular, the well-analyzed Lublin region has shaped a one-sided image of Jewish forced labor organized by the SS in Poland,<sup>22</sup> but the well-known SS camp systems of Lublin—as well as Galicia or Silesia—must be seen as a regional or local phenomenon. Even at these sites, labor offices organized the Jewish forced labor program and conducted recruitment and selection. In Poland different administrations had important roles in the persecution process. Hence general economic needs (e.g., to improve infrastructure) and the local and regional interests of involved institutions combined with the general aim of segregating Polish Jews shaped the development of the forced labor program and led to the changes of authority between the SS and the Generalgouvernement Labor Department in Poland.<sup>23</sup>

## **Conclusion**

After Jews had been stripped of their property and livelihood at the end of 1938, the introduction of a conscripted labor system formed a basic part of the remodeled and newly centralized anti-Jewish program. All Jews who were registered at local labor offices or claimed welfare support were obliged by the Reichsarbeitsverwaltung to work. In 1940 the Nazis extended forced labor to all able-bodied Jews (both men and women) in the Reich.

The labor offices conscripted Jews using racist criteria, forcing them to perform heavy labor in segregated gangs without regard for their individual physical condition or their former profession. They were employed exclusively in low-wage, unskilled work but were forced to pay heavy taxes. Forced labor controlled those Jews who were

able to resist and isolated them socially from the non-Jewish population. Jews were segregated at work and at home in “Judenhäuser” (houses for Jews) or in Jewish labor camps. For most German and Austrian Jews, forced labor—a basic element of Nazi persecution—structured their daily lives from 1939 until the deportations. Due to the division of tasks within the persecution program, economic goals and war needs strongly influenced the shape of the forced labor system in Germany in 1940–41, but also in Austria and partly in Poland. Moreover, many Jews who survived performed forced labor in camps or ghettos (for example, in Lodz) until the end of the war.

In most German-occupied countries, the introduction of compulsory labor was one of the first anti-Jewish measures. The conscripted labor program for Jews in Western Europe was managed exclusively by the Labor Administration; in Eastern Europe various forced labor systems often coexisted, whether ruled by the labor departments, the local or regional SS, or even municipalities in the case of the ghettos. The conscripted labor program for German and Austrian Jews established a practical and legislative blueprint not only for the recruitment of Jews in the Protectorate and in Poland, but also for the forced labor of Polish and Russian workers in Germany.

### Notes

1. Labor offices existed at the local level before 1933. These institutions registered unemployed people, controlled them, and provided state benefits for a limited period of time. Beginning in early 1939, local labor offices became Reich agencies under the authority of the Ministry of Labor.
2. For new perspectives on the process of persecution see Wolf Gruner, “Die NS-Judenverfolgung und die Kommunen: Zur wechselseitigen Dynamisierung von zentraler und lokaler Politik 1933–1941,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 48 (2000), pp. 75–126; Wolf Gruner, “Anti-Jewish Policy in Nazi Germany 1933–1945. From Exclusion and Expulsion to Segregation and Deportation. New Perspectives on Developments, Actors and Goals,” in *The Comprehensive History of the Holocaust: Germany*, published by Yad Vashem (Nebraska University Press, forthcoming).
3. Wolf Gruner, *Öffentliche Fürsorge und Judenverfolgung: Wechselwirkungen lokaler und zentraler Politik im NS-Staat (1933–1942)* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2002).
4. Dieter Maier, *Arbeitseinsatz und Deportation: Die Mitwirkung der Arbeitsverwaltung bei der nationalsozialistischen Judenverfolgung in den Jahren 1938–1945* (Berlin: Hentrich, 1994); Wolf Gruner, *Der Geschlossene Arbeitseinsatz deutscher Juden: Zur Zwangsarbeit als Element der Verfolgung 1938 bis 1943* (Berlin: Metropol, 1997). For a detailed treatment of the development in Austria, see Wolf Gruner, *Zwangsarbeit und Verfolgung: Österreichische Juden im NS-Staat 1938–1945* (Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2000).
5. For more details see Gruner, “Die NS-Judenverfolgung, ” pp. 98–103, 107–11; Gruner, “Anti-Jewish Policy,” in *The Comprehensive History of the Holocaust* (forthcoming).
6. *Der Prozeß gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher vor dem Internationalen Militärgerichtshof*, vol. 28, Nuremberg 1948, Dok. PS-1816, p. 534: Protokoll der Ministerkonferenz, November 12, 1938.
7. Quotation in Wolf Gruner, “Der Beginn der Zwangsarbeit für arbeitslose Juden in Deutschland 1938–39: Dokumente aus der Stadtverwaltung Berlin,” *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 37 (1989), p. 139, doc. no. 1. For a detailed treatment, see Gruner, *Der Geschlossene*.
8. “My four years of horror through the Holocaust: An authentic report by Heinz Rosenberg,” Leo Baeck Institute New York/Archive, Memoir Collection: p. 6.
9. For more details see Wolf Gruner, “Terra Incognita? The Camps for ‘Jewish Labor Conscript’ 1938–1943 and the German Population,” in *Yad Vashem Studies* 24 (1994), pp. 1–3.

10. For a detailed treatment of the development in Austria, see Gruner, *Der Geschlossene Arbeitseinsatz*. For comparative aspects see Wolf Gruner, *Forced Labor of Jews: Economic Needs and Nazi Racial Aims in Germany, Austria, the Protectorate and the occupied Territories of Poland (1938–1943/44): A Comparative View* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

11. Reichsgesetzblatt, 1941 I, pp. 681–82.

12. For a detailed account, see Wolf Gruner, “Die Fabrik-Aktion und die Ereignisse in der Berliner Rosenstraße: Fakten und Fiktionen um den 27. Februar 1943–60 Jahre danach,” *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 11 (2002), pp. 137–77, or in English, “The Factory-Action and the Events at the Berlin Rosenstrasse: Facts and Fiction about 27 February 1943—Sixty Years Later,” *Central European History* 36:2 (2003): 179–208.

13. See Gruner, *Forced Labor of Jews* (forthcoming)

14. Florian Freund, Bertrand Perz, and Karl Stuhlpfarrer, “Das Getto in Litzmannstadt (Łódź),” in “Unser einziger Weg ist Arbeit,” in *Das Getto in Łódź 1940–1944*, Hanno Loewy and Gerhard Schoenberger, eds. (Frankfurt: Eine Ausstellung des Jüdischen Museums in Zusammenarbeit mit Yad Vashem, #1990), pp. 17–31.

15. See Rundverfügung des Landrates Kempen/Reg. #Bez. Litzmannstadt vom 18. 6. 1941; Faksimile bei Diemut Majer, “*Fremdvölkische*” im Dritten Reich: Ein Beitrag zur nationalsozialistischen Rechtssetzung und Rechtspraxis in Verwaltung und Justiz unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der eingegliederten Ostgebiete und des Generalgouvernements (Boppard: Harald Boldt Verlag, 1981). See also the English-language translation of this book, *Non-Germans under the Third Reich*, (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2003).

16. See Wolf Gruner, “Juden bauen die ‘Straßen des Führers’: Zwangsarbeit und Zwangsarbeitslager für nichtdeutsche Juden im Altreich 1940 bis 1943–44,” *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 44 (1996), pp. 789–808.

17. Statistik der Arbeitseinsatzlenkung nach Arbeitsämtern für den Monat Oktober 1941–Mai 1942 des Reichsarbeitsministers, in *Der Arbeitseinsatz im Reichs-Gau Wartheland 1941/42*, Nr. 1–8, Appendice.

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22. See Hermann Kaienburg, “Jüdische Arbeitslager an der ‘Straße der SS,’ 1999 11 (1996), pp. 13–39; Dieter Pohl, “Die großen Zwangsarbeitslager der SS- und Polizeiführer für Juden im Generalgouvernement 1942–1945,” in *Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager: Entwicklung und Struktur*, vol. 1, Ulrich Herbert, Karin Orth, and Christoph Dieckmann, ed. (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, #1998), pp. 415–38; Jan Erik Schulte, “Zwangsarbeit für die SS. Juden in der Ostindustrie GmbH,” in *Ausbeutung, Vernichtung, Öffentlichkeit: Neue Studien zur nationalsozialistischen Lagerpolitik*, Norbert Frei and Sybille Steinbacher, ed. (Munich: K. G. Saur, 2000), pp. 43–74.
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# **The Hungarian Labor Service System (1939–1945): An Overview**

**Randolph L. Braham**

## **Introduction**

The labor service system that operated in Hungary during the Second World War, one of the most neglected chapters in the history of the Holocaust, was unique in structure, organization, and administration. In contrast to the other countries in German-dominated Europe in which the various forms of forced and slave labor were usually organized under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior or (at the local level) by the municipal authorities, the Hungarian labor service system was exclusively related to the military. While the Council of Ministers issued the laws governing the scope and character of the system, the decrees and administrative measures on their implementation emanated from the Ministry of Defense, which had exclusive jurisdiction over the system from its establishment on July 1, 1939, through the surrender of Hungary—Nazi Germany’s last satellite—on May 7, 1945.

The introduction of the labor service system for Jewish males of military age was but one of the many anti-Jewish measures adopted by successive Hungarian governments beginning in early 1938 and reflected Hungary’s increased alignment with the domestic and foreign policies of the Third Reich. On the losing side during World War I, both Germany and Hungary had pursued an aggressive foreign policy aimed at undoing the consequences of Versailles and Trianon, respectively. Following the first successes of this policy in 1938–39, Hungary felt compelled to emulate the Third Reich by adopting a series of anti-Jewish laws calculated to bring about the “solution” to the Jewish question. The high price paid by Hungary for the partial attainment of its revisionist ambitions ultimately proved disastrous for the country and especially devastating for Hungarian Jewry.<sup>1</sup>

Beginning in 1938 Hungary adopted a series of ever harsher anti-Jewish measures. The First Anti-Jewish Law (Law No. XV of May 1938), enacted with the enthusiastic support of Christian church leaders, initiated an avalanche of anti-Jewish legislation that prepared the ground for the “Final Solution” in 1944. This law was followed less than a year later by a general law on national defense, some of the provisions of which subsequently were used to justify the draconian measures that were taken against the Jews—including their expropriation, ghettoization, and deportation. It

was also under this innocuously general military defense law that Hungary established a unique labor service system. In doing so the Hungarian government aimed not only to appease domestic antisemitic forces, but also to respond to the increasingly discernible ideological and political pressures exerted by Nazi Germany.

### **The Forced Labor Service System: The First Phase (1939–1941)**

The forced labor service system was established under the provisions of Law No. II of 1939 regulating Hungary's national defense system.<sup>2</sup> The anti-Jewish measures of the wartime era were justified under the provisions of Article 141, which gave the government extraordinary emergency powers in time of war or threat of war; Article 230 provided the legal basis for the forced labor service system. According to its first paragraph, all Hungarian men of military age who were classified as permanently unsuitable for military service could be compelled to engage in public labor service (*közérdekű munkaszolgálat*) in special labor camps for a period not exceeding three months at a time.<sup>3</sup> The original intent and scope of the labor service system were left unspecified. The details for the implementation of Article 230 were to be worked out by the Ministry of Defense, which was staffed by a large number of Germanophile officers. In pursuing this task, the ministry was guided by the provisions of the Second Anti-Jewish Law (Law No. IV of 1939) that provided, among other things, a detailed and complicated definition of who was Jewish on explicitly racial grounds. In this context Jews were by definition identified as “unsuitable.”

Based on various memoranda from the Ministry of Defense, the Council of Ministers incorporated into Decree No. 5070/1939.M.E. (May 12, 1939) the general principles underlying the objectives of the labor service system as well as the provisions relating to its organization, structure, and administration. Under the decree the minister of defense was given not only the power—which he exercised through the army corps commanders—to determine the number, character, and internal organization of the labor camps, but also jurisdiction over matters of command, discipline, and training. The minister exercised supreme command over the labor camps through the national superintendent of the Public Labor Service System (*A Közérdekű Munkaszolgálat Országos Felügyelője* [KMOF]), a general appointed on his recommendation by the head of state.

The labor service system went into effect on July 1, 1939. Its administrative and organizational structure was similar to that in effect in the armed forces. Labor

servicemen (*munkaszolgálatosok*) had to report to local recruitment centers when they were called up. Following the usual physical examination and classification, they were ordered to report to specific labor service battalions (*közérdekű munkaszolgálatos zászlóaljak*) that operated under the jurisdiction of the various army corps commands (*hadtest parancsnokságok*) into which the country was divided. At their battalion headquarters, labor servicemen were grouped into companies (*századok*) that usually consisted of 200–250 men.

Although during its first phase the labor service system was relatively benign, it was clearly discriminatory. Jews of military age, already deprived of many of their civil and economic rights under the several major anti-Jewish laws, were now stigmatized as unreliable. Instead of rifles, Jews were given shovels and pickaxes as their standard weapons. Before Hungary's entry into the Second World War on June 27, 1941, Jewish recruits were usually deployed as forced laborers on projects designed by—and of special interest to—the military. Many labor service companies were assigned to clear woods, especially along the Romanian frontier; others were engaged in constructing roads, dredging and clearing rivers, loading and unloading freight at trainyards, and building and maintaining roads and airfields. By November 1940, approximately 52,000 Jews were serving in 260 labor service companies.

### **The Forced Labor Service System: The Second Phase (1941–1945)**

In 1941 the labor service system underwent a major change spearheaded by the officers in the Ministry of Defense, especially the General Staff. In an atmosphere of euphoria—Hungary had just acquired the “Délvidék” area from Yugoslavia and Nazi Germany was triumphant in Europe—the Council of Ministers adopted Decree No. 2870/1941.M.E. on April 16, 1941. As implemented by the Ministry of Defense (Order No. 27 300.eln.8.–1941 of August 19, 1941),<sup>4</sup> the decree radically revamped the labor service system. It stipulated the establishment of a new auxiliary service system (*kisegítő szolgálat*) in which Jewish males were required, among other things, to serve for at least two years. Shortly thereafter the relatively few Jewish officers still on active duty were deprived of their rank, and their discharge certificates (*emléklapok*) were replaced by new ones that not only omitted their rank but were also stamped—clearly emulating Nazi practice—with the letters “Zs” (*Zsidó*; Jew). The same discriminatory practice was used in marking the identification documents issued to all Jewish labor servicemen.



The condition of Jewish labor servicemen changed from bad to worse during the course of the war. This was evident not only in the more aggressively antisemitic attitude of many of the officers and guards who commanded them, but also in the increasingly blatant discriminatory treatment that they received. Beginning in March 1942, Jewish labor servicemen were gradually deprived of uniforms and compelled to wear discriminatory armbands (yellow by Jews, white by converts) that identified them as open targets for abuse by both Hungarian and German antisemites. By early 1942 practically all labor servicemen performed their forced labor in civilian clothes and footwear and an insignia-free military cap. In many companies labor servicemen soon found themselves with inadequate clothing, not only because of the wear and tear associated with their heavy work, but also because after the workday they were often made to crawl and somersault by sadistic, amusement-seeking officers and guards. Frequently these same people deprived labor servicemen of their officially allotted food rations, which were already low considering the hard labor exacted from them—especially along the frontlines in the Ukraine and in and around the copper mines of Bor, Serbia.

### **Jewish Forced Labor Servicemen in the Ukraine**

The number of labor servicemen assigned to frontline duty in the Ukraine increased dramatically following the deployment of the Second Hungarian Army on April 11, 1942. The army, consisting of around 250,000 men, was accompanied by approximately 50,000 Jewish labor servicemen grouped in various field companies. Most of these servicemen were issued emergency summonses and were called to report for service on an individual basis rather than by age. By this practice the Hungarian authorities aimed not only to satisfy the forced labor requirements of the military, but also to contribute to the “solution” to the Jewish question.

Acting in accord with a secret decree of the Ministry of Defense (April 22, 1942), the recruitment centers saw to it that 10–15 percent of the field labor service companies were composed of Jews “well known for their wealth and reputation” even if they were over 42 years of age—the limit specified by law for frontline service. The recruitment centers called up Jews following lists received from the Ministry of Defense, which in turn often prepared them based on “complaints” (i.e., denunciations) received from various “patriotic” individuals and groups. Among the Jews called up were those who had played a prominent role in their communities: the rich, well-known

professionals, leading industrialists and businessmen, and recognized local leaders. Many of these Jews had been denounced by individuals eager to appropriate their businesses or professional practices. Guided by the criteria established by the secret decree, the recruitment centers accepted for labor service a considerable number of Jews who were totally unfit for physical work or any other service. A number of the recruited Jews were, in fact, quite old or suffered from a variety of illnesses; some were visibly crippled or insane. Clearly a main objective of the antisemites involved in this mobilization was to advance their political-ideological goal relating to the “solution” to the Jewish question.

In the Ukraine Jewish forced labor servicemen were used as slave laborers—usually under the most horrible conditions—on a variety of projects specified by the Hungarian and German military authorities. Among their tasks were constructing, clearing, and maintaining roads and railroads; loading and unloading munitions, provisions, and other materials; building bunkers and gun emplacements; and digging trenches and tank traps. These activities were especially demanding in winter, when the soil was frozen and the shovels and pickaxes wielded by the emaciated and inadequately dressed forced laborers could hardly penetrate it. Particularly tragic was the fate of those who were assigned to clear minefields for which they had neither the technical training nor the necessary equipment. The unfortunate labor servicemen were occasionally compelled to march over them.

While deployed in battlefield areas, Jewish labor servicemen were constantly subjected to the most humiliating treatment. Among other things, they were prohibited from using any type of vehicle for any reason whatsoever; had to walk on the roads (sidewalks were restricted to the guards); and were forbidden to shop in stores or receive packages from home. Some labor servicemen with well-to-do parents or relatives occasionally “bought” food from their guards. The food was almost always stolen from the rations allotted for feeding the Jewish servicemen; the payment consisted of signed promissory notes, which the guards would cash in during their furlough.

The conditions under which Jewish forced laborers lived and worked in the Ukraine were especially bad because of the viciously antisemitic attitude of most of the company commanders (usually reserve officers) and guards—not to mention the SS and military police units that were rampaging in the area. The behavior of these commanders and guards reflected not only their own antisemitic attitude, but also the

instructions of their immediate superiors. Some battalion commanders reportedly instructed the officers in charge of labor service companies assigned to frontline duty not to bring Jews back home alive since they were enemies of the state. Many of these commanders, in fact, murdered Jews on the assumption that the sooner the labor service company was depleted, the sooner they would return home. This was especially true in the Ukraine, which was far removed from the scrutiny of the central authorities. Officers and guards acting in this spirit often gave vent to sadistic inclinations by abusing labor servicemen entrusted to them. They viciously maltreated them, subjected them to unspeakably cruel tortures, withheld or stole their already low rations, and often (and for long periods of time) made them quarter under the open skies. The emaciated and disease-ridden Jews were often also subjected to corporal abuse by members of the German and Hungarian units for or under which they worked.

