



Forced labor in Nuremberg - Facts instead of denial



The arrival of Dutch forced laborers in Nuremberg
(Sketch: Guust Hens)

Preliminary note

In the discussion about forced labor a lack of factual knowledge has to be noticed, especially on the local level. Of course it's difficult to differentiate between not-knowing and not-wanting-to-know.

The remarks of a Nuremberg businessman in the media who declined any participation in the compensation fund stating *these people are already dead anyway and no one can remember exactly what things were like at that time*, motivated us to compile the following documentation. Maybe it will help this man and his fellow CEOs to recall the past - and remind them of the survivors.

The forced labor of foreign workers had been against established international law

The Warfare Order of The Hague (1899/1907) categorically forbade any occupying forces to use the civilian inhabitants of a conquered territory for purposes of forced labor. For this reason the system stretched over their realm by the Nazis was a wrong even then, the offenses against the welfare and lives of their victims were serious crimes.

Who were the forced laborers?

In order to understand the complexity of the problem one must be aware of the variety of groups forced to work in Nazi Germany: German nationals (e.g. Jews, political dissenters)

and foreigners, the last to be distinguished to be either concentration camp inmates, prisoners of war or civilian workers from every occupied country in Europe.

Looking for common characteristics of this heterogeneous group besides the exploitation of its working force by the government and private industry, one notices that to the racist understanding of the Nazi jurists they all stood outside of the German *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community).

In the hierarchy concentration camp prisoners and Jews took the lowest stage meant to be exterminated by work, preceded by the Soviet prisoners of war and the civilian *Ostarbeiter* (people from the occupied areas of the Soviet Union). Closest to the *master race* stood the civilian workers from Western Europe, of course never admitted to gain an equal status like Germans.

The most severe result from this racial and ideological pyramid for each individual was the exemption from regular jurisdiction of the German courts. Even the civilian workers from France or Belgium privileged in comparison to the Eastern Europeans, were exposed defenselessly to Gestapo and SS by criminal law. (see below chapter about the correction camp Langenzenn).



Greek forced laborers in Nuremberg after their liberation in April 1945
(photo: Sotirios Xognos)

The role the companies played

Nuremberg State Archives (NSA), holding *KV Anklage, Interrogations*, statement of Michael Schreiber, during the war in charge of the inspection of companies regarding the living conditions of the foreign workers at the Nuremberg labor exchange, August 1946, interview 1, p. 2 following:

Question (Q): Let's assume one of the companies here in Nuremberg, e.g. Siemens or Nüral had to finish a new project, what were they supposed to do?

Answer (A): They applied using a form in two copies.

Q: Who prepared the application?

A: The company. Most of them had an employee assigned to this job who also took care of the distribution to the single departments.

[...]

Q: Could a company for instance apply for workers of a certain nationality?

A: Yes. They could say we have so and so many vacancies in a camp for Frenchmen or Russians, please give us this kind of foreign workers.

Recruiting of *Ostarbeiter* by deception

NSA, KV Anklage, *Interrogations*, statement of Michael Schreiber, Aug. 1946, interview 1, p. 15:

[Complaints] were voiced by “*Ostarbeiter*” most frequently. For example one arrived here with his cart and horses because he thought that he could open a transportation business. However, he had to move to a camp and couldn’t take the horses and the cart along with him. [...] They thought they could move around without restrictions and were disappointed the first time when they were put behind barbed wire fences.

Treatment and use of Soviet prisoners of war

Ulrich Herbert: *Fremdarbeiter. Politik und Praxis des Ausländer-Einsatzes in der Kriegswirtschaft des Dritten Reiches*. Berlin, Bonn 1985, p. 149: *In November 1941 of a total of 1,581,000 Soviet POWs 390,000 were registered to be held in custody in camps within the Reich - not more than 70,000 of them were able to work then. In January 1942 of these 1.58 Million prisoners reported in November 1,163,203 were still alive - almost 400,000 had died within these two months.*

Registration card of a deceased Soviet POW
(photo: private)

Civilian workers in Nuremberg

Ulrich Herbert: *Fremdarbeiter. Politik und Praxis des Ausländer-Einsatzes in der Kriegswirtschaft des Dritten Reiches*. Berlin, Bonn 1985, p. 273: *Almost 400,000 foreign civilian workers were employed in Berlin only, in Hamburg 63,000, 70,000 in Königsberg, 65,000 in Mu-*

nich, each in Magdeburg, Leipzig, Nuremberg and Linz 60,000. Herbert's source for these figures is the periodical Der Arbeitseinsatz im Großdeutschen Reich, no. 11/12 of Dec. 30, 1944, authorized by the Generalbevollmächtigter für den Arbeitseinsatz Fritz Sauckel.

