

MARK SPOERER, *Recent findings on forced labor under the Nazi regime and an agenda for future research*, in «Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento» (ISSN: 0392-0011), 28 (2002), pp. 373-388.

Url: <https://heyjoe.fbk.eu/index.php/anisig>

Questo articolo è stato digitalizzato dal progetto ASTRA - *Archivio della storiografia trentina*, grazie al finanziamento della Fondazione Caritro (Bando Archivi 2021). ASTRA è un progetto della Biblioteca Fondazione Bruno Kessler, in collaborazione con Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati, Fondazione Museo storico del Trentino, FBK-Istituto Storico Italo-Germanico, Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra (Rovereto), e Società di Studi Trentini di Scienze Storiche. ASTRA rende disponibili le versioni elettroniche delle maggiori riviste storiche del Trentino, all'interno del portale [HeyJoe](#) - *History, Religion and Philosophy Journals Online Access*.

This article has been digitised within the project ASTRA - *Archivio della storiografia trentina* through the generous support of Fondazione Caritro (Bando Archivi 2021). ASTRA is a Bruno Kessler Foundation Library project, run jointly with Accademia Roveretana degli Agiati, Fondazione Museo storico del Trentino, FBK-Italian-German Historical Institute, the Italian War History Museum (Rovereto), and Società di Studi Trentini di Scienze Storiche. ASTRA aims to make the most important journals of (and on) the Trentino area available in a free-to-access online space on the [HeyJoe](#) - *History, Religion and Philosophy Journals Online Access* platform.

Nota copyright

Tutto il materiale contenuto nel sito [HeyJoe](#), compreso il presente PDF, è rilasciato sotto licenza [Creative Commons](#) Attribuzione–Non commerciale–Non opere derivate 4.0 Internazionale. Pertanto è possibile liberamente scaricare, stampare, fotocopiare e distribuire questo articolo e gli altri presenti nel sito, purché si attribuisca in maniera corretta la paternità dell’opera, non la si utilizzi per fini commerciali e non la si trasformi o modifichi.

Copyright notice

All materials on the [HeyJoe](#) website, including the present PDF file, are made available under a [Creative Commons](#) Attribution–NonCommercial–NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. You are free to download, print, copy, and share this file and any other on this website, as long as you give appropriate credit. You may not use this material for commercial purposes. If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you may not distribute the modified material.



Recent Findings on Forced Labor under the Nazi Regime and an Agenda for Future Research

by Mark Spoerer

1. Introduction

It was after the occupation of the Czech Lands in October 1938 and the November pogroms of that year, that the Nazi regime built up what was to become Europe's largest program of cross-border deportation and forced labor in the last centuries¹. Since 1938, tens of thousands of German and Austrian Jews were affected as well as millions of other Europeans since 1939. Many died, and many of those who survived the war suffered from malnutrition, exploitation, and abduction.

Yet, this episode left only few traces in the public memories of postwar Germany, Austria, and their neighbors. In a remarkable example of selective perception the foreign laborers were remembered by most Germans as looting gangs who had horrified the pauperized domestic population in the immediate postwar period. On top of that, many Austrians quickly defined themselves as the Nazis' first victims abroad.

After being repatriated to their home countries, most former foreign laborers were reproached for collaborating with the Germans and thus kept silent². In the public memories of all European countries, and all the

Parts of this article are taken from M. SPOERER, *Forced Labor under the Nazi Regime: Recent Findings and an Agenda for Future Research*, in O. RATHKOLB (ed), *Revisiting the National Socialist Legacy: Coming to Terms with Forced Labor, Expropriation, Compensation, and Restitution*, Innsbruck 2002, pp. 73-81, and from M. SPOERER - J. FLEISCHHACKER, *Forced Laborers in Nazi Germany: Categories, Numbers, and Survivors*, in «Journal of Interdisciplinary History», 33, 2002, pp. 169-204.

¹ To my knowledge, there is no overview on forced labor programs in history. For a start, see M. SPOERER - J. FLEISCHHACKER, *Forced Laborers*. My use of the term «programme» here reflects the ex-post perspective; before 1942, the Nazis did not have a well-devised plan to put foreigners to work.

² F. COCHET, *Les exclus de la victoire. Histoire des prisonniers de guerre, déportés et S.T.O.* (1945-1985), Paris 1992; P. LAGROU, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and*

more in Israel and the US, the forced laborers' fate was superimposed by the horrors of the Holocaust or Shoa. Hence, only little academic research dealt with this episode until the 1980s, and in Western Germany mostly in an apologetic manner³.

The subject of forced labor caught much more academic attention in Eastern Europe, especially in the German Democratic Republic and Poland, where the exploitation of forced labor by German companies was interpreted in the framework of class struggle. However, stripped of its Marxist rhetoric, Eastern European academic research on the subject was often of superior quality⁴. The first serious academic monograph published in the Western hemisphere was that of Edward Homze in 1967⁵. In the following years, a number of studies that focused primarily on other topics touched aspects of the subject, but did not cover the core issue⁶. This was left to Ulrich Herbert's dissertation originally published in 1985⁷.

National Recovery in Western Europe, Cambridge 2000; P. POLIAN, *Deportiert nach Hause. Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im «Dritten Reich» und ihre Repatriierung*, München - Wien 2000.