The lot of Jewish forced laborers worsened during the retreat that followed the crushing defeat of the Hungarian and German armies at Voronezh and Stalingrad in January and February 1943, respectively, during which elements of the withdrawing armies of both countries plundered and killed helpless Jewish labor servicemen while feuding among themselves. The Germans often vented their anger and frustration over their defeat by harassing the demoralized Hungarians. The Security Police (Sicherheitspolizei) and the Security Service (Sicherheitsdienst [SD]) units, and occasionally even some Wehrmacht elements, were particularly vicious in their attacks on Jewish labor servicemen. The murder of Hungarian Jews was acknowledged by SS-Sturmbannführer Christensen in his March 19, 1943, memorandum addressed to all SD commando leaders.<sup>5</sup> The barbarity of the Germans even shocked some of the Hungarian officers, so much so that General Gusztáv Jány, commander of the Second Hungarian Army, felt compelled to file a protest with the commander of the Second German Army. “The Jews are organized within the Hungarian Army into labor companies within whose framework they perform important operations (for example, maintenance of roads, construction of fortifications, etc.). We cannot permit that these operations be made impossible by units not associated with the Hungarian Army.”<sup>6</sup>

According to a June 9, 1943, note by the Wehrmacht High Command addressed to the German Foreign Office, an official of the Hungarian Ministry of Defense reportedly instructed the officers in field hospitals to report on the treatment of Jewish labor service companies attached to the Wehrmacht. They were particularly urged to report possible killings and other details about the treatment of Jewish forced laborers.<sup>7</sup>

Jewish labor servicemen were also subjected to barbaric treatment by the retreating Hungarians. The commanders of many labor service companies deserted their posts in panic, leaving the Jews either under the control of a handful of subordinates or to their own fate. The straggling labor servicemen, bundled in their lice-infested rags and blankets, were subjected to unbelievable humiliation and torture during the long and agonizing retreat. Many were shot at random by the withdrawing German and Hungarian soldiers. Emaciated by hunger—with logistics in disarray, they were deprived of their meager food rations—and numbed by the bitter cold, many of the ill-dressed and lice-infected forced laborers lost their resistance and succumbed to typhus and other debilitating diseases. In the absence of any medical care, many died by the wayside.

Particularly cruel was the fate that befell thousands of typhus-infected labor servicemen who were concentrated in a makeshift quarantine hospital at Doroshich, a kolkhoz village located between Zhitomir and Korosten. A large number succumbed to the disease shortly after their admission. On April 30, 1943, a barn housing approximately eight hundred Jews was set afire. The living torches who jumped out of the flaming barn were machine gunned by waiting guards. The perpetrators of this crime were absolved of any responsibility. According to a report of the military commission entrusted with investigating the incident, “The fire had been set inadvertently by Jews who had been smoking.” Commenting years later about the horrors committed against Jewish labor servicemen, Hungarian president Árpád Göncz said, “This was the first Hungarian Army in our history that called up men and took them to the front in order to be able to annihilate them itself.”<sup>8</sup>

The losses of Jewish labor servicemen were staggering. Of the approximately 50,000 deployed in the Ukraine, only 6-7,000 returned to Hungary. Thousands were killed by the Hungarians and the Germans; many other thousands succumbed to famine, disease, and exhaustion; and thousands ended up in Soviet prisoner-of-war camps, where their treatment was not very different from that endured by the German and Hungarian POWs. The fate of many of the survivors who were returned to Hungary was even more cruel. Shortly after their arrival home in spring 1944, Hungary was occupied by the Germans and within a few weeks the surviving labor servicemen were rounded up—this time together with their families—and deported to Auschwitz.

**Jewish Labor Servicemen in Bor, Serbia**

Approximately 6,200 Jewish labor servicemen were deployed in and around the copper mines of Bor during the 1943–44 period. The mines, situated roughly 120 miles southeast of Belgrade, supplied approximately 50 percent of the copper requirements of the German war industry and were operated jointly by Siemens and the Organisation Todt (OT), Albert Speer's construction agency. The idea of deploying Hungarian Jewish labor servicemen in the copper mines originated with OT vice president Gerhard Fränk; his February 20, 1943, memorandum and other German documentary sources reveal that the negotiations and final agreement involved the cooperation of high-ranking German officials including Speer, Heinrich Himmler, and Joachim von Ribbentrop.<sup>9</sup> The details of the agreement were worked out by Wilhelm Neyer, OT-Hauptfrontführer and representative in Budapest with close ties to the Hungarian Ministry of Industry. Neyer originally requested the allocation of 14,000 Jewish labor servicemen: 4,000 for work at the German shipyard in Reval, Estonia, and 10,000 for work in the copper mines at Bor.<sup>10</sup> The Hungarians rejected the deployment of labor servicemen at Reval but made a firm commitment to assign 6,000 labor servicemen to the copper mines. The final agreement, signed on July 2, 1943, by Neyer and Hungarian deputy minister of defense General Imre Ruskiczay-Rüdiger, stipulated the immediate deployment of 3,000 men.<sup>11</sup>

Jewish labor servicemen and a special company of Jehovah's Witnesses were deployed under the command of Hungarian officers and guards. The first contingent of approximately 3,000 labor servicemen grouped in fifteen companies arrived in Bor in early August<sup>12</sup> and were assigned to various camps in and around the mining area. Some were employed in building the Bor-Zagubica railway line; others were utilized in road repair work. The majority, however, were used as forced laborers in the mines. Especially hard and exhausting was the lot of those building the access (*Durchlass*) tunnel, which was five kilometers long and several hundred meters deep. Labor servicemen usually had to work long hours every day in knee-deep water, breathing air filled with suffocating dust and explosive gas. Their food rations were totally inadequate for the hard labor that they had to perform.

In the barracks labor servicemen were under Hungarian military control and discipline; in the workplace they were under the immediate supervision of German foremen. They were often abused during and after work by the many antisemites who had authority over them.

The tragedy of labor servicemen assigned to Bor reached its climax during their evacuation in early fall 1944. In the wake of the Soviet advance, the Germans decided to abandon the projects and salvage as much of their heavy machinery as possible. The 6,200 Jewish forced laborers were first concentrated in one of the main camps and then force-marched toward Hungary in two large groups. The first contingent, consisting of an estimated 3,200–3,600 Jews, left Bor on September 17 escorted by approximately 100 Hungarian officers and guards. During the long and arduous retreat, they were mistreated not only by their Hungarian escorts but also by German military personnel, Swabian SS men, and Bosnian Ustashi who served as guards on several stretches of the road. Hundreds of Jews were killed along the route on various pretenses. Particularly tragic was the fate of a group of labor servicemen who were quartered in the brickyards of Cservenka (Crvenka). On the night of October 7–8, 1944, the SS massacred between 700-1,000 Jews after depriving them of their last possessions. Lined up in small groups, they were shot into a mass grave. The survivors of this group were driven on toward Hungary, as were the approximately 3,000 labor servicemen in the second contingent, who were much luckier thanks partially to the support of Serbian partisans.<sup>13</sup>

The ordeal of the surviving labor servicemen did not end with their arrival in Hungary. A few days following their regrouping, the men who had failed to escape were deported to various German concentration camps.

### **The German Occupation and the Arrow Cross Era**

The German occupation of Hungary on March 19, 1944, sealed the fate of Hungarian Jewry. Having survived the first four and one-half years of the war, the Jews of Hungary—the last generally intact community in Nazi-dominated Europe—were subjected to its most brutal and concentrated liquidation program. In fewer than four months, all of Hungary except Budapest was made *judenrein*. Ironically the labor service system, which remained under Hungarian jurisdiction, emerged as a refuge—albeit only temporarily. Motivated primarily by reasons of national interest, the Hungarian Ministry of Defense retained control over Jews inducted into labor service. Although labor servicemen (especially those deployed in the Ukraine and Serbia) continued to be mistreated by their superiors, they were saved from the threat of ghettoization and deportation. A number of decent Hungarian officers rescued several thousand Jewish men from certain death by recruiting them into the service. Other officers who were committed to the general application of the “Final Solution”

program, however, went out of their way to deport as many labor servicemen as they could.<sup>14</sup> After Regent Miklós Horthy halted the deportations in early July, the situation of the Jews of Budapest—like that of labor servicemen stationed within the country—improved considerably.

The respite enjoyed by labor servicemen stationed within the country and the surviving Jews of Budapest was all too brief. On October 15, when Horthy finally decided to extricate Hungary from the losing war, the followers of the Arrow Cross Party (*Nyilaskeresztes Párt*)—the ultra-rightist and viciously antisemitic political group headed by Ferenc Szálasi—staged a coup with the aid of the Germans. The shortlived euphoria of the surviving Jews was replaced by a new nightmare as the anti-Jewish drive was resumed with great vehemence and speed. Less than a week after seizing power, Lieutenant General Károly Beregfy (the new minister of defense) ordered all Jewish men between the ages of 16 and 60 and Jewish women between the ages of 16 and 40 called up for “national defense service.” On October 26 he authorized the transfer of a large number of labor service companies to the Germans, ostensibly to construct fortifications along the borders of the Third Reich and Hungary.<sup>15</sup> The transfer began on November 2. The number of Jewish labor servicemen handed over to the Germans is estimated at 50,000.

Thousands of labor servicemen and servicewomen were force marched along what came to be called a “highway of death” leading to the borders of the Reich. With the advance of the Soviet forces toward Budapest, the *Nyilas* (the popular name for the Arrow Cross members) decided to transfer most remaining labor service companies to western Hungary. The lot of these servicemen was not very different from that of the Jews in the most notorious concentration camps. Poorly housed and more poorly fed, they were required to work for long hours during the winter months of 1944–45. Those who became exhausted and could no longer work were simply shot and buried in mass graves. The *Nyilas* and SS went on a rampage as the Soviet forces approached; thousands of labor servicemen were killed in cold blood. Exhumations conducted after the liberation, for example, found the bodies of 790 labor servicemen in a mass grave at Hidegség, 400 bodies were found at Ilkamajor, 814 at Nagycenk, 350 at Sopron-Bánfalva, 300 at Mosonszentmiklós, and 220 at Hagyesalom. At Kőszeg labor servicemen were even subjected to gassing during the evacuation of the city on March 22–23, 1945, when ninety-five ill and emaciated labor servicemen were locked in a

sealed barracks and gassed by three German commandos especially equipped for this purpose.

Large-scale atrocities occurred at Kiskunhalas, Pusztavám, and several other places in western Hungary.<sup>16</sup> Most labor servicemen who survived these atrocities were herded toward the Third Reich where they ended up in various concentration camps, including Mauthausen and Günskirchen.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Beginning in the mid-1930s, the Hungarian labor service system was conceived as part of the antisemitic policies pursued by Hungarian governments in tandem with the Third Reich. The system was established in 1939 when Hungary's political, diplomatic, and economic relations with the Germany bore the first fruits of its revisionist ambitions. By that time the Jews of Hungary were defined along racial lines and deprived of many of their basic civil, economic, and human rights. Even during the first phase of its operation (July 1939–April 1941), the labor service system was discriminatory. Although labor servicemen were allowed to wear army uniforms at work, they were identified as unreliable and forbidden to bear arms. The uniforms worn by labor servicemen during this phase were mostly those discarded by the Hungarian armed forces or captured from the Czechoslovak Army. The labor servicemen's status as second-class citizens within the armed forces was clearly identified by the armband that they had to wear.

The status of labor servicemen worsened in April 1941, shortly after Hungary—by then a full-fledged member of the Axis—joined in dismembering Yugoslavia. The Hungarian government, acting on the recommendations of Germanophile officers in the Ministry of Defense, adopted increasingly severe legislative measures relating to the labor service system. By early 1942 Jewish officers were deprived of their rank and labor servicemen were not only compelled to wear their own clothes and footwear, but also a yellow or white armband that identified them as easy targets for abuse. The treatment of labor servicemen varied from company to company depending on the attitude of the commanding officers. In general, however, Jewish labor servicemen were treated as pariahs and abused by the Christian officers and guards—especially along the frontlines in the Ukraine and Bor and on the Hungarian-German border, where they were abused not only by their Hungarian superiors but often by elements of the German military and security forces as well. Their daily life was not fundamentally



different from that of the Jews who lingered in German concentration camps. Like the victims in those camps, labor servicemen were often subjected to punitive treatment by officers and guards, deprived of their possessions and basic needs (including adequate shelter, nutrition, and sanitary care), and subjected to unimaginable tortures. Countless thousands were executed on order or on the whim of sadistic German and Hungarian soldiers. Moreover, many labor servicemen ended up in German concentration camps after being discharged from the service or as a consequence of their withdrawal from the frontlines.

At its peak in 1944, the labor service system comprised 570 companies. Since the archives of the Ministry of Defense have reportedly been destroyed, it is all but impossible to determine exactly how many of the companies were composed exclusively of Jews, formerly Jewish converts, or non-Jews of other nationalities (mainly Romanian and Slovak). The number of casualties suffered by Jews in the various labor service companies cannot be established with any degree of certainty. Most experts in the field of Hungarian Holocaust studies estimate the total number of Jewish labor servicemen who were killed or who disappeared during the Second World War to be 50,000-60,000.

The survivors of the system, now living in many parts of the world, are in their seventies and eighties. In the absence of records, it is impossible to determine their company or battalion affiliation—although it is safe to assume that many are still in possession of at least some documents attesting to their labor service. It is a regrettable compounding of the labor servicemen's wartime ordeal that they received little or no compensation from the Hungarian and German governments, and that the Hungarian labor service system has remained one of the most under-studied elements of the destruction of European Jewry during the Nazi era.

### Notes

1. In November 1938 Hungary acquired the Upper Province (Felvidék) from Czechoslovakia. Following the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, Hungary also acquired Carpatho-Ruthenia (Kárpátalja); in August 1940 it acquired northern Transylvania from Romania; and in April 1941 it obtained the “Délvidék” (the Bácska and adjacent areas) from Yugoslavia. For details consult Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
2. See “1939. évi II.törvénycikk a honvédelemről” [Law No. II of 1939 on National Defense] in *1939 évi Országos Törvénytár* [National Code of Laws for 1939] (Budapest, March 11, 1939).
3. Also relevant were Articles 87–94, which stipulated that all persons between the ages of 14 and 70 were liable to work to the limit of their physical and mental capacities for the defense of the nation.
4. See the decree in *Budapesti Közlöny* [Budapest Gazette], April 19, 1941. The text of the order (and of its amendments) can be found in Elek Karsai, ed., “Fegyvertelen álltak az aknamezőkön . . .” [They Stood Unarmed in the Mine Fields], vol. 1 (Budapest: Magyar Izraeliták Országos Képviselőlete, 1962), pp. 300–26.
5. See doc. no. 3012–PS in *Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal*, vol. 31 (Nuremberg: Secretariat of the International Military Tribunal), pp. 493–495. For specific examples of atrocities perpetrated by the Germans, see Karsai, “Fegyvertelen,” vol. 1, pp. lxxv–lxxvi.
6. *Ibid.*, p. cxxiii.
7. See doc. no. 55 in Randolph L. Braham, ed., *The Destruction of Hungarian Jewry: A Documentary Account* (New York: Pro Arte for the World Federation of Hungarian Jews, 1963).
8. *Rendhagyó történelemóra a holokausztról* [Irregular History Class about the Holocaust]. (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő, 2000), p. 19.
9. Braham, *Destruction*, doc. nos. 58–61.
10. *Ibid.*, doc. nos. 54, 56.
11. *Ibid.*, doc. no. 62. The instructions implementing the agreement were spelled out in decree no. 111 470 eln. KMOF.1943, signed by Ruszkiezay-Rüdiger on July 6, 1943. See Karsai, pp. 370–78.

12. Braham, *Politics*, p. 347.

13. For details see *ibid.*, pp. 350–52.

14. This was the case, for example, in Hatvan in June 1944, when a train carrying approximately six hundred labor servicemen was attached to a deportation train going to Auschwitz. A similar fate befell about thirty labor servicemen who were rounded up in Kecskemét on June 20.

15. For a list of these companies, see Braham, *Politics*, pp. 368–70.

16. For additional details see *ibid.*, pp. 357–60.

**The Factory Slave Labor Camps in Starachowice, Poland:  
Survivors' Testimonies  
Christopher R. Browning**

Although in some ways characteristic of the wider phenomenon of the Nazi exploitation of Jewish slave labor in Poland, the complex of slave labor camps in the town of Starachowice in the Radom district of the General Government was nonetheless unusual in important ways. The unusual aspects of the camps' history, however, are helpful in studying the overall topic of forced labor since they are the exception that helps prove the rule.

The use of survivor testimony as a primary source base confronts the historian with both challenges and opportunities. The major challenge in this case revolves around constructing a coherent and historically accurate narrative from the postwar accounts of 175 survivors, each of whom experienced, remembered, and told the story of the Starachowice camps in his or her own way. The major opportunity allowed by such an exceptional or rare cluster of survivor testimonies is the possibility of recovering an experiential perspective on these camps in particular, and on the wider phenomenon of Jewish slave labor in general.

**Background**

Let us first situate the Starachowice camps in the broader historical context.<sup>1</sup> Starachowice was a small, new industrial town, directly adjacent to the old town of Wierzbnik, twenty-eight miles south of Radom and ninety-five miles south of Warsaw. A prewar Jewish population of 3,000 lived in Wierzbnik but swelled to nearly twice that number—first from the influx of Jews from Łódź and Płock, the victims of Nazi ethnic cleansing of the “incorporated territories” of western Poland; and second from the influx of Jews from nearby towns who desperately sought work in the Starachowice factories when the ghetto liquidation campaign swept through the Radom district in late summer and early autumn 1942.