Prisoners of war in Nuremberg

Letter from the retired colonel Pellet, former commanding officer of the POW camp Stalag XIII at Nuremberg-Langwasser, dated May 17, 1949 (Nuremberg City Archives, holding C 36/I no. 322): *The stock of POWs amounted to approx. 32,000 men with frequent shipments to and from the camp. [...] Of those 500 details [prisoners of war working details] mentioned before about 150 were located in Nuremberg. Among them the more important were at the time:*

- *MAN 2,000 Soviet enlisted men and officers*
- *Siemens 1,500 Frenchmen*
- *Metall und Eisen 800 Soviet enlisted men*
- *Alu Werke 800 Soviet enlisted men*
- *Faun-Werke 500 Soviets*
- *VDM 500 Soviets*
- *Metallchemie 500 Soviets*
- *Werk Stadeln 500 Frenchmen and Soviets*
- *Reichsbahn 500 Frenchmen and Belgians*
- *Viktoria 400 Frenchmen and Belgians*
- *Zündapp 400 Soviets*
- *Hercules 300 Frenchmen and Belgians*
- *Triumph 300 Frenchmen and Belgians*
- *Vereinigte Schuhfabriken 300 Frenchmen, Belgians and Soviets*
- *Baumüller 300 Soviets.*

Total numbers

NSA, KV Anklage, *Interrogations*, statement of Michael Schreiber, Aug. 1946, interview 1, p. 11: *In Nuremberg and the surrounding area we had approx. 400,000 workers. 100,000 of them were foreigners.*

The life in the camps

The conditions in the festival hall *Kolosseum* at Friedrichstraße, one of the camps ran by *Siemens-Schuckert*, according to the book of Joseph Gelin: Nürnberg 1943 - 1945. *Erlebnisse eines französischen Arbeiterpriesters*. Bamberg 1995, p. 89: *There is a large theater hall called Kolosseum where a camp had been established. [...] In the camp's hospital, a stuffy room where a sloppy orderly reigns and where I saw several patients dying, the sick try to keep their patience. The Siemens company scarcely sends out officials to the hospital. I walk along the rows of the two-story beds, just as above on the galleries where also beds are imposed. Everybody gobbles his plate of thin soup and his three potatoes in his corner. Fortunately, tonight we will be entertained by a play performed by the camp's actors group or some guest performers in order to outwit the hunger.*



Female *Ostarbeiter* in a Nuremberg labor camp
(photo: private)

The normality of forced labor use in the industry

Report of the Ukrainian national Mrs. Maria Gawrilowna S., born in 1924, dated October 1999. Mrs. S. had to work in Nuremberg at the *Kabelmetall Neumeyer* factory (Klingenhofstraße) from July 10, 1942 until March 23, 1945.

[...] I had been obliged to work for the Germans on June 16, 1942. We were taken to a forest. Barbed wire was around our tents. We were guarded by armed police with dogs. Then we had to work: Getting up at three o'clock and walk to the plant for three hours, 12 hours of work, after that again being marched back to the camp for three hours. We were fed very badly: Some soup with beets and potatoes. Often there were worms in our meal.

Subsequently barracks were built for us in the vicinity of the plant. We didn't get any clothing, only once an old thin working overall. Our shoes were made of wood. We received peppermint tea, 100 grams of bread, on Thursdays an additional 20 grams of margarine and two marks which were meant to purchase goods the very same day but there was nothing to buy.

But it is better not to remember these things. Thank God we survived.

There were also good people among the Germans who slipped us slices of bread when no one could see them doing so. And by this we survived.

In 1945 I escaped the camp. About March 23 I reached the village of Marloffstein near Erlangen, where I asked a farmer to employ me. The farmer agreed and did not report me to the police, in which case I would have been shot. [...] He told me not to be afraid because the war will be ended soon.