In autumn 1942 Heinrich Himmler was fervently trying to limit the number of Jewish workers spared deportation to the death camps by imposing two restrictions on prospective employers: first, the work was to be directly—not indirectly or tangentially—related to the war economy; and second, the Jews were to be incarcerated in special camps, both totally controlled by the Nazis and separate from the surrounding

population. In Starachowice the main factories were a steel mill and a munitions plant expropriated by the Hermann Göring Werke in 1939. There was never any question that they were part of the war economy, even in Himmler's narrowest and strictest sense. Before the Wierzbnik ghetto was cleared on October 27, 1942, the factory management constructed special camps for the Jewish slaves whom they would subsequently rent from the SS at Himmler's specified rate of five zloty per day per man and four zloty per day per woman. As a result, while virtually all of the inhabitants of most ghettos in the Radom district were routinely dispatched to Treblinka at this time, close to 30 percent of the Jews of Wierzbnik—some 1,200 men and 400 women—were force marched to the newly constructed factory slave labor camps on the fateful day of the ghetto liquidation.

Three further factors distinguished the Starachowice factory slave labor camps. First, when Himmler carried out his labor camp liquidation campaign in 1943—engulfing the D-4 camps of Galicia in the summer, the camps of the eastern Cracow district in September, and the Lublin camps in the great “Erntefest” massacre of November—the liquidation sweep stopped just short of Starachowice. Second, the Starachowice camps remained under the direct control of local factory managers and were never subsumed into the SS concentration camp system, which meant that the tenuous balance between the conflicting imperatives for destruction and exploitation gradually tipped toward the latter. Third, when the Starachowice camps were finally closed in July 1944, the prisoners were evacuated to Birkenau, where they were admitted en masse without a decimating selection on the ramp. Unlike many Jewish slave labor camps in Poland, from which there were virtually no survivors, the fortuitous combination of these factors resulted in an unusual cluster of Starachowice survivors.

What can we learn about the slave labor camp experience from the “collected memories” (in explicit juxtaposition to the notion of “collective memory”) of the Starachowice survivors? It is clear that the Jews' basic survival strategies—bribery and work—were devised long before they were sent to the factory slave labor camps. As was the case elsewhere in Poland, the Jewish council of Wierzbnik organized the allocation of compulsory labor through Jewish officials in a ghetto labor office in order to replace the capricious and unpredictable terror and arbitrary roundups. In this way the Jews became an important labor force in the Starachowice factories from which they had been barred employment in the prewar period.<sup>2</sup> The Jewish council also

systematically bribed German officials in the hope that they would develop a vested interest in the preservation of the Jewish community.<sup>3</sup>

One dimension of wartime Poland that is starkly prevalent in survivor testimony—but virtually absent from contemporary German documentation—is the pervasive corruption and insatiable avarice of German occupation personnel. The extortion of official contributions was only one aspect of the wider onslaught against Jewish property. Jews were routinely arrested and held for ransom, and most Germans were free to walk into any Jewish residence or business and help themselves to whatever they could lay their hands on. No wonder the Jews concluded that individual greed was a major German motivation that they could attempt to manipulate for their own survival, and in the case of the Wierzbnik Jews in particular, they did so not only before but also after their incarceration in the Starachowice slave labor camps.

If the Jews of Wierzbnik were correct in their assessment of German greed and susceptibility to bribes, they were wrong in their assessment of the power of local Germans. Those with a vested interest in continuing Jewish payoffs often had little or no authority to help preserve the community. Men such as Walter Becker, the local police chief and a major recipient of such payoffs, may have held the power of life and death over individual Jews and Poles in Wierzbnik/Starachowice and thus may have seemed terribly important to the local inhabitants. In terms of shaping Nazi policy and the ultimate fate of the ghetto, however, he was a total nonentity—a low-ranking Kripo officer denied entry into the SS.

As the German onslaught against the Polish ghettos spread to the Radom district in late summer 1942 and it became increasingly clear that Wierzbnik would not be spared, the two defense strategies of work and bribery merged into one. The pivotal figure in this regard was Leopold Schwertner, chief of personnel for the Göring Werke. The Jewish council paid Schwertner to create more jobs for Jewish workers; Schwertner also engaged in the brisk business of selling work cards to individual Jews, even touring towns in the surrounding region to pick up Jewish workers by the truckload and smuggle them into the Wierzbnik ghetto and Starachowice factories.<sup>4</sup> Thus one central aspect of Nazi slave labor, unusual if not unique in the long dismal history of human slavery, was that Jews—unlike other forced laborers of the Nazis—sought and even paid considerable sums for their own enslavement as a conscious survival strategy and virtually the only alternative to the even more precarious option of flight and hiding.

On October 27, 1942, the Wierzbnik Jews selected for work were taken to three camps in Starachowice: Strelnica on the edge of the Bugaj forest on the north side of town, which supplied workers for the munitions plant; Majówka on the bluff between the higher and lower sections of Starachowice, from which workers were sent to the steel mill and blast furnace; and Tartak, a lumberyard south of town where prisoners lived on the premises and made ammunition crates and other wood products for the military. Strelnica and Majówka were administered and guarded by the security force of the Göring Werke, while Tartak was administered separately by the managers of the “Aryanized” former Jewish lumber business. In late summer 1943, the primitive and unsanitary camp at Strelnica was closed and its prisoners were transferred to the enlarged Majówka camp. In late spring or early summer 1944, Majówka was closed and the prisoners were again shifted to a new camp directly on the grounds of the munitions factory. It was from there that they and the Tartak workers were evacuated to Birkenau on July 28, 1944.

### **German Policies and Personnel**

A succession of commandants marked three distinct periods in the mortality pattern of the main camps: an unmitigated reign of terror and killing under Willi Althoff; a crucial reversal in killing policy that preceded the partial de-escalation of terror under Walter Kolditz; and relative stabilization under Kurt Otto Baumgarten.

Althoff was the chief of security for the Göring factories in Starachowice and commanded a force of Ukrainian guards. With the construction of the Jewish camps, Althoff naturally became the first commandant, and the Ukrainians became camp as well as factory guards. A handsome, well-dressed man who donned a raincoat to keep his clothes from being splattered with blood, Althoff descended on the main camps (especially Strelnica) virtually every night and left dead Jews in his wake. Many of his killings were theatrically staged for personal amusement and even to entertain guests.<sup>5</sup>

Although Althoff’s obvious pleasure in killing remains foremost in the memories of prisoners, his behavior must not obscure the fundamental factory-management policy that lay behind it. Given the utter lack of sanitary facilities, the Starachowice camps were swept by epidemics—above all typhus. The factory management’s response, quite simply, was not to improve sanitary conditions but rather to kill the sick and weak Jews who would otherwise have cost them 4–5 złoty per day

while not working. The spectacular aspects of his killings aside, most of Althoff's victims were the sick and weak.<sup>6</sup>

By May 1943 the Germans had completed a second sweep of what they called the “remnant” ghettos in central Poland. In the Radom district, there were virtually no Jews still alive who were not in hiding or in work camps. Jewish labor had become a scarce commodity, a situation that entirely altered the factory management's economic calculations. Jews who had been killed could not be replaced, but sick Jews could still recover and return to work. This simple fact was reflected in an abrupt change in policy. Althoff was suddenly sent away and the factory management announced that henceforth sick prisoners would no longer be shot.<sup>7</sup>

Althoff's successor was the extremely obese Walter Kolditz. He closed the notorious Strelnica camp and moved the prisoners to the newly enlarged and slightly less unsanitary Majówka camp.<sup>8</sup> While killing was no longer an everyday event, the Kolditz era was marked by at least one extremely sadistic killing on the one hand<sup>9</sup> and the most lethal single selection in the camps' history on the other. Just days after the Erntefest massacre in the neighboring Lublin district, in which over 42,000 prisoners were murdered and all but two small work camps in the district were liquidated, 150–160 Jews were selected in Majówka and taken to a site near Radom, where they were killed—alongside victims from other camps—by SS executioners.<sup>10</sup> Both the timing and manner of execution suggest that this selection was imposed by the SS as a district-wide policy and was not the result of a local initiative by either the factory management or Kolditz.

Sometime thereafter Kolditz was relieved of his duties and replaced as commandant by Karl Otto Baumgarten, hitherto a division manager within the munitions factory. Individual killings continued in the camp, though in each case for some identifiable cause. The primary killers for this period were the chief of the Ukrainian guards, Willi Schrott, and one of the deputies of factory security, Gerhard Kaschmieder.

An unusual feature of the collected memories of the Starachowice survivors is that 116 testimonies were taken by German judicial authorities seeking evidence of specific crimes committed by specific perpetrators. Prosecution for murder under the German criminal code required evidence concerning the “malicious” or “cruel” manner in which the killing was committed, or the “base motives” behind the killing. Thus far more than in any other form of survivor testimony, this particular collection of



testimonies offers a concentrated focus from the victims' perspective on both the behavior as well as the attitudes and mindset of the German personnel in Starachowice. For the prisoners the ability to distinguish among German perpetrators was one key to survival.

Aside from the many nondescript Germans whose behavior did not imprint itself on survivor memory, three categories of Germans emerge. The first category was composed of the "dangerous" Germans (such as Althoff) who killed often and eagerly. The second category was composed of "corrupt" Germans; these were men susceptible to bribes and with whom negotiations were undertaken and businesslike deals were made. The prime examples were the chief of personnel, Leopold Schwertner, and Baumgarten. During the camp period, the focal point of bribes and negotiations shifted from Schwertner to Baumgarten, and at least some testimony hints that Baumgarten played a role in the removal of both Althoff and Kolditz.<sup>11</sup> In his dual capacity as a manager within the munitions plant and commandant of the Jewish labor camps, Baumgarten strove to increase corporate production and profits as well as to line his own pockets. Both goals were best served by negotiating with and extorting from (rather than killing) his Jewish workers.

In addition to the dangerous and corrupt Germans, the third and certainly smallest category consisted of the "decent" Germans with whom Jewish prisoners found refuge and protection. Most remarkable in this regard were a man named Fiedler (in some testimonies referred to as Fickler), who had taken over the Jewish-owned sawmill and lumberyard, and his deputy Piatek.<sup>12</sup> Together they presided over the Tartak camp, where Jews were not only better clothed and fed but above all more secure. Fiedler personally assured them that nothing would happen to them as long as he was there.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the camp had no guards, for prisoners were not trying to escape. On the contrary, they paid to get themselves or their relatives transferred there.<sup>14</sup> Quite simply, no place in this area of Poland was safer for Jews.

### **Prison Life and Prisoner Society**

The original prisoners were divided into three groups based on a kind of seniority: the prewar Wierzbnikers, the early refugees from western Poland, and the late wave of refugees from nearby communities. Once interned, the camp population suffered constant attrition from executions and epidemics but was also replenished by the transfer of additional prisoners. Most of the latter came from other camps in the Radom

district, and in particular a large contingent came from Wólanow when the labor camp there was closed. Most conspicuous, however, was a group of some 200 Jews who arrived in Starachowice from camps in the Lublin district via Majdanek. Wearing uniforms marked with the large letters KL for *Konzentrationslager*, they were referred to as the “KLS” or “Lubliners.”

If geographical origin and date of arrival in Starachowice were two key factors in creating groups that clung together, and thus in shaping the social hierarchy within the prisoner community, the third key factor affecting the nature of camp society was the continuing existence of family ties. For Starachowice and other camps, such as Wólanow, which eventually fed into Starachowice, the purchase of work cards had usually been a family strategy for survival. Many immediate families entered Starachowice intact, while others were at least partially intact. Though men and women lived in separate barracks, considerable contact was possible, especially in the post-Althoff era.<sup>15</sup> Some parents who had placed in hiding those children who were too young to secure work permits were able to reunify their families by eventually smuggling their children into camp. After the end of the Althoff reign of terror, these parents calculated that the risk of their children trying to survive in hiding was greater than trying to live as an illegal child in camp.<sup>16</sup> Thus one unusual characteristic of the Starachowice camps was the presence of children—not only a number of illegal children who had been smuggled into camp in one way or another, but also the legal children of the privileged prisoners. One positive aspect of the latter was that it made the presence of the former less conspicuous.<sup>17</sup>

In no German camp was prisoner life organized along egalitarian principles. On the contrary, the infamous kapo system of divide and conquer through granting internal power and privilege to some prisoners at the expense of others was the norm everywhere, and Starachowice was no exception. At the top of the hierarchy—surrounded by a coterie of family, relatives, and supporters, as well as three members of the now disbanded Jewish council—stood the Wierzbniker Jeremiah Wilczek. This group controlled the camp council (Lagerrat), police (Lagerpolizei), and kitchen. The camp elite enjoyed a number of privileges that the other prisoners did not. They lived in separate housing with their wives and in some cases with their children, whom they had been allowed to bring into camp.<sup>18</sup> They were also able to maintain contact with people outside the camp and even visit them in town in order to conduct business or have access to valuables hidden with friends.<sup>19</sup> In numerous testimonies Wilczek and the

camp elite were accused of living and eating well, in effect stealing from the common food and clothing supply while the rest of the camp suffered from hunger and dressed in rags.<sup>20</sup> Two testimonies lodge an even more serious charge: Wilczek and the camp council participated in selections, in effect helping the Germans decide who would live and who would die.<sup>21</sup>

Many survivors are ambivalent in their assessment of the camp elite, but one pattern is clear: the prisoners who were most disenchanted with the camp council and hierarchy of privilege were latecomers to the camp from outside Starachowice. When prisoners from Wólanow—where the Jewish camp leaders had imposed a strict but relatively honest and egalitarian regime—were transferred to Starachowice in 1943, they were dismayed by the rampant inequality and abuse of power that they encountered. The newcomers' possessions were seized under the pretext of disinfection; these possessions were never returned but instead sold to Poles on the black market. Rare items such as meat and sugar—which inmates occasionally received at Wólanow—were sold in Starachowice to those who could pay, with the camp council pocketing the proceeds. When Wólanow newcomers indignantly protested, they were branded rebels, discriminated against even more in terms of being assigned the worst jobs, and dispersed among different barracks so they could not act in concert. The new arrivals from elsewhere were also deprived of their possessions.<sup>22</sup>

The greatest challenge to the camp elite was posed by the Lubliners, the 200 hardened survivors of Majdanek who arrived in Starachowice in spring 1944. The Lubliners openly challenged the Starachowice elite for control of the camp. The old elite apparently increased its bribes to Baumgarten, who backed it against the newcomers, but thereafter it was careful not to flaunt its privileges quite so openly. To some of the prisoners, these Jews were tough veterans and rare survivors of the Lublin camps; in the words of one admirer, they were “made out of iron.” To others they were low-class thugs and “ruffians” grasping for power.<sup>23</sup> In any case, the deep animosity between the Wilczek coterie and the Lubliners remained unabated and ended tragically. When the Starachowice Jews were evacuated to Birkenau in July 1944, several Lubliners slipped into the first train car in which Wilczek and others of the camp elite were riding. Angry words led to a struggle in the suffocating heat and claustrophobic confines of the overloaded railroad car. Wilczek, his son, the head of the camp kitchen, and other members of the camp elite—as well as some who tried to intervene—were

strangled.<sup>24</sup> When the train reached Birkenau, their bodies were piled on the ramp for all to see, and the story of their fate quickly spread among the other Starachowice Jews.

The vital role that Baumgarten's corruption and greed played in the camps' history raises the logical question of how such large-scale, systemic bribery could be financed. In Starachowice, as in other camps, virtually every prisoner sought to "organize" from the worksite materials that could be made into marketable goods. Such goods were then traded at the worksite or smuggled out of camp (when the more well-disposed Ukrainian guards were on duty) and sold to Poles on the black market.<sup>25</sup> Much of this income subsequently flowed to the camp council through the purchase of both extra food and preferred work assignments.<sup>26</sup>

Beyond such income from individual prisoner initiative, however, was an underground economy of considerable complexity that enabled the camp council to finance the crucial network of bribery. Within the camp the Germans had collected a group of skilled craftsmen known as the *Konsum* to work for them. In addition to working for the Germans, the *Konsum* also worked for the camp council, which provided it with raw materials and sold the resulting goods.<sup>27</sup>

The most unusual feature of the Starachowice underground economy, which gave it a decisive advantage in the internal dynamics of the camp society, was that the original Wierzbnikers were still in their hometown. Not just the wealthier and more assimilated families—with whom Wilzcek was allied—but even many ordinary Wierzbnikers had had both business and social contacts in the Polish community and hence Polish acquaintances with whom they had left property. On some occasions they were permitted to go into town to conduct business and retrieve valuables; on other occasions money was smuggled into camp from local sources. This was a resource that none of the subsequent waves of Jews who came into the Starachowice camp could match.<sup>28</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The experience of the Jewish slave laborers of the Starachowice camps was atypical in important ways. The fact that many of them were incarcerated in their hometown and continued to have access to some of their property was highly unusual. Likewise, the fortuitous combination of factors that contributed to the survival of a significant remnant contrasts sharply with the fate of so many Jewish work camps from which virtually no one survived. In other ways, however, the history of the Starachowice

factory camps illuminates the broader phenomenon of Jewish slave labor. Factory managers in Poland showed no concern for Jewish life but they did value Jewish labor, all the more so as labor became an increasingly scarce commodity within the German empire.

In the years before the “Final Solution,” local ghetto managers in Poland (when left to themselves) opted for production over attrition and sought to create temporary, self-sustaining ghetto economies until Berlin determined the fate of the ghettoized Jews. Similarly, when Himmler’s maniacal drive to liquidate first the ghettos and then the labor camps in fall 1943 finally gave way to the exigencies of the war economy, and factory managers were temporarily allowed relative autonomy in the exploitation of the remaining Jewish workers, some semblance of economic rationality—favoring exploitation over extermination—once again held sway. As earlier in the ghettos, prisoner communities struggled against terrible hardships of malnutrition, disease, and now systemic overwork, but a precarious stabilization—in comparison to the horrific killing years of 1942–43—allowed most of the prisoner community to continue living. These prisoner communities (like the earlier ghettos) were no models of equality and solidarity, but neither were they demoralized and atomized. The bonds of family and community held, and mitigating measures were organized, even if the benefits were not equally shared. In the end, just as the earlier ghettos had been liquidated, so the labor camps were evacuated. Their prisoners were thrown into the maelstrom of transports, concentration camps, and death marches, in which most of the former labor camp inmates perished.

In one way, however, the history of the Starachowice Jewish slave laborers is not at all atypical: their story is not a particularly edifying one. One of the saddest lessons of the Holocaust is confirmation that terrible persecution does not ennoble victims. Enslavement, starvation, and mass murder do not make ordinary people into saints and heroes. We must be grateful for the testimonies of those who did survive and are willing to speak, but we have no right to expect from them tales of redemption.

## Notes

1. For general background on the use of Jewish labor in Poland, see my *Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers, German Killers* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chap. 3; Dieter Pohl, “Die grossen Zwangsarbeitslager der SS- und Polizeiführer für Juden im Generalgouvernement 1942–1945,” in *Die nationalsozialistische Konzentrationslager: Entwicklung und Struktur*, vol. 1, ed. Ulrich Herbert, Karin Orth, and Christopher Dieckmann (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 1998), pp. 415–38; Donald Bloxham, “‘Extermination Through Work’: Jewish Slave Labour under the Third Reich,” *Educational Trust Research Papers*, 1 (1999–2000); and “Jewish Slave Labour in Relation to the ‘Final Solution,’” in *Remembering for the Future: The Holocaust in the Age of Genocide*, ed. John Roth (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 163–86.
2. Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen 206 AR–Z 39/62 (Hamburg StA 147 Js 1312/63, investigation of Walter Becker [hereafter cited as Becker]), pp. 405 (testimony of Fred B.) and 866 (Anna W.).
3. Becker, pp. 1006 (Mendel M.) and 1021 (Simcha G.).
4. Becker, pp. 736–37 (Toby W.), 796 (Abraham R.), 938 (Zvi Hersh F.), 956 (Israel E.), 961 (Sarah P.), 970 (Rachmiel Z.), and 1053 (Pinchas H.). Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation [hereafter cited as VHF], PCN 5829. Personal interview: Joseph F. Goldie Szachter Kalib, *The Last Selection: A Child’s Journey Through the Holocaust* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), pp. 170, 180, 199. Eventually Jewish valuables were found in Schwertner’s apartment and he was arrested for corruption. After a few months, he was released from prison but banned from the occupied territories because he was deemed “not suited for responsible assignments in the East.” Becker, pp. 1090–91 (Leopold Rudolf Schwertner). National Archives/Berlin Document Center microfilms: SS-enlisted men file.
5. Becker, pp. 675 (Meyer H.), 759 (Mina B.), 792 (Leib R.), and 831 (Ben L.). VHF, PCN 17158 (Paul C.), PCN 19958 (Miriam M.) PCN 18549 (Saul M.), PCN 11572 (Joseph T.), PCN 23509 (Anita T.), PCN 600447 (Chaim W.). Museum of Jewish Heritage (hereafter cited as MJH), RG 1383 (Pola F.). Personal interview: Anna W.
6. For particularly vivid descriptions of Althoff’s killings, see Becker, pp. 29 (Israel A.), 83 (Mendel M.), 407 (Fred B.), 435 (Toby W.), 631 (Mania B.), 749 (Leona F.), 791 (Leib R.), and 896 (Anna B.). Fortunoff Archives, Sterling Library, Yale University (hereafter cited as FA): T–91 (Israel A.). Kalib, *Last Selection*, pp. 177–79.
7. Becker, pp. 818 (Faye G., who named Schwertner as the factory spokesman), 828 (Ben L., who claimed that Becker made the announcement). Personal interview: Joseph F. (who attributed the announcement to Baumgarten). VHF, PCN 641059 (Louis F., who identified the speaker only as a “civilian” from the factory).

8. Becker, pp. 776 (Arnold F.), 1390 (Chaim H.).
9. Becker, p. 869 (Anna W.).
10. Becker, pp. 470 (Adam G.), 714 (Ida G.), 859 (Eva Z.), 1328 (Alan N.), 1364 (Rachiel P.), 1369 (Max R.). Yad Vashem Archives (hereafter YVA), M-49/1172 (Mendel K.). VHF, PCN 640106 (Rachel P.). Personal interview: Alan N. Adam Rutkowski, "Hitlerische Arbeitslager für den Juden im Distrikt Radom," *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* 17/18 (1956), p. 19.
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13. YVA, M-1E.2469 (Joseph K.). FA, T-1682 (Mania K.).
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15. Kalib, *Last Selection*, pp. 173–74. VHF, PCN 635637 (Salek B.), PCN 620109 (Tovi P.). Personal interview: Joseph F.
16. Kalib, *Last Selection*, pp. 200–203. VHF, PCN 620109 (Tovi P.).
17. Indeed, some of the "illegal" children testified to having been placed with the "legal" children during searches and selections. VHF, PCN 620109 (Tovi P.).
18. Becker, p. 1335 (Moshe P.). FA, T-1884 (Regina N.). VHF, PCN 635637 (Salek B.), PCN 620109 (Tovi P.). Kalib, *Last Selection*, p. 174.
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28. FA, T-955 (Guta T.). YVA, O-3/9394 (Ruben Z.). Kalib, *The Last Selection*, pp. 172, 174, 180-81, 206, 208. VHF, PCN 635867 (Morris P.). USHMM, RG-50.030\*0396 (Chris L.) Personal interviews: Martin B., Howard C., Alan N., and Chris L.



## **Retelling the Jewish Slave Labor Experience in Romania**

**William Rosenzweig**

I grew up in Czernowitz, Bukovina, which was part of Romania until June 28, 1940, when it was occupied by the Soviet Union. The Germans and Romanians started the war against the Soviet Union at the end of June 1941 and, after a few days of fighting, entered our city on July 5. The authorities gave the Romanian Army the right to harass and kill Jews for the first three days, claiming that the Jews had offended their officers when that army retreated in 1940. As a result, approximately three thousand people were killed on July 5 and a comparable number during the next two days. In addition, three hundred people—including Chief Rabbi Dr. Abraham Jakob Mark and my wife's grandfather—were taken to the Prut River and shot by the Romanians.

During the Soviet occupation, we were evicted from our apartment and assigned to a private house on the outskirts of the city, which was formerly occupied by local Germans (*Volksdeutsch*) who fled Czernowitz for Germany when the Soviets came. Because few Jews were left in that area (many were killed by the Romanians), we were hiding in the fields when we noticed the approach of the Germans and Romanians. Eventually the Germans moved into our house and settled there.

Under the cover of night, we went to another area and found refuge in a house belonging to an acquaintance. This did not help: a few days later, my parents, brother, and two aunts were taken from the house and lined against the wall to be shot by the Romanians. I was chased away because, having blue eyes and blond hair, I looked gentile. Luckily at that moment some Russian soldiers rode by on horseback and began shooting and the Romanians ran away.

Some time later Romanian soldiers caught me outside the house and placed me against a wall, claiming that I was shooting at them. One shot was fired at me by a soldier, but it only penetrated my hat so they let me go.

On another occasion Romanian soldiers took about twenty people—including my family and me—intending to kill us. We were pleading and begging for our lives when suddenly one of our neighbors, a very attractive young woman, told the officer in charge that she would go to bed with him if he would let us go. She was our hero and our savior.

Romanian soldiers continued to round up people in our neighborhood. My family and I were arrested as part of a large group and taken to police headquarters in

the center of the city. We were lined up in the courtyard, where we heard shooting and expected that we too would be killed. The chief of police, whose name was Vaja, suddenly came into the courtyard and noticed me. He told the other policeman that he wished to handle our case personally. He brought my family and me into his office, closed the door, and said that his stepson Egon Wagenknecht had asked him to do everything in his power to save us. Egon was my best friend; he had fled Czernowitz at the arrival of the Soviets but did not return with the Romanians. The chief asked what he could do for us. We asked him if he could provide us with a pass so that we could circulate freely in the city, which he did. Thinking this pass would give us protection, we were happy.

We returned to the house from which we had been taken earlier. We then realized that to stay there would be very dangerous, so my father was able to arrange shelter in a basement of a large apartment house in the center of Czernowitz. We set out the next day, each of us taking whatever he or she could carry.

As we were about to pass a military camp, we suddenly heard lots of shooting. Romanian soldiers came from all sides and tried to take all of the pedestrians in the area into custody. I encouraged my family to run away while I stayed behind to delay the soldiers by engaging them in conversation. Since I had a pass from the chief of police, I thought that they would let me go, but the pass did not help; I was arrested. At the camp entrance, I was brought before an officer to whom I showed my pass. I was sure that I would be set free. Instead, he tore up the pass and pulled out his gun to shoot me.

Suddenly an orderly ran in and told him that the colonel wished to see him immediately. I was left standing at the entrance. Many more people were brought in and all of us were taken to a large hall in the camp. The officer announced that everyone would be checked. He told us not to be afraid, except the Jews who knew what to expect. I was afraid that some of my gentile neighbors might identify me as a Jew but this did not happen. I was checked and because I carried an identification card issued in Bucharest, which did not state religion and on which my first name was "Wilhelm," I was released. By that time it was already night and I tried to reach the camp exit by crawling through a ditch. The city had a curfew and anyone caught in the streets was shot immediately. Eventually I was able to reach the central park of the city and, later that night, the building where my family stayed. They were amazed because they were certain that they would never see me again.

A few days later, the Romanian military started going from house to house to take all Jewish men to work, which consisted of cleaning and clearing buildings, streets, and public places blown up by the retreating Soviet Army. Most of this work was done under the supervision of the German Organisation Todt. We were beaten regularly by the Germans and Romanians.

In early October 1941, all Jews were ordered to leave their homes within nine hours and go to a ghetto. That ghetto consisted of some streets where the poorer Jews lived. It became complete chaos. People had to stay in attics and basements, sometimes as many as two dozen people in a room. Postcards and letters started to arrive from Transnistria, supposedly from Jews who had already been deported from other locations, stating that life there was good and that they had nice housing, food, and work.

The frustration of living in such misery conditioned and prepared people to want to leave. Each day another street or area was evacuated and the inhabitants were taken to the central train station. In the midst of this, the authorities realized that the city could not function without some key Jewish people and started to issue authorizations to certain people to remain. There were two kinds of authorizations, one issued by the governor and one issued by the mayor (who was somewhat friendly to the Jews). People with these authorizations were deported in 1942—directly over the Bug River to the Germans—and were exterminated.

Once at the railroad station, we were crammed into freight cars without food, water, or sanitary facilities. After a few days, the cars arrived in Marculesti in Bessarabia and we were taken to a lager surrounded by barbed wire and Romanian gendarmes. We were told that everyone must surrender all personal documents, IDs, birth certificates, marriage certificates, photographs, money, jewelry, etc.

Instead of turning in their jewelry, some of the people threw everything into a very deep fountain in the lager. Each of us was forced to submit to a thorough personal body check; if any of the above items were found, the person would be shot on the spot. In other words, we were dehumanized and left with only the clothes on our backs and a bundle that consisted mainly of bedding.

After the inspection was completed, we were led to the gate where convoys were formed to be marched on foot to an unknown destination. The irony was that 30–40 yards from the gate, peasants with horses and buggies were ready to transport us for

money. Since most people did not risk retaining anything valuable, they were forced to walk with whatever they could carry.

This became very difficult and many people remained behind, especially the elderly, the sick, and children. It was bitterly cold. The ones who remained behind were shot and left on the road. My father could not walk and remained behind. I ran back, threw away some of his load, and was able to bring him with the convoy.

We were finally taken to a forest named Cosauti. It was very cold, alternating between rain and snow. We were continuously beaten and countless numbers died. Some deportees from previous groups appeared in rags, not wearing shoes and very hungry, and started to undress the dead. We were shocked to see this happening. Their answer was, “When you Bukovinians are away as long as we are, you will do the same.”

We continued from there to the Dniester River. We crossed a narrow bridge over the wide river and were now in Transnistria, a Romanian-occupied area of the Ukraine. Here the Ukrainian militia joined the Romanian gendarmes.

The mud in the fields was deep and very thick. Most of us lost our shoes. It was difficult to move since you could not pull your feet out of the mud. We were extremely hungry and ate the sugar beets from the fields, which made us very sick. At night we stayed in open fields battered by wind, rain, snow, and cold, leaving behind many dead.

Finally we arrived in Crijopol. Many of the Ukrainian Jews there had been killed by the Einsatzgruppe D, so we could not expect help. We encountered many deportees from previous convoys who were already sick with typhoid.

Then we were marched to Obodowka. Terrible things happened on the way, and we encountered the same mud and severe weather conditions. We were placed in stables that were occupied by previous deportees. The stench and the cold were unbearable. Exhausted, we fell asleep on the ground with our backpacks on our backs or on the ground next to us. When we awoke the next morning, my brother’s and mother’s backpacks were gone, and near us were many dead people. It was now early December. We were taken to Bershad, a little town where approximately 4,000–5,000 local Jews lived. The ghetto there had been opened in July 1941.

The first deportees had come from Bessarabia; our group of approximately 20,000 Jews from Bukovina came later. We found broken-down houses without roofs, walls, or floors. We were in the open—freezing cold, weak, hungry, full of lice—and many of us were infected with typhoid. Later we were taken to work to cut wood at the

various government installations outside the ghetto, always under strict supervision by gendarmes.

Now I suddenly felt very weak and realized that I—as well as everyone in my family except my father—was sick with typhoid. Because of my father, who had early training as a *feldsher* (doctor's assistant) and worked in the hospital in Bershad, the whole family was permitted to stay in the hospital, which had neither beds nor medicine. We lay on straw. I remained sick until April, my brother until May. One of my aunts died from starvation and typhoid. If not for my father, all of us would have died.

In summer 1942 men were again recruited to clean streets and government places and build roads. Some Jews who were tradesmen were recruited to work as painters, locksmiths, and carpenters to repair the official buildings outside the ghetto.

The Romanians had an agreement with the Germans that the territory between the Dniester and Bug rivers should stay under Romanian administration. On the other side of the Bug there were only Germans. Under this agreement the Jews were supposed to be sent to the Bug River for subsequent transfer to the Germans, either for work or to be killed. Whenever the Germans needed people to build bridges or highways or cut trees, they requested laborers from the Romanians. Only later, in 1943, when Prime Minister Antonescu realized the implications of Soviet successes in the war, did he decide not to transfer any more Jews to the Germans.

In Bershad we were isolated without access to radio, newspapers, mail, or any other communication. There were always rumors about various things, including repatriation.

A Jewish community committee was functioning with its own militia and sanitary corporation. The committee listed all deportees, issued IDs, and was forced to find people when the Germans and Romanians needed workers. We tried to hide when such searches were conducted but this was not always possible. On one occasion, most of the men were caught and taken to a forest to cut wood. After about four weeks, some of the men returned; the others did not.

In winter 1943 the Germans requested able-bodied men to be sent to Nikolaev to build a bridge. This was one of the biggest demands. It was an extremely cold day. I was caught wearing a light jacket and practically no shoes. On the way to the *comandatura* (the local police command post) my brother—who was then only

fourteen—saw me freezing in the convoy. He wanted to run back to our place to bring me the only coat that our family possessed, but I screamed at him not to do it.

Fortunately, however, the Romanians did not choose me because they figured that I would freeze on the way. My luck! The work in Nikolaev was very harsh. The people had to work in freezing water and many died. In addition, if some of the work was not done according to the Germans' plan, they would line the people up and execute every tenth person. By following a local Jew who lived in the same quarters, I discovered a type of catacomb system under the town's streets that could be reached by crawling through a typical Russian oven and reaching a passage at the back leading to underground tunnels. We hid in these tunnels from time to time.

The commander of Bershad, a lieutenant named Ghineraru, was extremely cruel. He sometimes drove around the ghetto on a motorcycle, picked up a young boy or young man, tied him to the motorcycle, and drove at a very high speed over the cobblestone streets. Also in Bershad the bodies of people who were shot were hung for days on telegraph poles.

A friend (who had finished textile school) and I found a broken wooden handloom. In order to avoid being chosen for manual labor outdoors, we asked the commander to allow us to weave sheep wool into fabric to make gloves, scarves, and sweaters for the gendarmes. Since the winter was severe, he gave permission and provided us with space outside the ghetto. We obtained spinning wheels from the peasants and brought Jewish girls to work; among those girls was my future wife. My friend and I set up the loom and were weaving, but two or three months later, we heard that the SS was coming to arrest us all. We were able to escape but that was the end of the weaving project.

Shortly before liberation, which took place in Bershad (the first ghetto to be liberated) on March 14, 1944, the Germans assumed command of the ghetto. They found a bottle in the lake that contained a list of people who had helped the partisans. As a result, the Germans went from quarter to quarter and killed many professionals and Ukrainian Jews. They were shot and buried in a mass grave outside the ghetto. A few days later, the Germans were surrounded and retreated under chaotic conditions.

## PART III

# FORCED AND SLAVE LABOR ACROSS EUROPE

## **Forced Labor along the “Straße der SS”**

**Andrej Angrick**

In winter 1941 the Third Reich postponed its plans for a quick military victory over the Soviet Union. The Nazi regime lacked the military resources necessary to start a large-scale offensive on a broad front, from the Baltic Sea in the north to the Black Sea in the south; it therefore shifted strategic priority to the campaign in the southern sector and concentrated its resources for a march on Stalingrad and the Caucasus. The Third Reich’s most important ally on this front, Romania, also had troops concentrated there.

That was the plan, but the attack could succeed only if weapons and supplies could be brought to the front quickly. Toward this end the German forces and their allies used the old Russian army roads, which were renamed “transit roads” (*Durchgangsstraßen* [DG]) by the Nazis.

### **The Durchgangsstraße IV (DG IV): A Project of the German Occupation Regime**

During his inspection tour in December 1941, Heinrich Himmler experienced firsthand the poor condition of supply roads in the southern sector. Reaching the SS Division Wiking proved quite arduous and, for other parts of the inspection tour, he had been forced to travel by airplane. He even canceled a meeting with August von Mackensen, General of the Third Panzer Corps, because the “magnificent roads of the Soviet paradise” made this an impossible undertaking.<sup>1</sup> Himmler and army leaders quickly agreed that top priority should be given to rapid road construction and improvement measures near the front lines in the southern sector, particularly since the condition of these roads was likely to be decisive in determining Germany’s chances for victory.

The troublesome road that Himmler traveled was designated DG IV by the Nazis. It began in East Galicia (a region occupied by the Soviets in September 1939); led through the cities of L’viv and Tarnopol; continued from there through the southern Ukraine and the cities and towns of Letichev, Vinnitsa, Gaisin, Uman, Kirovograd, Krivoy-Rog, and Dnipropetrovsk; then on to Stalino (Donetsk) and Taganrog; and finally reached Rostov—the gateway to the Caucasus—on the Don. The stretch of road from the border of the Generalgouvernement to Taganrog alone was approximately two thousand kilometers.

The Nazis planned to extend the road to the Caucasus as their forces advanced. Due to pressure from the Wehrmacht High Command (OKW), work on extending the



existing network of roads began shortly after the attack on the Soviet Union, and with the aim of improving conditions for heavy vehicle traffic eastward. Following negotiations between the OKW and the Organisation Todt (OT), the latter took responsibility for maintaining and improving the DG IV route. Reichsminister Dr. Todt entrusted the office of Albert Speer, Hitler’s chief superintendent of construction (Generalbauinspekteur), with implementing this project. Since the original intent was to follow a route farther to the south, this supply road was dubbed the Black Sea Road (*Schwarzmeerstraße*). Because the route would then have led through territory occupied by the Nazis’ Romanian allies, however, these plans were altered so that the road remained within areas administered by the Germans.