The systemic wrong of forced labor: Compulsory abortions

NSA, KV Anklage, *Interrogations*, statement of Michael Schreiber, Aug. 1946, interview 2, p. 9 following:

Q: You know that a rather large number of female "Ostarbeiter" had been forced to abortions. How did this work?

A: I cannot say, I hadn't got any official knowledge about this.

Q: You [the labor exchange] paid for the abortions, didn't you?

A: Yes, we received the invoices. But what happened exactly, I don't know.

[...]

Q: Do you think that the abortions were carried out with the consent of these women?

A: I have heard several times that these women were against the abortions. I don't know if the pregnant women were asked for their consent.

Q: Didn't you wonder why abortions of German women were severely punished and even a law had been passed [...] to prevent them, and on the other hand abortions of female "Ostarbeiter" not only were left unpunished but even were desired?

A: I explained this to myself that because of the large number of the pregnancies the authorities just did not know what to do with all these children regarding accommodation, maintenance, care etc.

The systemic wrong of the forced labor: The correction camp Langenzenn for civilian foreign workers

The correction camp at Langenzenn (20 km west of Nuremberg) had been part of a net of *Arbeitserziehungslager* extended over the entire German Reich, where foreigners without any legal proceedings were taken into custody by the Gestapo. Langenzenn and another camp at the so-called *Russenwiese* in Nuremberg were subordinated to the Nuremberg Gestapo. Many forced laborers from the area became incarcerated there for trivial reasons - to Poles and Soviets more severe accusations meant concentration camps or the death penalty anyway. They were handed over to the Gestapo by their employers to be *re-educated*.

Taken from the local newspaper *Nürnberger Nachrichten*, Oct. 26, 1949:

From 1943 on Poles, Russians, Frenchmen and Belgians were punished there for insignificant crimes by order of the heads of the Gestapo offices. Officially the camp had been established for detention up to 51 days. But in fact an unutterable regime of fear was in power there. Already upon their arrival the prisoners were heavily beaten with bull whips, the same happened when they were released. In addition, a definite number blows was fixed in entering papers for every single prisoner. The prisoners had to count the blows themselves during the maltreatment. In case they miscounted the hitting started from the beginning. They were beaten for every little transgression or irregularity in the most merciless way, particularly if they didn't make the desired statements at interrogations. The prisoners unable to work outside were marched around in the camp the whole day. They also had to line up and were dismissed or were ordered to throw themselves to the ground and to get up quickly. Those who were not able to rise again for being exhausted were beaten until they got up. Women also received this treatment.

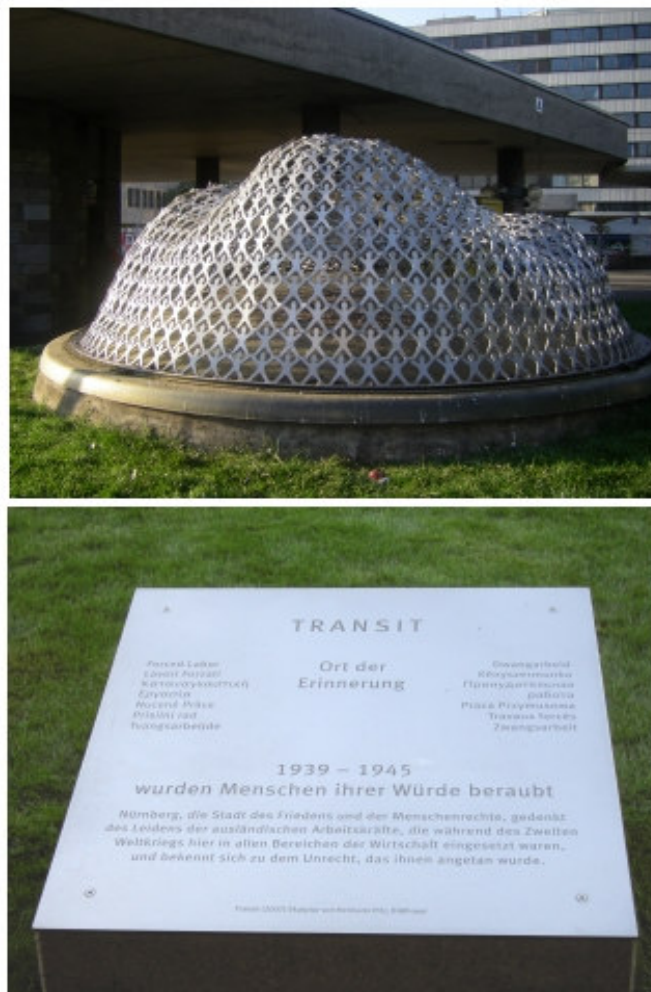
Hygienic and sanitary facilities of the camp were almost not in existence. The prisoners received a daily ration of half a liter of black coffee without sugar, 100 grams of bread and 2 liters of soup made of beets or their skins only (to each 300 liters of soup 250 grams of margarine were added). For each prisoner there were not more than 2 additional cooked potatoes. Many prisoners fell sick and died. In individual cases prisoners were beaten to death. Many times the flesh had been beaten off the buttocks of the maltreated. Partly they had to work with tied up hands hence suffering from festering wounds. For not sufficient work the