Let us examine the role that the SS played in this large-scale project. Himmler wanted the Higher SS and Police Leader for the Ukraine/Russia South, Hans-Adolf Prützmann, to represent the SS in the project. Speer, Prützmann, and SS-Oberführer Hans Kammler (head of the Amtsgruppe Bauwesen) first consulted on the project on February 17, 1942. Two days later Himmler conferred with Prützmann and Oberstleutnant Geibel (Prützmann’s staff member assigned to the DG IV project) as well as with Kammler, Landesbaurat Arnold Adam (OT-Linienchef on DG IV), and Dr. Gerhard Fränk (head of Speer’s OT construction staff) about further plans.<sup>2</sup> Since the project would have to be realized with limited resources, the SS was entrusted with those parts of the operation that suited its special capabilities—in other words, providing sufficient laborers and guard personnel. The OT supplied construction supervisors and technicians and was responsible for the actual technical realization. Various German construction companies (among them Eras KG, Ufer, Kaiser, Meister-Jehle-Grimminger-Stock, Fix, Stöhr, Kaspar Emmerich, Horst, Dohrman/Schütte, and Horst & Jüssen) were commissioned to carry out local road construction.

Himmler again dealt with the subject of DG IV on the evening of February 19, 1942. While he was attending a lecture by Ministerialdirektor Hans-Joachim Riecke from the Wirtschaftsstab Ost at the Führer’s headquarters, he and Speer agreed that the route should match Germany’s plans for establishing settlements in the region.<sup>3</sup> Speer also raised the issue again in the course of this evening when he informed Hitler about the agreement reached with Himmler. Hitler approved but insisted that the supply route be “constructed in the most primitive way” possible and that the “road surface should be conceived to last for 2-3 years” only.<sup>4</sup>

To facilitate the project, the authorities divided DG IV into smaller sectors that were assigned to SS administrative units termed Oberbauabschnittsleitung, Bauabschnittsleitung, and Streckenbauleitung. SS-Oberbauabschnittsleitungen were established in Vinnitsa, Kirovograd, Krivoy-Rog, and Stalino. SS-Bauabschnittsleitung existed in Letichev, Gaisin, Uman, Novo-Ukrainka, Alexandriya, Sofiyevka, Gurovka, Dnipropetrovsk, Grishino, Pavlograd, and Makieyevska. The SS-Streckenbauleitung was the smallest part of the OT to be charged with constructing a military supply line to the East; its task (mostly under the control of a Regierungsbauinspektor) was to plan, coordinate, and control the roads in this area under the supervision of private companies. SS leaders were in charge of the Oberbauabschnittsleitung and Bauabschnittsleitung; most of these men were from the General SS and had been transferred to these posts as Fachführer, denoted by the “F” following their rank.<sup>5</sup>

Many SS leaders who were later deployed as SS police leaders in the East (Jürgen Stroop, Ludolf von Alvensleben, and Theobald Thier) first served on the DG IV road project. Approximately five thousand civilian and military German officers, functionaries, and specialists served along DG IV during 1942. Securing the road and guarding workers on the construction sites were initially in the hands of a unit called the Polizeisicherungsabteilung an der DG IV. This unit consisted of headquarters staff and four companies totaling 546 men, first under the command of Major Georg Muhlmann and later Hauptmann Paul Tillmann of the Schutzpolizei. These forces were distributed along the various sectors of the road but were inadequate for securing the camps along the route. Thus Schutzmannschaft battalions—each composed of five hundred men including Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Latvians, and Cossacks—were sent to reinforce the Polizeisicherungsabteilungen, who were in turn charged with securing the smallest bases, some of which were only ten to fifteen kilometers apart. The 17th Company of Speer’s transport troops was responsible for moving supplies between the respective construction sectors. These were the personnel who were mobilized by the German forces and their allies.<sup>6</sup>

### **Recruited Laborers and Their Living Conditions**

Three groups of people—Soviet prisoners of war, local civilians, and Jews—carried out the actual road construction work as forced laborers controlled by the German authorities. The initial plans were for the POWs to construct and improve DG IV, but a supplemental order issued in late December 1941 stipulated that guard units would

bring the POWs from the respective “transit camps” (*Durchgangslager*) to the worksites each day or that the POWs would be stationed along the route in camps established for this purpose. The number of POWs working along DG IV and DG V, together with the number of POWs used as forced laborers elsewhere, were reported each month to the general commanding the engineers of Army Group South.

Although the authorities preferred to use Soviet POWs for these construction projects, they assumed that the prisoners’ work performance would not be particularly high compared to the output of German soldiers in construction units, since the latter were working on the basis of “soldierly orders and soldierly performance of duties.” They reasoned that prisoners would work only if they “knew there was a supervisor behind them and they were under pressure.” As noted in a construction battalion report to the commander of the troops on duty in the area of DG IV, the authorities also assumed that the Soviet POWs lacked intelligence and generally had a “bad attitude.” Threats of punishment or of return to a POW camp—here the reporting officer was apparently thinking of the high mortality rates due to disease and malnutrition in the camps—were used to pressure POWs into increased productivity. But even the author of this report, although obviously convinced that his activities were correct, admitted that there was a further reason for the limited usefulness of the captured Red Army soldiers. The physical condition of the POWs sent to work outside the camps was so bad as of March 1942 that of “1,052 POWs taken over so far,” 183 had already died, 174 had fallen ill, and there were no signs that the situation would improve.<sup>7</sup>

Such reports made it obvious that the deployment of POWs for road construction along DG IV was unlikely to fulfill the initially high expectations. The death rates for POWs in other camps, furthermore, were perhaps even higher than those in the camps run exclusively by the Wehrmacht. A former OT *Streckenbauleiter* provided an unvarnished description of the situation in his area of jurisdiction, first in Nemirov and later in Teplik.

During my stay there, there were about five or six POW camps in and around Nemirov with only Russian POWs. These camps and prisoners were under my command as far as work details and food supplies were concerned.... I did not hear that shootings of POWs took place in Nemirov while I was on duty there. I remember only that, in the months January to March 1942, rations for the POWs were reduced so far that they were plagued by epidemics such as typhus, etc. and that a large number died.<sup>8</sup>

As a result, the SS decided to force civilians, too, to work on the road construction project. Virtually all able-bodied inhabitants living within fifty kilometers of both sides of the road were forced to join the construction crews. Their situation was considerably better than that of the POWs, as the following account—given by former SS-Oberführer Jürgen Stroop to a fellow prisoner in the Warsaw Prison while awaiting his postwar trial—shows.

The workers were divided into groups made up of men and women from sovkhozy and kolkhozy near the surrounding villages. The crews were paid on a piece-work basis. When the order came to speed up construction, we paid the road construction workers more than the others and they also got more tobacco, sugar, textiles, and metal wares.<sup>9</sup>

Although an unknown number of these forced laborers also died from the poor conditions and strenuous work, they were better off than the other victims. In contrast to the POWs, once their workday was over, they were no longer under surveillance or subject to arbitrary treatment at the hands of the guards. Besides receiving better rations, they were permitted to stay in their villages and thus were not in danger of being deported by Reich Director of Labor Fritz Sauckel and his organization. In their familiar rural surroundings, civilian laborers were in a better position to grow their own crops and barter for food and other supplies.

The third group of forced laborers were civilians also, but these people had been completely stripped of their rights. Jewish inhabitants who had survived the large-scale massacres in the region were pressed into forced labor along DG IV. As in the case of the POWs, they were interned in camps. Due to the brutal thoroughness of the Nazi annihilation of Ukrainian Jews, however, hardly any Jews had survived in the vicinity of the road construction sites. In October 1941 the mayor of Kremenchug reported that 1,000 Jewish prisoners had been sent to do road construction work;<sup>10</sup> by May 1942 the Feldkommandatur 200 reported that twenty-four Jews had been “sent to forced labor.”<sup>11</sup>

A passage from the diary of Speer’s confidant Rudolf Wolters, written on May 31, 1942 during a trip to the Russian border, reveals that the Germans in charge had taken note of the work performance and “motivation” of the Jewish forced laborers toiling in the face of their impending death. “Everywhere along our street . . . work is going on at full speed. The crews of foreigners are working here under the command of the German OT men. In terms of quality, the Jews are in first place. We have been told

that some of them volunteer to work two shifts in a row. They know what’s at stake now.”<sup>12</sup>

Postwar investigations by the German judicial authorities have shown that, in 1942, Jewish inhabitants of Litin, Gnivan, Vinnitsa, Nemirov, and Teplik worked on crews constructing the Ukrainian part of DG IV. Many of these Jewish workers died from exhaustion or disease or were shot. Since the construction project required more laborers, where were the Nazis to find them? The Soviet POWs had died from malnutrition and disease, all potential groups of Ukrainian civilians had been exhausted, and the Jewish inhabitants of the regions along DG IV—with few exceptions—had been murdered.

### **The Recruitment of Jewish Forced Laborers from Transnistria**

DG IV had been planned in part as a Black Sea Road that was originally intended to cross Romanian occupation territory, in particular the northeastern corner of what was called Transnistria. In this region Romanian military and police administrations had established numerous camps where Jewish forced laborers were interned; despite an unprecedented wave of exterminations in the region, these camps still existed. Following the murder or death from disease and malnutrition of many of the first Jewish prisoners, Jews were deported from Bukovina and Bessarabia and brought to the camps. It was as if the Romanian government had begun implementing the program that Reinhard Heydrich called for at the Wannsee Conference. The August 1941 Tighina agreement served as the basis for establishing these forced labor camps, insofar as that document outlined the fate of the Romanian Jews. “Deportation of the Jews across the Bug River is not possible at the moment. Therefore, they will have to be drawn together in concentration camps and deployed as laborers, until deportation to the East is possible, after operations have been completed.”<sup>13</sup>

Thus the mass deportations from Bukovina, Bessarabia, and Dorohoi began, filling the forced labor camps on the border to Reichskommissariat Ukraine (Radu Ioanid has described this in detail).<sup>14</sup> The SS had designs on part of this group of Romanian Jews. By August 14, 1942, Bauabschnittleiter Franz Christoffel of Gaisin and his men had crossed the Bug River and appeared in the camps under Romanian administration in Ladezin, Cariera de Piatra, and Chetvertinovka. According to Matatias Carp, the SS resolved the question of recruitment with the Romanian prefect of the Tulcin district, Colonel Loghin. Christoffel and his unit led approximately 3,000

prisoners back across the river on August 19. Approximately 400–450 prisoners remained in the quarry in Cariera de Piatra, 1,000 remained in Chetvertinovka, and seventy-eight persons remained in Oleanita.<sup>15</sup> The Romanian Jews apparently went with the SS without coercion because working conditions in the Romanian camps were hard and cruel and the guards were despotic and corrupt.<sup>16</sup> Unlikely as it may seem, the Jewish prisoners expected that conditions would be better for them under the SS. “We were happy to be able finally [to] work under the Germans. We thought we’d have it better working for a civilized people rather than for the more or less filthy Romanians. We went on foot to Ladezin. Already on the way there, Ukrainian militiamen told us what awaited us with the Germans. We didn’t believe it.”<sup>17</sup>

In September, October, and November 1942 as well as in May 1943, more Jewish prisoners were sent to work on the DG IV project, particularly from the camp in Peciora.<sup>18</sup> The Romanians were accustomed to this kind of cooperation. Jews from the ghetto in Mogilev-Podolsk, for example, worked on a bridge-building project near Nicolaev under the command of the OT;<sup>19</sup> in the Romanian forced labor camp Kopaigorod, the German Landwirtschaftsführer Johann Maiterth supervised crews of Jewish laborers.<sup>20</sup> Newly arriving laborers in the DG IV camps must have soon realized that they would only be needed for a brief period of time. The rations that they received made this apparent, as Arnold Daghani’s diary reveals: the daily ration was one portion of unsalted pea soup. It was not until new arrivals had been in the camp for eight or nine days that they received three-quarters of a loaf of bread. Another report describes rations of 215 grams of bread, seventy grams of unshelled peas, 260 grams of potatoes, and twenty grams of meat—all of which was in a barely edible state—per person per day. Despite the explicit prohibition of such activities by the camp commanders, the prisoners had no choice but to barter for something edible from the local farmers, guards, or the Germans themselves. Rations were meager by any standard but were especially inhuman in view of the extremely arduous tasks that prisoners had to perform. These tasks involved producing and collecting the materials needed for road building from stone quarries and sand and gravel pits (e.g., manually breaking up large stones) and then transporting them to the road-building sites. Other prisoners worked on the actual road construction—i.e., building embankments, laying the roadbed with gravel and other materials, and the like. Prisoners were also charged with shoveling snow or hacking ice, building protective walls against snowdrifts, or securing the road against erosion by digging drainage ditches.<sup>21</sup>



**Conclusion:****The Number of Prisoners Sent to Work on the Ukrainian Section of DG IV**

According to investigations by the district attorney's office in Lübeck, approximately 50,000 POWs, 50,000 native civilian workers, and 10,000 Jewish civilians worked on DG IV in 1942. In 1943 70,000 people were still working on the road project; this amounts to a decrease of 40,000 workers from the previous year, but presumably also means that there was a much higher number of deaths since losses were replaced many times over.<sup>22</sup> This estimate based on postwar investigations, however, contrasts with a June 15, 1943 letter Prützmann wrote to the field headquarters of Reichsführer-SS Himmler in which he emphasizes that "besides a very small number of German workers" and about twelve thousand men from the Schutzmannschaften, more than 140,000 laborers were at work on DG IV.<sup>23</sup>

The figures in Prützmann's letter are more plausible even if we take into account that the author may have exaggerated the large number of people under his command. Ample evidence documents that a large majority of the Jewish prisoners were shot when they were unable to work and that entire camps were closed due to supposedly impending epidemics; other camps with Jewish prisoners were closed when the respective section of the road was completed. When the Germans began retreating from the area, they carried out selections among the prisoners: the strongest prisoners were sent westward to the Bershada ghetto<sup>24</sup> and elsewhere. Although these people escaped possible death in the DG IV camps, their suffering was not over. Fortunately a few former prisoners survived and, in documenting these events, they have prevented Transnistria from indeed becoming a "forgotten cemetery."



### Notes

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**Foreign Labor in Vichy, France:**  
***The Groupements de Travailleurs Etrangers***

**Sarah B. Farmer**

As part of the commemoration of the experience of the war and Occupation, the 1944 massacre of civilians at Oradour-sur-Glane emerged as a national symbol of French experience during the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> Following the initiative of survivors and local notables, in 1946 the national government expropriated the ruins of Oradour and preserved them as a national monument to French suffering under the Nazis.

In summer 1994 I learned that during the war a contingent of foreigners had worked in the area and assembled for periodic roll calls in the town square. Most of the workers left in 1942 when (or so my informant believed) they had been sent into the occupied zone to work for the Germans fortifying the Atlantic coast. Returning to the archives, I pieced together a story that lay outside the commemorative and historical narratives indicating an officially organized presence of foreigners in the civilian life of rural France during the war.<sup>2</sup> Locating more than fragmentary traces of the foreign workers proved to be difficult.

The existence of Vichy's foreign labor groups (Groupements de Travailleurs Etrangers [GTE]) remains little known even though the histories of the war years, the Resistance, and the collaboration of the Vichy regime with Nazi Germany have now been well delineated—to the point that some historians now speak of a French “obsession” with the “dark years.”<sup>3</sup> Only a few historians of labor and employment policy have studied the French use of conscripted foreign labor during this period,<sup>4</sup> a surprising omission considering that records recently acquired by the French National Archives reveal the existence of such labor battalions in almost every department in France.<sup>5</sup> For the most part, the GTE are mentioned only briefly in secondary works and memoirs treating French internment camps.<sup>6</sup>

**Internment and Labor Policy in Pre-War France**

The legal basis for the internment of foreigners and their use as laborers resulted from measures taken by the government of the Third Republic to respond to a variety of strains in the years just before the German invasion of France in May 1940. Denis Peschanski writes that concerns about the French labor market and economy (as well as national security) led to a new interest in the regulation of immigration<sup>7</sup> and the

increased surveillance of foreigners in 1938–39. “One cannot emphasize enough the significance of the decree of 12 November 1938 that provided for the internment of foreign ‘undesirables’ in special centers in the interest of public order and safety.”<sup>8</sup> This measure permitted the internment of Spanish refugees who had streamed across the Pyrenees in winter and spring 1939, when the forces of General Francisco Franco defeated the militias that had defended the Spanish Republic in the 1936–39 civil war.

Laws passed in spring 1939 to address the “organization of the nation in wartime” became the basis for requiring able-bodied foreigners and refugees to aid in the defense of France by supplying labor.<sup>9</sup> Although the newly founded Vichy regime’s Ministry of Labor took charge of these foreign laborers—who, for the most part, had first been interned in southern France and then organized into labor groups in 1940 after the economic disruptions of the defeat and Occupation—and although the legal basis for internment was established in the last years of the Third Republic, historians such as Peschanski and Julian Jackson warn against reading the history of pre-war France only in light of the Vichy regime that followed.<sup>10</sup>

During the years between the world wars, successive governments actually pursued conflicting objectives. On the one hand, a need for foreign labor since the end of the nineteenth century had spurred the recruitment of immigrant labor. Successive waves of immigration, the largest of which occurred following the First World War, made 1930 France second only to the United States in the number of foreigners among its population.<sup>11</sup> The French liberalized the laws governing naturalization in 1927, allowing 315,066 foreigners to acquire French citizenship between 1926 and 1930 as compared to 95,215 for the previous five years.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, the economic troubles of the 1930s and the arrival of refugees fleeing political turmoil in Italy and Central Europe fueled xenophobia and a desire to more strictly control and track immigrants.<sup>13</sup> As unemployment rose in 1932, the government introduced quotas for the number of foreign workers allowed to work in private enterprise. New laws restricted the practice of medicine to French citizens and prohibited naturalized citizens from taking the bar.<sup>14</sup> In 1935 the administration claimed the right to refuse renewal of the *carte d’identité* to foreigners who had resided in France for less than ten years if they worked in an economic sector troubled by unemployment.<sup>15</sup> The decree of November 12, 1938, provided for “stricter surveillance” and, in some cases, internment of “undesirable” foreigners in “specialized centers.” Nonetheless, the French government continued to respect the right to asylum

as a key principle of French republicanism. A May 1938 decree established particular protection for political refugees for the first time. Of course the actual experience of refugees depended on how this law was applied by members of the French administration.<sup>16</sup>

### **Internment and Labor Policy During War Mobilization**

The mobilization for war in 1939 brought new conditions for technocrats concerned about getting the labor market in order.<sup>17</sup> Legislation designed to facilitate preparations for war allowed the government to take control of the labor market and intervene in workers' affairs. After years of fighting unemployment, the government faced a severe shortage of manpower as draft-age men were called into the army and as increased arms production became necessary.<sup>18</sup> The Ministry of Labor documented all workers not subject to military service with the goal of distributing them among agriculture, war-related industry, and public works.<sup>19</sup> The ministry also had the power to recruit civilian as well as foreign and colonial labor.