prisoners received 25 blows with a stick and in addition were punished by withdrawing of the food.

From *Fränkische Tagespost*, Nov. 5, 1949, statements of staff members of the Nuremberg prison hospital, to which inmates from Langenzenn were delivered: *I have seen women delivered to us completely lice-ridden in a condition I cannot describe. A young Pole had been brought to us hardly able to walk anymore. One could have cut off slices of his flesh. One police first-aid attendant reported six cases which he could recall. A young man beaten off half of his buttocks, [...] others arriving at the hospital smeared with their excrements, the tampons rotten, worms creeping out of their purulent wounds.*

The victims

At Nuremberg's municipal Southern Cemetery in the confinements of its department 93, 5,085 forced laborers and prisoners of war from Eastern Europe are buried, who died during the war in Nuremberg. According to official projections at least 5,900 POWs and foreign civilian workers lost their lives here. The citizens of western allied nations were exhumed after the war and buried in their home countries.



Memorial for the forced laborers in Nuremberg at Plärrer square
(Photo: Susanne Rieger)

The presence: Forgotten truths

The endless squabbling about the compensation and the comments on the topic by the media produced frustration in many parts of the German population. A *final stroke* is demanded more and more openly. The two favorite *arguments* of those people are as stupid as they are infamous:

What has happened to the German prisoners of war or our people in Eastern Prussia and the Sudetenland was just as bad.

The Jews have been compensated already, so what do they want?

Just a little reminder to all of them: Germany started WW2. The causes of the expulsion of Germans are not to be found in May 1945 but almost 6 years earlier, in March and September 1939.

In addition, a wrong isn't made undone by another wrong. The people claiming compensation payments for their forced labor are in their vast majority non-Jews.

Everything will be fine?



Messrs. Siwko, Mikulewitsch, Forostjanyi and Warno (f.l.t.r.), former *Ostarbeiter* 2007 in Nuremberg participating in the inauguration of the memorial at Plärrer square
(photo: Susanne Rieger)

Hooray, Bundestag has established legal security, the money can flow! German industry has contributed a quarter (!) of the compensatory means, taking into account that half of its payments are tax deductible. Again, the tax payers are the ones who have to pay the rest, but not even they seem to be outraged about it, because the public attention has turned to other topics long ago.

Now the responsibility for speedy and correct proceedings rests on the shoulders of the *partner organizations*. A clever move - Pontius Pilate might have said. What devils of fellows regarding their knowledge of law, history and languages will decide about rejection or acceptance of the applications there? How will the balance sheet look after hundreds of millions of DM will be distributed by administrative machineries in Eastern Europe or organizations confronted with comparable tasks never before in their history?

Still the rulings of the law exclude entire groups of Nazi victims from payments such as the Slovenian people, who were not deported in order to make use of their working power in first place, but for the *ethnic cleansing* of their native country.

Conclusion

Statement of Salomon Korn, member of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, in an interview with *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Nov. 30, 1999, p. 13: *Morally seen the German industry has missed the time for credible actions. There is neither insight nor a bad conscience. I have the impression: The late poison of nationalism. Secretly the German industry regards the forced laborers to be still inferior and treats them according to that: Arrogantly, coldly, threatening.*

Gerhard Jochem

[Index*](#)

[Home*](#)