The French already had a source of foreign labor on their own soil: 465,000 Spanish refugees, two-thirds of them Republican soldiers, who had poured over the southern border in February 1939 following the defeat of Loyalist (Republican) forces by Franco's insurgents.<sup>20</sup> Photographer Robert Capa memorably captured the scene of French gendarmes escorting ragged columns of exhausted and defeated antifascists as they crossed the border by walking north along the beaches of the Mediterranean.

In winter and early spring 1939, these refugees were packed into makeshift camps located on beaches and in coastal towns near the Franco-Spanish border. Within a few months, most were evacuated inland and dispersed among a variety of "receiving centers," "shelters," camps of "undesirables," and internment camps operated by the Ministry of Defense.<sup>21</sup> The number of refugees in the camps declined to approximately 160,000 in late spring 1939 as people returned to Spain, emigrated to a third country, or were hired out as inexpensive labor to local industry and farms. The French government remained wary of the leftist militants among the remaining refugees, but it also recognized the Spaniards as a pool of much-needed manpower.

The legal basis for conscripting the labor of these refugees lay in an April 12, 1939 decree that required all able-bodied foreigners benefiting from the right to asylum in France to perform work service equivalent to the military service demanded of French men. Some 25,000 Spanish civilians and former militia were used for

agricultural labor. By the end of 1939, 33,000 former Loyalist soldiers had been organized into the newly created *Compagnies de Travailleurs Etrangers*—companies of foreign workers who were hired out to private companies or sent as agricultural laborers to French farms.<sup>22</sup>

The formation of foreign labor companies served both as a way to acquire much-needed labor—while restricting foreigners’ access to the labor market, where they would compete with French workers—and as a means to police foreigners. In 1946 Jacques Desmarest, an expert on Vichy’s labor policies, attributed great importance to the government’s suspicion of people who (for the most part) were members of leftist parties and judged capable of carrying on revolutionary agitation. “Their incorporation [into labor groups],” he writes, “responded to preoccupations that were more political than economic.”<sup>23</sup> As war approached, legislation was also enacted to tighten control over Germans and Austrians in France and to provide a legal foundation for their internment.

### **Internment and Labor Policy During the War Years**

On September 1, 1939, the day that the German Army invaded Poland, the French government announced a decree permitting the rounding up of male foreign nationals of enemy countries between the ages of 17 and 50. Within two weeks, the age of those targeted had been extended to include men between the ages of 50 and 65. All of these “foreign nationals of enemy countries” were ordered to appear at designated assembly centers for internment. These measures produced the great irony of locking up refugees, Jews and non-Jews alike, the majority of whom had fled Nazi persecution in Germany and Central Europe.<sup>24</sup> On November 18 the French government extended the internment apparatus to give prefects the power to intern any individual—foreign or not—whom they suspected of threatening national defense or public safety. This measure was quickly used to arrest members of the French Communist party, which had been outlawed following the August 23, 1939, Non-Aggression Pact between Hitler and Stalin.

The German Army invasion of May 10, 1940, put an end to the eight-month “phony war” (*drôle de guerre*), during which the French and British were at war with Germany but not engaged in actual fighting. The French defeat (since referred to as “the debacle”) was notoriously swift. German troops entered Paris on June 14; two days later Prime Minister Paul Reynaud resigned after failing to convince his cabinet to

continue the war. Marshal Pétain replaced Reynaud and signed an armistice with Germany on June 22. On July 10 the French Parliament voted full powers to Pétain, who effectively ended the Third Republic and established the authoritarian French state with its capital in the southern spa town of Vichy.

The newly founded Vichy regime took control of the numerous internment camps that dotted the southern zone and their associated companies of foreign workers.<sup>25</sup> A September 27, 1940, law assigned to labor battalions all able-bodied male foreigners between the ages of 15 and 55 who were unable to return to their country of origin and were considered “superfluous in the national economy.” This meant that male refugees without means of supporting themselves—including Jewish male foreigners who had illegally crossed from occupied France to the southern zone—were obliged to serve in a labor battalion, the GTE.

Vichy’s newly created Commission for Unemployment Relief (Commissariat à la lutte contre le chômage [CLC]) assumed direction of the GTE at the end of 1940.<sup>26</sup> Although the CLC was created to deal with the sudden rise in unemployment after the defeat of May 1940, unemployment rapidly diminished and the CLC soon found its workers in high demand. In the southern zone, to which the majority of refugees had fled, the GTE were organized into six groups of approximately 41,000 workers.<sup>27</sup> The director of the CLC for the southern zone, Henri Maux, focused on supplying agricultural labor. As of March 1941, a little more than one-half of the GTE worked in agriculture and 22 percent worked on building hydroelectric dams, mining coal, or for the chemical and metallurgical industries. The remaining 25 percent labored on projects run by the Forestry Service, the Department of Mines and Bridges, or regional or local governments;<sup>28</sup> this included roadwork, electrification projects, constructing school playgrounds, swamp drainage, woodcutting, and peat cutting.<sup>29</sup> The ways in which workers were grouped and housed reflected the nature of their contracts: those hired out under a group contract tended to live together in makeshift barracks, whereas those under individual contracts most often lived with the person for whom they worked.<sup>30</sup> Foreigners incorporated into the GTE initially did not receive a salary but were granted a “bonus” depending on their productivity (*prime de rendement*) and an allocation for their families.<sup>31</sup> Those employed by private businesses later earned a salary determined by an agreement between the employer and the regional head of the GTE.<sup>32</sup>

In 1941 the government began to transfer men from the internment camps to labor groups. Many internees volunteered to join since entry into a GTE offered an

improved lifestyle and a chance to earn enough money to enable their relatives to leave the camps as well.<sup>33</sup> Reports on the internment camp at Rivesaltes indicate that Jewish leaders had to struggle to enable Jews to have access to employment in a GTE equal to that of Spaniards and other foreigners.<sup>34</sup>

The CLC (South) created a number of departmental groups early in 1942, the members of which were spread out as much as possible in the countryside and were accorded the status of “supervised foreigners.”<sup>35</sup> Workers placed in this way—lodged and fed by the people for whom they worked—were less conspicuous and less subject to surveillance by the administration of the GTE, and had better access to food.<sup>36</sup>

This opportunity for improved safety and well being came at a time when the German conversion to a full-scale war economy led the occupying authorities to increase their demands for manpower to work in France as well as in factories within the German Reich. In May 1942 Gauleiter Fritz Sauckel and Prime Minister Pierre Laval agreed that France would provide the Germans with 250,000 workers, 150,000 of whom were to be skilled.<sup>37</sup> The following month the French set up the “*relève*” program in which three French prisoners of war were to be released for every French man who volunteered to work in Germany. When the *relève* program produced meager results, the Germans began requisitioning labor, much to the dismay of the Vichy authorities, who insisted that the departure of French workers from the unoccupied zone should remain voluntary.<sup>38</sup>

Simultaneously the Germans sought to press French men into service closer to home. After giving up plans to invade Great Britain, the Germans set about building the Atlantic Wall, a chain of U-boat bomb shelters and other fortifications along the French Atlantic coast. This huge construction program run by the Organisation Todt (OT)<sup>39</sup> lay within the German zone of occupation, and the German authorities ordered the prefects in the coastal departments to provide workers. (For example, the prefect of the Department of Finistère was to provide 1,000 workers on September 30 and a comparable number two weeks later.) French civil servants were concerned about the effect of these demands on the local economy, as well as the social and political repercussions if the German authorities followed through on threats to requisition agricultural workers during the winter if these demands were not met.<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps not surprisingly, the CLC in the northern zone quickly decided to draw on the reserves of foreign labor in France. In order to avoid adding to the sixteen thousand French men whom the Germans had already pressed into service, the CLC



(North) reached an agreement with the Germans at the end of May 1941 to supply them instead with Spanish workers drawn from the internment camps and GTE in the unoccupied zone.<sup>41</sup> Starting in the late spring, OT representatives accompanied by CLC (North) members set off on a series of recruitment trips into the unoccupied zone.

At first these trips proved quite successful since foreign workers were attracted by the chance to earn higher wages. For example, CLC (North) and OT representatives embarked on a recruitment mission into the unoccupied zone in July 1941 with the goal of procuring just 3,000 foreign workers.<sup>42</sup> By the end of 1941, however, Todt had enlisted 11,000 workers from the ranks of the GTE, 4,419 of whom were skilled laborers.<sup>43</sup>

The success of this program, however, caused some consternation within the Spanish Republican refugee community. A refugee publication lamented the shortsightedness and lack of principle of the decision to work for the Germans.

This decision brings little honor to the men who have made it. It is a qualitative lessening and we are pained that it [such a decision] was taken.... Propaganda about the comfort that is said to exist in the other zone got through to them, but they don't know that foreigners in that zone are "at the disposition of the occupying authorities" and that this is decisive for a man who has a little dignity and some ideals. No one can claim that he is assured food and even imaginary liberty in the other zone. What is happening is that the authorities need workers and they are making use of them.... For the time being, the unoccupied zone is the most appropriate place for us.<sup>44</sup>

The CLC leadership in the southern zone viewed OT's recruitment efforts as an intrusion into its labor market and the program that it had so carefully developed. In order to counter the appeal of joining the OT, Maux issued instructions in June 1941, February 1942, and November 1942 aimed at bringing GTE members' pay and working conditions into line with that of French workers. He reported in March 1942, not without pride, that these changes garnered immediate results.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, in June of the following year, a member of his staff reported an "inefficaciousness of recruitment by Todt"<sup>46</sup> and noted that workers spread out in the countryside as agricultural laborers "seem to prefer their current existence over returning to group labor, especially in the occupied zone. The appeal of higher salaries is insufficient to make them decide to leave their current situation. Likewise with the promise of plenty of food, since living on farms they are well fed most of the time." He went on to note "it would have seemed likely that foreign workers contracted out to [the Ministry of] Water and Forests would

have let themselves be easily convinced. The woodcutting projects undertaken are difficult. Salaries have been insufficient and irregularly paid. Still recruitment was almost zero.”<sup>47</sup>

In fact, fear of being forcibly sent to the occupied zone had caused the number of escaping foreign workers to quadruple from 153 in January 1942 to 645 in September 1942.<sup>48</sup> Maux calculated in October 1942 that only 1,700 Spanish workers had volunteered during the entire year, compared 11,000 in 1941.<sup>49</sup>

### **Jewish Internment and Labor**

Jews, for the most part, were spared the threat of being drafted into the OT. Although some Jews volunteered during the initial recruitment drives, the Germans soon refused to take Jewish workers on their construction sites and sent the small number who volunteered back to the unoccupied zone. Jews were also being progressively separated within the GTE population. For reasons that remain murky, the GTE were organized into groups by nationality during the course of 1941. Jacques Desmarest points out that the terms of the Armistice required that demobilized soldiers of Allied armies not be permitted to leave French territory and that this led to the creation of special groups for Belgians, Poles, and Czechs.<sup>50</sup> Christian Eggers observes that there was also an effort in late summer 1941 to group together German and German-speaking foreign workers.

Jews in the GTE were separated out in late summer 1941, however, and placed into all-Jewish groups referred to as “Palestinian groups.”<sup>51</sup> Eggers notes that the creation of the “Palestinian groups” took place at the same time as a series of Todt recruitment drives, and therefore that the creation of the all-Jewish groups may have been a consequence of the OT’s decision to not accept Jews on its worksites.<sup>52</sup>

The logic behind the exclusion of Jews became even more ominous on December 10, when the Vichy government announced that “all Jews resident in France who had entered the country after 1 January 1936 will be . . . grouped in a Groupement de Travailleurs Etrangers [for those without financial means] or in special centers [for those with means]” regardless of whether they had acquired French citizenship.<sup>53</sup> The following day the minister of the interior specified that Jews joining the labor battalions should not be dispersed but rather grouped in “homogeneous” units. The operations were to be completed for the southern zone within two months, by the end of March 1942.<sup>54</sup>

The lethal consequences of creating all-Jewish groups became obvious when the Vichy government moved from a policy of isolating Jews to one of arresting and deporting them. Departmental archives in southern France reveal that prefect offices used GTE lists when compiling names of people targeted for the mass arrests that began in mid-August 1942 and continued into the fall, as the Vichy police pursued those who had managed to evade the first wave of arrests. In many areas the police found that the Jewish foreign workers had fled prior to arrest. Warnings of the roundup had been passed along by administrators within the CLC (South) to the Jews and resisters employed in the branch of the Service Social des Etrangers, headed by Gilbert Lesage. A man of remarkable courage, Lesage was later recognized by Yad Vashem as one of the “Righteous Among the Nations” for his efforts to prevent the deportation of Jewish children. Nonetheless, 763 foreign workers were sent from the southern zone to Drancy on August 24 and 1,366 more were sent on August 26.<sup>55</sup>

Although the CLC and most labor battalions were disbanded in 1943, foreign workers of all nationalities (including Jews) remained dispersed in the countryside until the Liberation.

### **Conclusions**

The culture of the French civil service and the rise of technocratic expertise in the 1930s led certain Vichy administrators to try to regulate the economy and social order in ways that they had not envisaged. Maux believed that he was contributing to French welfare by solving employment problems. He was not an admirer of Pétain and disliked the aims of the National Revolution and its proponents, yet the labor battalions that he administered became woven into networks of detention and repression.

The GTE fit into the larger system of forced labor in Nazi-dominated Europe in that they were shaped by the German need for labor. As the Germans demanded manpower, the French first created the *relève* and later, in 1943, the Obligatory Labor Service (Service du Travail Obligatoire), which put new pressures on the foreign laborers in the GTE. Knowing the extent of the existence of the GTE gives a richer, more accurate picture of who was present in the French countryside during the war years and why, as well as of the dense network of internment in both zones.

**Epilogue**

Where and in what form did a GTE exist at Oradour? My interviewees did not have any detailed information, but archival research indicated that a GTE formation had been established in Oradour in the first half of 1941 and then transferred to the environs of Limoges in October 1942. A police report in the archives of the Gendarmerie nationale from July 7, 1942, gave a detailed description of the GTE at Oradour.<sup>56</sup> This labor group enrolled 385 men, the great majority of whom (267) were Spaniards; the other 118 included men of thirteen nationalities as well as some who were stateless. The GTE administrative personnel were housed in Oradour proper as well as at a site 1.5 kilometers from town.<sup>57</sup> Workers were incorporated into the GTE at Oradour and then directed to enterprises that requested laborers. A registry of workers' names in the departmental archives indicates that while some individuals were hired out in and around Oradour, sizable contingents of workers and individuals were sent into the wider region.<sup>58</sup> The gendarmes reported that the workers (presumably those in the close vicinity) answered roll call four times a day in the town square and otherwise moved about freely.

These fragments of documentation indicate that foreign workers were present among the French during the war. As historians continue to draw a more nuanced picture of this time and place, the GTE deserve a place in the story.

### Notes

1. Sarah Farmer, *Martyred Village: Commemorating the 1944 Massacre at Oradour-sur-Glane* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
2. I have already discussed some of the material presented here in “Out of the Picture: Foreign Labor in Wartime France,” in *France at War: Vichy and the Historians*, ed. Sarah Fishman (New York: Berg, 2000), pp. 249–60.
3. Eric Conan and Henry Rousso, *Une passé qui ne passe pas* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).
4. Jacques Desmarest, *La politique de la main-d’oeuvre en France* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1946); Bernd Zielinski, “Le chômage et la politique de la main-d’oeuvre de Vichy (1940–1942),” in *Les ouvriers en France pendant la seconde guerre mondiale: actes du colloque, Paris, CNRS, 22–24 octobre 1992*, ed. Denis Peschanski and Jean-Louis Robert (Paris: Institut d’Histoire du Temps Présent, 1992), pp. 295–304; Patrick Weil, *La France et ses étrangers* (Paris: Editions Calmann-Lévy, 1991), pp. 48–74.
5. AN 72 AJ (Fonds Dorledot, non classé). Study of the GTE is hampered by a patchiness of archives at the ministerial level, although historian Bernd Zielinski has fruitfully mined the archives of German authorities and postwar trials of certain Vichy officials. Preliminary work reveals the likelihood of significant material spread out at the local level in departmental archives and in the newly accessible archives of the Gendarmerie nationale.
6. Important exceptions are Denis Peschanski’s long-awaited *La France des camps: l’internement 1938–1946* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002); Antoinette Maux-Robert, *La lutte contre le chômage à Vichy: Henri Maux, le Juste oublié, 1939–1944* (Limoges: Charles Lavauzelle, 2002); and Christian Eggers, “L’internement sous toutes ses formes: approche d’une vue d’ensemble du système d’internement dans la zone de Vichy,” *Le Monde Juif* 153 (1995), pp. 7–75.
7. In *La France et ses étrangers*, p. 26, Weil has established the year 1938 as a key moment in this development.
8. Peschanski, *France des camps*, p. 31.
9. Décret-loi, March 20, 1939, and April 12, 1939.
10. Peschanski, *France des camps*, p. 94. Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 112.
11. Weil, *La France et ses étrangers*, p. 28.

12. Ibid., p. 36.

13. For a detailed account of the twists and turns of French policy toward foreigners and refugees in the 1930s, see Vicki Caron, *Uneasy Asylum: France and the Jewish Refugee Crisis, 1933–1942* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

14. Weil, *La France et ses étrangers*, p. 33

15. Ibid., p. 35.

16. Ibid., p. 48. After Edouard Daladier became prime minister in April 1938, the government increasingly bypassed Parliament and governed by decree (Jackson, *Dark Years*, p. 102). Enacting decree laws became a way for the government to pass legislation deemed necessary but for which it would be too difficult to obtain a parliamentary mandate (Caron, *Uneasy Asylum*, p. 3, fn.).

17. See Limore Yagil, “*L’homme nouveau*” et la révolution nationale de Vichy, 1940–1944 (Villeneuve d’Ascq: Presses du Septentrion, 1997).

18. Desmarest, *La Politique*, p. 109.

19. Ibid., p. 110.

20. Civilian refugees had been coming from Spain since the beginning of the civil war in 1936, but not in great numbers. By 1938 there were approximately 40,000–45,000 Spanish refugees in France.

21. Peschanski, *France des camps*, p. 41. The camps’ “undesirables” were treated as a case apart and were under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior.

22. René Grando, Jacques Queralt, and Xavier Febrés, *Camps du mépris, des chemins de l’exil à ceux de la Résistance, 1939–1945* (Perpinja Catalunya: Editorial Trabucaire, 1991), p. 142.

23. Desmarest, *La Politique*, p. 132.

24. Peschanski, p. 72. Arthur Koestler describes his internment at the camp of Le Vernet in *Scum of the Earth* (London: Eland, 1991), pp. 91–140.

25. According to Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton (*Vichy France and the Jews* [New York: Basic Books, 1981], p. 165), in September 1940 there were thirty-one internment camps in southern France; major camps were Rivesaltes (Pyrénées Orientales), Le Vernet (Ariège), Rieucros (Lozère), Argèles (Pyrénées Orientales), Les Milles (outside Aix-en-Provence), Gurs (Basses-Pyrénées), Noé (Haute-Garonne), and

Récébédou (just south of Toulouse). Foreign workers under the authority of the CLC also included 15,000 “indigenous” Indochinese (referred to as “Annamites”) organized into the *Service de la Main d’Oeuvre indigène*. Maux, Notes du commissaire à la lutte contre le chômage 20/12/42, AN Fonds Henri Maux.

26. Desmarest, *La Politique*, p. 145. The case of Henri Maux (the commissaire-adjoint of the southern zone) and his conflicts with François Lehideux (the leader of the northern zone) provides an illuminating example of the tensions and disagreements within the Vichy civil service. Lehideux and Maux operated quite independently. In the North the CLC focused on providing work on public worksites for the seasonally unemployed. In the South Maux pursued the goals of retraining and redirecting the available workforce. An anti-Pétainist, Maux’s objectives and management of the CLC led him into direct conflict with Lehideux (see Maux-Robert, *La Lutte*, pp. 103–7).

27. Henri Maux, “Chômage et reclassement,” *La Revue des hautes Etudes politiques, sociales, économiques et financières* (June 1942), p. 19. Marrus and Paxton (*Vichy*, p. 171) and Eggers (“L’internement,” p. 22) speak of approximately 60,000 men in the GTE of the southern zone in July 1941. Statistics in Maux’s papers give the figure of 43,918. “Etat du total des Réfugiés à la date du Juillet 1941,” AN Fonds Henri Maux (non classé) CLC (Sud).

28. Maux, “Chômage,” p. 20. In February 1941 Maux created the Service Social des Etrangers, run by Gilbert Lesage, to serve as a social services agency for the foreign workers’ families.

29. AN Fonds Henri Maux (non classé). Carton 1, 1941, folder 3.

30. This assumption is based on my examination of registers of foreign workers as well as reports of the Gendarmerie nationale for the department of the Haute-Vienne.

31. Desmarest, *La Politique*, p. 132. The local body to whom they provided labor was responsible for lodging, food, and any equipment or supplies. Centre de Documentation Juive (CDJC), Fonds Lesage. Le Ministre, Secrétaire d’Etat à la Production Industrielle et au Travail à Monsieur le Préfet de . . . , Vichy, October 12, 1940.

32. AN Fonds Henri Maux, CLC (Sud). Carton 3, folder “Travailleurs Etrangers.” Commissariat à la lutte contre le Chômage, Instruction sur l’Organisation et l’Utilisation des Travailleurs Etrangers, February 15, 1941. In June 1941, February 1942, and November 1942, the CLC (South) issued instructions aimed at bringing pay and working conditions of GTE members in line with that of French workers. J. de Grandsaigne, “Histoire des Formations des Travailleurs Etrangers, Novembre 1940–Mars 1943,” AN Fonds Henri Maux (non classé), CLC (Sud), carton 3, Travailleurs Etrangers.

33. Eggers, "L'internement," p. 23.

34. USHMM Archives, Union Générale des Israélites de France, Record Group from the CDJC Paris: 1942–1944. RG–43.025, Reel 30, Commission des camps: Rivesaltes. "Note sur les possibilités d'emploi des israélites hébergés au camp de Rivesaltes."

35. Maux, "Chomage," p. 20.

36. According to Gilbert Lesage, this was Maux's express purpose in spreading out foreigners in rural areas (Maux-Robert, *La Lutte*, p. 63.) Although it was easy to escape from a GTE or just leave the residence to which one was assigned, the foreign workers had handed over their papers to the administration of the GTE and had no ration tickets and more often than not practically no money (Eggers, "L'internement," p. 39).

37. Jackson, *Dark Years*, p. 219.

38. AN Fonds Henri Maux (fonds non-classé). Commission Franco-Allemande à l'Information. Réunion du 12 novembre 1942. Les réquisitions de main d'oeuvre.

39. Named after SS engineer Fritz Todt, the OT carried out vast construction projects throughout the German Reich. For a discussion of SS engineers and building projects, see Michael Thad Allen, *The Business of Genocide: The SS, Slave Labor, and the Concentration Camps* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

40. AN Fonds Henri Maux (fonds non-classé). Le CHEF DU GOUVERNEMENT (Direction des Services de l'Armistice) à MONSIEUR LE SECRETAIRE D'ETAT AU TRAVAIL (à l'attention de M. Maux. Sujet: Réquisition de main-d'oeuvre pour les organisations TODT.

41. AN Fonds Henri Maux (non-classé), CLC (Sud), carton 3, discussions avec les Allemands. Commissariat de la lutte contre le chômage (Paris), "Abus commis par les Autorités allemandes," July 31, 1941.

42. AN Fonds Henri Maux (fonds non classé), CLC (Sud), carton 3, dossier Discussions avec les Allemands. "Notes: main-d'oeuvre pour l'Organisation Todt."

43. AN Fonds Henri Maux (fonds non classé), CLC (Sud), carton 3, dossier Discussions avec les Allemands.

44. AN Fonds Henri Maux, CLC (Sud), carton 3, dossier Discussions avec les Allemands. "De l'exile," May 31, 1941.

45. AN Fonds Henri Maux (fond non-classé), CLC (Sud), carton 3, liasse travailleurs étrangers. Le Commissariat à la lutte contre le chômage à Monsieur l'Amiral de la



Flotte, Vice-président du Conseil, Ministre Secrétaire d'Etat à la Guerre, Objet: Prime des T. E. Incidence sur le recrutement par les autorités de l'occupation, March 9, 1942.

46. AN Fonds Henri Maux (fonds non classé), CLC (Sud), carton 3, dossier Todt 1942, 7e Mission. Peyroles, A. à Monsieur le Commissaire-adjoint à la Lutte contre le Chômage, Compte-rendu des opérations de la Commission, Montpellier, June 3, 1942.

47. Peyroles, A. à Monsieur le Commissaire-Adjoint à la Lutte contre le Chômage. Compte-rendu au sujet des opérations de la Commission de Recrutement de Main-d'Oeuvre pour la zone occupée, June 19, 1942.

48. AN Fonds Henri Maux (Fonds non classé), CLC (Sud), carton 3, dossier Discussions avec les Allemands. Le Commissaire-adjoint à la Lutte contre le Chômage à Monsieur le Ministre, Secrétaire d'Etat au Travail. Compte rendu des opérations de recrutement de Travailleurs Espagnols pour la zone occupée par l'Organisation Allemand TODT, September 12, 1942.

49. AN Fonds Henri Maux (Fonds non classé), CLC (Sud), carton 3, dossier Discussions avec les Allemands. Le Commissaire-adjoint à la Lutte contre le Chômage. Prélèvement de Main d'Oeuvre par la Commission Allemande, October 24, 1942.

50. Desmarest, *La Politique*, p. 152.

51. Eggers, "L'Internement," p. 33.

52. Ibid.

53. CDJC, Fonds Lesage, Le Ministre, Secrétaire d'Etat à l'Intérieur à Messieurs les Préfets Régionaux de la zone libre, Vichy, January 2, 1942. The special centers (*Centres de résidence assignée*) had been formally created on November 3, 1941 (Eggers, "L'internment," p. 50).

54. AD Haute-Vienne 185W 1/149, Ministère de l'Intérieur, circular no. 76, January 2, 1942.

55. I have yet to research the full number of GTE members caught in the roundups of August 26, 1942. These figures come from Maux-Robert, *La Lutte*, pp. 170, 172.

56. SHGN, Gendarmerie nationale, 12e Légion, Compagnie de la Hte. Vienne, Section de Rochechouart, Brigade de St. Junien, l'adjudant Vaillant Commandant la brigade sur les évasions, July 7, 1942, no. 67/4.

57. Jean-Jacques Fouché, *Oradour* (Paris: Editions Liana Levi, 2001), p. 110. Fouché's research has uncovered a report from May 1941 that describes a smaller enrollment and fewer workers housed in Oradour.

58. AD Haute-Vienne, 1081 W 238.

## **Racism versus Pragmatism: Forced Labor of Soviet Prisoners of War in Germany (1941–1942)**

**Rolf Keller**

“Use of the Russians for labor has been a complete disaster.” This short notice from the files of the Bremen city administration in February 1942 summarizes the results of the German policy toward Soviet prisoners of war in 1941. Nearly 500,000 soldiers of the Red Army were transported to Germany as labor, but they were fed and treated so badly that most died (mainly of starvation) within a few months—a result of the influence of various interest groups. Although intended to be used as part of the German war economy, these men became victims of the war of destruction no less than their comrades in the East—particularly during the first ten months of the war against the USSR, from summer 1941 until spring 1942, a dramatic period during which German military success came to a halt and German policy toward Soviet POWs changed radically.

Scholarly publications have devoted little attention to the use of Soviet POWs for labor inside Germany during 1941–42. Even the well-known studies by Mark Spoerer and Ulrich Herbert on forced labor in Germany, or by Christian Streit on Wehrmacht treatment of Soviet POWs, touch on this subject only in passing and not always accurately.<sup>1</sup>

### **The “War of Annihilation” and Labor Shortage**

The attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 marked a shift in the war policies of the Third Reich from merely defeating to completely annihilating an enemy, conquering its territory, and exploiting it economically. The aim of this ultimate battle of ideologies was completely to destroy communism or “Jewish bolshevism,” a goal that meant destroying not only the bearer of this idea, turning Soviet nationals into racially inferior slave labor destined to serve the German settlers in the East.

This attitude of racial discrimination also determined the treatment of POWs from the Red Army. The Germans deliberately ignored international law, especially the Geneva Convention on the treatment of POWs, although the Soviet government—which had not signed the convention—had offered to respect its principles if the Germans did as well. The German government did not even respond to this proposal.

Thus Soviet soldiers were not treated like regular POWs. In March 1941 Hitler declared, “We have to abandon the view that all soldiers are comrades. A Communist is never a comrade and never will be one. We are engaged in a fight to complete annihilation [*Vernichtungskampf*].”<sup>2</sup> The survival of the Soviet POWs, therefore, was not seen as a desirable goal; even most German military commanders had no compassion for them. “The more of them [who] die, the better for us” was an often-heard slogan.<sup>3</sup>

Initially German political and military leaders did not anticipate that Soviet POWs might be needed as workers and regarded them only as “useless eaters” destined for starvation. They assumed that the Blitzkrieg strategy would allow Germany to bring most German soldiers back to factories and farms after only a few months, following victory on the Eastern Front. Hitler and the ideological leaders in his government and the Nazi Party were afraid to have those dangerous Red Army “bolshevist agitators” and “murderers” living inside Germany.

In contrast, the civilian labor administration, industrialists, and others (for example, economic managers and employers) thought more pragmatically and pointed to the close connections among consumption, demand, production rates, and employment figures. In spring 1941 the German economy urgently needed workers. Experts from the Ministry of Labor projected that a minimum of 800,000 positions for workers would open at the end of the year, even after the USSR had been defeated and German soldiers had returned to their homes.

When the campaign against the Soviet Union began, representatives of industry, agriculture, and the administration called for using Soviet POWs as workers. Except to fill the needs of the German Army, however, Hitler in 1941 had forbidden their employment inside Germany. To circumvent this order, the Reich Ministry of Labor requested that Hermann Göring—as plenipotentiary for the Four-Year Plan—promote the use of Soviet POWs in the German economy. At that time (the beginning of July 1941) tens of thousands of Soviet prisoners were already on their way to Germany.

### **POWs and Forced Labor**

POWs are subjects of international law, and under certain circumstances their use as labor by the enemy is permitted. Since the 1907 Hague Convention on the rules of war, the specific treatment of POWs has been obligatory. The 1929 Geneva Convention, which was signed by the Germans and more than fifty other nations, further laid down

concrete regulations on the use of their labor (Articles 27–34).<sup>4</sup> The convention permitted work assignments for all prisoners who were sufficiently fit, taking into account their physical and intellectual capacities. Officers were exempt from working but could do so if they agreed. Labor in dangerous environments, the production of weapons or ammunition, or services performed directly for fighting units were strictly forbidden. Hours of work were not to exceed those of civilians. POWs were to be paid for their work and given adequate food and accommodations. Delegations from the International Committee of the Red Cross were authorized to visit camps and labor detachments to ensure that POW living and working conditions conformed to basic standards.

To some extent the Germans complied with the articles of the Hague and Geneva conventions for American, British, and French POWs in World War II. Therefore the employment of these groups of prisoners cannot be characterized as “forced labor,” except for the comparatively few cases where the terms of the conventions were violated. When we look at labor performed by Soviet POWs in the German war economy, however, we find considerable evidence of forced labor—even as early as in the first orders of the POW section of the German Army High Command (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht) in summer 1941. The Germans failed to comply with the Hague and Geneva conventions with regard to the following: international delegations were not allowed to visit the Russian camps and work detachments; Soviet prisoners received only insufficient food rations and were treated very brutally; they were assigned work that was directly connected to support of German fighting units at the front or under exhausting conditions at places such as coal mines, road and railway construction yards, large building sites, fortifications, or cultivation projects; and they were not paid for their work.

### **Special Camps for Soviet POWs in Germany (*Russenlager*)**

The only reason to transport Soviet POWs into the German Reich was to address labor shortages. Months before the attack on the USSR, the Wehrmacht took steps to provide the German economy with Soviet prisoners. In spring 1941 plans were laid to use more than one million men to satisfy the need for workers. Had these plans been realized, the total number of POWs in Germany would have increased by more than 50 percent. As of July 1, 1941, 1.65 million POWs—mainly French—were held in the main camps (Stalags) and work detachments (*Arbeitskommandos*) in Germany.

Soviet POWs were completely segregated from those of other nationalities and German civilians. Beginning in April 1941, the Wehrmacht established camps for Soviet POWs in Germany (*Russenlager*) that would hold up to 50,000 men each. At least twelve camps were created; the largest and most important were located in Neuhammer, Senne, Wietzendorf, and Zeithain. Another of these camps, later used by the SS, was Bergen-Belsen.<sup>5</sup>

The *Russenlager* were erected in army training areas and were badly equipped. When the first transports arrived, these camps consisted of nothing more than a fenced-off space in the open air. Since there were no barracks, the prisoners had to live and sleep on the ground. They dug holes for themselves or used branches to build huts in an attempt to obtain shelter from the elements. There was no running water with which to wash, and open ditches were used as latrines.

Food rations were wholly inadequate. A German civilian who lived in the vicinity of the Belsen camp noted in his diary in August 1941, “The Russians here on the heath receive just one loaf of bread and a little jam between ten of them.” The mid-day meal was a soup consisting mainly of water with small portions of vegetable matter, such as rape plants or potatoes. The starving men ate whatever they could find, including grass, leaves, bark, and twigs. The trees in the camps were stripped bare after a short time. Dysentery raged.

The consequences of this treatment soon became apparent. The undernourished prisoners died from hunger, cold, and disease. Given the conditions prevailing in the *Russenlager*, from which the prisoners were sent to work in the German war machine, we can imagine how extraordinarily taxing these jobs must have been.

### **The Use of Soviet POW Labor (*Russeneinsatz*) in Summer 1941**

As of August 15, 1941, approximately 200,000 Soviet prisoners had been deported to the camps inside Germany. At that point Hitler stopped the transports and ordered Soviet prisoners put to work exclusively in the East. Thus in 1941 only 120,000 men were allowed to work inside the Reich. The labor performed by Soviet prisoners was characterized as a “necessary inconvenience [*notwendiges Übel*]”<sup>6</sup> and reduced to a minimum. At first the men were put to work in the army sector as replacements for French and other prisoners, who in turn were sent to the agricultural or industrial sectors. The use of Soviet POWs in the civil sector was supposed to be an exception,

but only a few weeks later—at the end of August and with the harvest approaching—Göring ordered that Soviet prisoners also be used as labor in agriculture and forestry.

The Germans, however, did not develop a careful, long-term economic plan for deploying Soviet POW labor. The conditions under which these POWs were used changed depending on varying needs and policies, and ideologically motivated policy always took precedence over economic considerations. In August rations for the prisoners were again set at new levels. Soviet prisoners who worked were supposed to receive more meat, fats, and sugar than their nonworking counterparts in the camps, but their rations remained far below the needs of persons engaged in heavy labor.

The creation of work detachments began at the end of July 1941, immediately after the arrival of the first transports of prisoners, and had been prepared well in advance by labor offices, employers, and the Wehrmacht administration. By the end of August 1941, for example, Stalag Wietzendorf—which at the time held 28,000 prisoners—had established more than seventy work detachments throughout northwestern Germany. By October, 65 percent of the Wietzendorf prisoners were already in work detachments, mostly in satellite camps with an average of one hundred men or more. The largest work details, such as the construction site of a huge factory for manufacturing gunpowder and explosives at Liebenau, consisted of more than 1,000 prisoners. Wietzendorf had the highest level of prisoner labor of the Russenlager.

On October 1 a total of 112,400 Soviet POWs were working in Germany. What were the working conditions for these men? The following account by the district leader (Landrat) of Diepholz, an area where more than 3,000 prisoners from Wietzendorf were used for reclaiming marshlands, is typical.

The Russian prisoners arrived in a very starved state. Their physical condition was so bad that I doubted they could carry even a shovel, not to mention do hard work in the marshes for ten hours a day. . . . Already on the second day of work a Russian died at work from exhaustion. Attached are two photographs showing how the Russians eat grass like cows. . . . To raise the miserable productivity levels, the civil foremen and the military guards often have beaten the men.<sup>7</sup>

Such brutal treatment, however, showed no results. The productivity levels of Soviet prisoners were only 10–20 percent of those of French prisoners who had worked there before, and the district leader urgently recommended increasing their rations.

According to the assessment of employers and the Labor Administration after just two months, the successful use of Soviet labor depended on feeding the prisoners at

a reasonable level. The main problem was painfully obvious, but very little was ultimately done to improve the situation.

### **Hitler's October 1941 Decision: Extensive Use (*Grosseinsatz*) of Soviet POW Labor**

At the end of September 1941, the army arranged to transport one-half million more Soviet prisoners into the Reich, and in October 1941 a second wave of Soviet prisoners was sent into Germany.<sup>8</sup> The Blitzkrieg strategy had failed, the need for weapons and soldiers rapidly increased, and the number of workers in the war industry was shrinking because German workers were leaving for military service. The government faced a dilemma: should economic needs supersede ideologically motivated aims? On October 31 Hitler altered his policy. Wilhelm Keitel, head of the High Command of the Wehrmacht, announced “the lack of workers is becoming a dangerous obstacle for the war industry” and ordered “extensive use” of Soviet prisoners and improvement of their living conditions. “The Führer has now decreed that extensive use of Soviet POW labor will be made for the needs of the war economy. A precondition for efficient work is adequate nourishment.”<sup>9</sup> A small payment to Soviet POWs, intended to cover the cost of providing for their basic needs, was also implemented. Thus the worth of the Soviet slave workers had increased, and the German government began to show interest in their survival and fitness for work.

In the meantime, however, rations for the prisoners had already been raised. Working Soviet POWs were supposed to receive the same rations as the other POW groups in Germany, except for meat and fats, for which the rate was only 50 percent. At the same time, the rations for Soviet prisoners unable to work were reduced: these men received no meat or fats. This sort of distribution—more for working and less for nonworking prisoners—was essentially a death sentence for the sick and weaker men who were confined to the Stalags. To secure the effective distribution of Soviet labor, Göring ordered that Ministerial Director Werner Mansfeld of the Reich Ministry of Labor and his employment section (*Geschäftsgruppe Arbeitseinsatz*) decide exclusively where to deploy the men. At a November 1941 meeting of the government and army institutions involved, Göring announced his principles for the use of Soviet prisoner labor. These principles, which revealed only a slight departure from the previous policy, included collective employment in special Russian enterprises (*Russenbetriebe*)—segregated from other German or foreign workers—in six sectors:



armaments production, construction work, railway transport, agriculture, forestry, and mining. Göring stipulated that working prisoners would be closely guarded and supervised. The prisoners were to wear wooden clogs and be fed cat and horse meat. Commenting on their ration levels, Göring declared, “The Russian is easily satisfied . . . and should not be spoiled.”<sup>10</sup>

The prisoners who arrived in Germany in October and November had been in POW camps for months, or under siege for weeks before their capture in the battles of Minsk and Wjasma, and were weak and undernourished. Although almost all were unfit for work, many were put to work. The absolute number of Soviet prisoners at work doubled from 112,400 on October 1<sup>11</sup> to 225,000 in mid-November,<sup>12</sup> and the employment rate in relation to the total number of Soviet prisoners increased from 40 to 57 percent. But 165,000 prisoners still lay in camps unfit for work. At the same time, the urgent need for manpower in the German economy was approaching a deficit of 1.4 million workers.

On November 14 transports from the East were halted again.<sup>13</sup> Because of an outbreak of spotted fever (*Flecktyphus*), the camps were closed. No more such prisoners were sent to Germany, and none of those already in the Stalags in Germany were sent out in work detachments. As of this point approximately one-half million Soviet prisoners had been sent to Germany since the beginning of the war, less than the number announced and far less than the number actually required for meeting labor needs.

### **The Breakdown of Soviet Employment in Winter 1941–1942**

The conditions for the prisoners who had been sent out to work were chronically inadequate. Six hundred prisoners, men who had been transported from the East to Wietzendorf shortly before, were deployed for construction work and arrived in Bremen on October 22. One week after their arrival, the Bremen city administration declared that the prisoners had not been used for work during the first few days because they were too weak and completely run down. Then the 350 strongest men were chosen for work, but the results were still poor. The death rate among the prisoners increased. By December 8th, 300 men—more than one-half the original contingent—had already died. The administration then decided to send the survivors back to Wietzendorf. Reviewing the use of Soviet prisoners for labor in Bremen, the administration called it a “complete disaster.”<sup>14</sup>

Initially the Volkswagen factory at Fallersleben had a better experience with Soviet POWs. On November 3 the first 120 Russians arrived and, after being fed extra rations for a few days to become fit enough for work, were put to work in production. The results were satisfactory because the workers still received additional food from the factory canteen.<sup>15</sup> A new transport of 280 men arrived four weeks later. These prisoners were in very bad condition; four of them died immediately after being carried to their quarters by their comrades. Twenty men had to be sent to the hospital. In the following weeks, more prisoners became too weak to be employed in the factory.

Under such circumstances the productivity of the Soviet POWs remained very low. Nonetheless, the employers who used these workers had to pay the same wages to the Wehrmacht administration as they did for the French or Polish prisoners, men whose output was five to ten times that of the Russians. In effect, the use of Soviet prisoner labor did not pay for itself. These POWs required better living conditions to produce a net economic gain for their employers—and a gain for the German war economy as well.

The Hermann Göring Steelworks at Salzgitter refused to pay wages and asserted that two French prisoners were able to load a twenty-ton wagon in one shift, something that even ten Soviet prisoners could not do. Therefore, they argued, payment for the Soviets' work had to be reduced commensurately. The commandant of the Fallingbommel-Oerbke Russenlager rejected this demand. "The Russian is actually a good worker," he insisted, and he recommended distributing full food rations to secure better results.<sup>16</sup> Only after months of discussions did the steelworks finally pay the full wages demanded for the prisoners' work.

On December 1 Wehrmacht statistics documented a total of 350,000 Soviet prisoners in Germany.<sup>17</sup> Since approximately 500,000 men had been transported to Germany, we have to assume a loss of 150,000 men (30 percent) in the first five months of the war; most had died from starvation and disease caused by the poor living conditions. An estimated 20,000 men (Jews, commissars, or political functionaries) had been separated out in the Wehrmacht camps and handed over to the Gestapo. These prisoners were deported to concentration camps such as Buchenwald or Sachsenhausen and killed by the SS immediately after their arrival.<sup>18</sup>

In late 1941, the German advance on the Eastern Front was halted. The war had turned into a protracted battle of attrition devouring huge numbers of soldiers, weapons, ammunition, transport capacity, and other resources. The need for workers in the war

industry rapidly increased. On December 24 Hitler finally announced that the use of Soviet POW labor had become a decisive factor in the capacity of the German war economy; all efforts were to be taken to keep the prisoners alive and marshal them for work, but it was already too late since massive numbers of Soviet POWs were dying in the camps. From summer 1941 to spring 1942, the number of deaths totaled 14,000 in Bergen-Belsen and Wietzendorf, 11,000 in Neuhammer, and 10,000 in Zeithain.

Only a few thousand more prisoners could be recruited as labor, however, because many had died from exhaustion or disease. In fact, the number of Soviet laborers dropped from 225,000 in November 1941 to 150,000 in February 1942—and as shown by the situation at the Volkswagen Motorworks in Fallersleben, not all of these prisoners were actually working. A total of 835 Soviet prisoners had been sent to the factory by February 3, thirty-seven of whom died and 230 of whom (suffering from typhus and debility) were returned to Bergen-Belsen's Russenlager—where most of them subsequently died. As of February 1942, only thirty Soviet prisoners were still working in the factory, while the others remained in the Fallersleben camp and did not work at all.<sup>19</sup>

Employment of Soviet POWs in Germany almost broke down in winter 1941–42 when the death rate in the Russenlager and work detachments rose to nearly 50 percent. (At the Liebenau gunpowder factory, for example, 600 out of 1,200 men died.) Statistics available in German and Russian archives show that out of one-half million Soviet prisoners in Germany, 220,000 to 250,000 died.

### **Soviet Prisoners Loaned to the SS as Slave Laborers**

Heinrich Himmler became interested in the use of Soviet prisoners for labor as part of his plans to colonize the East and for industrial enterprises owned by the SS. In September 1941 he received Hitler's permission to assume control of over 200,000 Soviet POWs previously held by the Wehrmacht. Later this figure almost doubled, and Himmler planned to establish an SS empire of sorts employing 375,000 Soviet POW slave workers.<sup>20</sup>

Following Hitler's decision Himmler immediately ordered the establishment of large, new POW camps for 100,000 men each in Lublin-Majdanek and Auschwitz-Birkenau; later the number was raised to 150,000 men. In October the first 10,000 prisoners were brought to the Auschwitz concentration camp and housed in a separate subcamp known as the "Russian POW work camp." A few weeks later, their work on

the construction of Birkenau camp began. In December Himmler proposed building an additional SS-run POW camp at Stutthof for 25,000 men.

In addition to building new camps in the East, Himmler ordered the establishment of Soviet POW work camps in almost every existing concentration camp inside Germany. Preparations began in September 1941, and on October 4 the Wehrmacht ordered the transfer of 25,000 Soviet prisoners “to be employed in SS enterprises in Germany.”<sup>21</sup> Two weeks later, contingents averaging 2,000 men—mainly from the largest Russenlager of the Wehrmacht at Wietzendorf and Neuhammer—were sent to Buchenwald, Flossenbürg, Gross-Rosen, Mauthausen, Neuengamme, and Sachsenhausen.

In the end the SS never received the number of POWs it sought. Only 30,000 men were transferred to the concentration camps, where they remained POWs and were not transformed into prisoners of the SS. This is why the prisoners were put into special POW subcamps inside the concentration camps in Germany: the SS was only their employer, while the Wehrmacht retained administrative control over these men.<sup>22</sup> Therefore the SS administration had to report changes in personnel concerning every Soviet POW to the Wehrmacht central registry.

The physical condition of Himmler’s prisoners, men who had been taken from the contingents of soldiers captured in September and October 1941, was very bad. Almost none were fit for work. Of the 2,000 men sent from Wietzendorf to Buchenwald, the SS reported nine deaths the day after their arrival; some had already died during transport. The prisoners were not put to work in the initial weeks. Malnutrition, brutal treatment, and murder by the SS contributed to a death rate that was almost as high as that in the camps of the Wehrmacht. Of 10,000 prisoners sent to Auschwitz in October and November 1941, only 945 were still alive in March 1942—fewer than 10 percent. Of 2,500 prisoners at Sachsenhausen, 1,982 died; of 2,000 prisoners at Buchenwald, 681 died.

The survivors were not fit for work and, in fact, only a small number of Himmler’s Soviet slaves had actually been put to work. At the beginning of 1942, when he realized that his plans to establish a huge SS industry using Soviet prisoners as slave workers had failed, Himmler discovered the labor potential of his Jewish victims. On January 26, a few days after the notorious conference at Wannsee, he wrote to Glücks, chief of the concentration camp administration:

Because Russian prisoners of war will not be available during the next period, I'm going to take a large number of those Jews who are to be deported from Germany and send them to the camps. Be prepared to take more than 100,000 Jewish men and up to 50,000 Jewish women into the concentration camps within the next four weeks. The concentration camps will be assigned major economic tasks and orders during the next weeks.<sup>23</sup>

It is clear that the "Final Solution" ran concurrently with the exploitation of Jewish slave labor in the years that followed: Himmler had to compensate for the death of hundreds of thousands of Soviet POWs to realize his plans, and no other contingents of slave workers were available.

### **Conclusion: New Premises in Spring 1942**

By the end of 1941, the German Army had taken 3.4 million Soviet POWs, only a small fraction of whom were actually used as forced labor. The losses in the camps and holding centers outside the Reich boundaries in the East were much higher than those in Germany. A total of about two million prisoners died or were killed.<sup>24</sup> In February 1942 Alfred Rosenberg, Reich minister for the occupied Eastern territories, weighed the results of the German policy toward the Soviet prisoners of war.

The fate of the Soviet POW in Germany is a tragedy of the greatest dimensions. Out of 3.6 million prisoners, only a few hundred thousand are left able to perform work. The greater part of them has died of starvation or because of inclement weather. Thousands have been killed by spotted fever. Naturally, provisioning such massive numbers of prisoners was difficult. Still, debilitation and death in these dimensions could have been prevented.<sup>25</sup>

On February 20 Mansfeld noted "the current difficulties in the employment sector would not have arisen had the decision to use Soviet prisoners of war on a large scale come in time."<sup>26</sup> Because it was quite clear that they would never again take such great numbers of Soviet prisoners, the Germans now considered additional use of civilian labor from the USSR (*Ostarbeiter*).

The treatment of Soviet prisoners—especially with regard to food—began to improve. New general regulations were issued on March 24. The needs of the war economy became top priority and all restrictions on the use of Soviet prisoner labor were removed, but ideological formulations showed that a special situation still existed. "Bolshevism is the deadly enemy of National Socialist Germany", a phrase used in many central orders of the OKW.<sup>27</sup> The Soviets were still not placed on an equal

footing with the POWs of other nations. Their working conditions, general treatment, and rations continued to worsen until the end of war. In the latter years of the war, tuberculosis was the main cause of death, a result of these POWs' wholly inadequate living conditions. When the mortality rate increased again in 1944, special death camps for incurable Soviet prisoners were established.

In spring 1942 the handling of POWs as a whole improved. Most Russenlager in Germany were dissolved during that year; only Bergen-Belsen, Lamsdorf, and Senne remained.<sup>28</sup> Soviet prisoners were moved to "normal" POW camps in the area, which managed their labor as well as that of other POWs. The separation of Soviet from other POWs ended, but their living conditions remained several notches below those of their French or British counterparts.

### Notes

1. Mark Spoerer, *Zwangsarbeit unter dem Hakenkreuz: Ausländische Zivilarbeiter, Kriegsgefangene und Häftlinge im Deutschen Reich und im besetzten Europa 1939–1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Ansalt, 2001); Ulrich Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter: Politik und Praxis des “Ausländer-Einsatzes” in der Kriegswirtschaft des Dritten Reiches* (Bonn: Verlag J. H. W. Dietz, 1985; Ulrich Herbert, ed., *Europa und der “Reichseinsatz”: Ausländische Zivilarbeiter, Kriegsgefangene und KZ-Häftlinge in Deutschland 1938–1945* (Essen: Klartext, 1991); Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941–1945*, 4th ed. (Bonn: Verlag J. H. W. Dietz, 1997); Christian Streit, “Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene in deutscher Hand: Ein Forschungsüberblick,” in *Die Tragödie der Gefangenschaft in Deutschland und in der Sowjetunion 1941–1956*, ed. Klaus-Dieter Müller, Konstantin Nikishkin, and Günther Wagenlehner (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1998), pp. 281–90.
2. Notizen über die Ausführungen Hitlers vor der Generalität am 30. März 1941: Kriegstagebuch des Generalstabschefs Halder, quotation in Streit, *Keine Kameraden*, p. 34.
3. Speech by Rosenberg, February 1942: Nürnberger Dokument PS–081.
4. *Reichsgesetzblatt 1934*, Teil II, Nr. 21, pp. 227–57 (issued on April 30, 1934).
5. This camp had been partly used by the SS since 1943. In January 1945 the SS took over the whole camp from the Wehrmacht. Films and photos of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp immediately after the liberation of its prisoners in April 1945 shocked the world.
6. OKW-Erlass zum Arbeitseinsatz sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener, 2. August 1941: Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg, RW 19/2109.
7. Schreiben des Landrates des Kreises Diepholz an den Oberpräsidenten der Provinz Hannover, 9. September 1941: Niedersächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Hannover, Han. 122a, Nr. 7061.
8. OKH 3.9.1941: Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg, RW 6/v.276. Streit, *Keine Kameraden*, p. 172.
9. Nürnberger Dokument EC–194.
10. Vermerk “über die Besprechung vom 7.11.1941 über den Einsatz von Sowjetrussen”—Anlage zu einem Schreiben des Beauftragten für den Vierjahresplan vom 14. November 1941: Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg, RW 19/2148.
11. Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, RW 6/v, 450.

12. Bericht des Beauftragten für den Vierjahresplan vom 13. November 1941: Bundesarchiv, R 41/229.
13. Vermerk für das Kriegstagebuch des Kommandeurs der Kriegsgefangenen im Generalgouvernement, 14. November 1941: Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg, RH 53–23/84.
14. Vermerk des Senators für das Bauwesen vom 11. Dezember 1941: Staatsarchiv Bremen, 4, 29–1–1293.
15. Kriegstagebuch des Rüstungskommandos Braunschweig, 8. November 1941: Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg, RW 21–8/4.
16. Schreiben des Kommandanten des Stalag XI D Oerbke, Oberstleutnant Riedel, an die Hütte Braunschweig der Reichswerke Hermann Göring, 25. November 1941: Bundesarchiv, SAG alt, 12–312–6.
17. Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, RW 6/v.450.
18. For detailed information on that subject, see Reinhard Otto, *Wehrmacht, Gestapo und sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im deutschen Reichsgebiet 1941–42* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1998).
19. Kriegstagebuch des Rüstungskommandos Braunschweig, 3. February 1942: Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg, RW–21–8/5.
20. On this point see the recent work of Jan Erik Schulte, *Zwangsarbeit und Vernichtung: Das Wirtschaftsimperium der SS. Oswald Pohl und das SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt 1933–1945* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2001), pp. 332–56; see also Streit, *Keine Kameraden*, pp. 217–23.
21. Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg, RW 48/12.
22. For example, the POW camp at Neuengamme officially was named “Work Camp No. 179” of Stalag X D Wietzendorf.
23. Bundesarchiv Berlin, NS19/120.
24. Streit, *Keine Kameraden*, p. 128.
25. Nürnberger Dokument PS–081.



26. Aktenvermerk betr. "Vortrag von Min.-Dir. Dr. Mansfeld, Generalbevollmächtigter für den Arbeitseinsatz, über allgemeine Fragen des Arbeitseinsatzes": Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg, RW 19/2148.

27. OKW, 24. März 1942, betr. "Behandlung sowj. Kr.Gef.": Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg, RW 6/v. 278 (Nürnberger Dokument PS-695).

28. Bergen-Belsen and Lamsdorf were dissolved in June 1943; Senne was transformed into a "normal" POW camp as of October 1942.

## **Appendix: Biographies of Contributors**

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