³ Decidedly apologetic views were put forward by A. VON KNIERIM, *Nürnberg. Rechtliche und menschliche Probleme*, Stuttgart 1953; H.-E. KANNAPIN, *Wirtschaft unter Zwang ...*, Köln 1966, and, less aggressively, by L. EWERTH, *Der Arbeitseinsatz von Landesbewohnern besetzter Gebiete des Ostens und Südostens im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, PhD thesis Tübingen, 1954. Somewhat more balanced is the study of H. PFAHLMANN, *Fremdarbeiter und Kriegsgefangene in der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft 1939-1945*, Würzburg 1968.

⁴ E. SEEBER, *Zwangsarbeiter in der faschistischen Kriegswirtschaft. Die Deportation und Ausbeutung polnischer Bürger unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Lage der Arbeiter aus dem sogenannten Generalgouvernement*, Berlin 1964; D. EICHHOLTZ, *Geschichte der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft 1939-1945*, 3 vols., Berlin 1968, 1985, 1996. A valuable collection of sources is *Documenta Occupationis* (Poznan, vols. 5, 1952; 6, 1958; 9, 1975, and 10, 1976). The Polish academic journal «*Studia Historiae Oeconomicae*» has published many interesting articles on various aspects of occupation and forced labor during World War II.

⁵ E.L. HOMZE, *Foreign Labor in Nazi Germany*, Princeton NJ 1967. Another detailed, difficult to obtain and now undeservedly forgotten study was completed shortly before the end of the war, J.H.E. FRIED, *The Exploitation of Foreign Labor by Germany*, Montreal 1945.

⁶ F. PINGEL, *Häftlinge unter SS-Herrschaft. Widerstand, Selbstbehauptung und Vernichtung im Konzentrationslager*, Hamburg 1978; C. STREIT, *Keine Kameraden. Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941-1945*, Stuttgart 1978; G.-H. SEEBOLD, *Ein Stahlkonzern im Dritten Reich: Der Bochumer Verein 1927-1945*, Wuppertal 1981.

⁷ U. HERBERT, *Fremdarbeiter. Politik und Praxis des «Ausländer-Einsatzes» in der Kriegswirtschaft des Dritten Reiches*, Bonn 1985, 1999²; English U. HERBERT, *Hitler's Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany under the Third Reich*, Cambridge 1997.

His impressive monograph helped spark a political discussion on the compensation of former forced laborers that, retarded by periods of public disinterest and re-accelerated with the help of American lawyers, finally led to the German and Austrian compensation laws of the summer of 2000 – 55 years after the forced laborers had been liberated⁸.

Herbert has set the standards on how the Nazis' forced labor system evolved on the macropolitical and on the macroeconomic levels. His story of forced labor is in essence that of two competing forces, racist ideology versus economic pragmatism. On the one hand, the security forces, centered in the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, opposed the employment of most groups of foreigners and advocated the observance of the Nazis' racial hierarchy, even if this turned out to be counterproductive. The armaments bureaucracy, on the other hand, emphasized the imperative of war production and was willing to improve the conditions of the foreigners if the costs promised to be overcompensated by the benefits of production increases. The compromises that had to be and were forged by these rivals manifest themselves in the legal and institutional framework that governed the employment of foreigners throughout the war.

This framework discriminated groups of workers by their legal status. As the Germans insisted on the fiction that all civilian laborers were volunteers, the legal status did not discriminate between volunteers and deportees. This leads to the question who exactly was a «forced laborer». German labor law prevented all workers from changing their occupation without explicit permission by the labor office. Hence, if the only criterion for a definition of forced labor were simply coercion to stay in a given employment, close to 100% of the work force, German as well as foreign, would meet it. However, the conditions of life and work in Germany were by no means homogenous. Germans and, to a pronounced lesser extent, a small fraction of all foreign civilian laborers were entitled to a certain minimum standard of life. But a decent standard of life was granted only to «Aryan» Germans and, with increasing reluctance, to foreign laborers from countries that still had a place of their own in the planned German-dominated «Greater Economic Area» of Europe, such as the Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Italy. In contrast, this standard was denied to most foreign laborers from Slavic countries controlled by German civil or military

⁸ For a summary of the compensation process and legal aspects, see P. ZUMBANSEN (ed), *NS-Forced Labor: Remembrance and Responsibility. Legal and Historical Observations*, Wiesbaden 2002.

administration, especially Poland and the Soviet Union. The peoples of these countries were regarded as serfs to be exploited relentlessly and eventually expelled to remote areas not fit for German settlers. Hence, the millions of Polish, Ukrainian, Belarussian, and Russian workers under German supervision had no civil rights at all. A member of the German security forces who killed one of them would not normally have faced any legal action. Concentration camp inmates, especially Jews, were entirely outside the law.

A sensible definition of forced labor and the different degrees thereof must take into consideration the conditions of life and work. Four criteria are critical: (1) Was the worker able to end the employment relationship in the short-term? (2) Was he or she able to enforce legal standards concerning the conditions of life and work? (3) Would he or she have any voice in complaining about the conditions of life and work? (4) Was his or her probability of surviving similar to that of normal (native) workers? These four criteria produce five groups of workers. Only condition (1) applies to some German and privileged foreign laborers, e.g., Italians until Italy's surrender in September 1943. In general, condition (2) holds for German workers, constituting the crucial difference from non-privileged foreigner groups. Hence, forced laborers are defined as those for whom conditions (1) and (2) do not hold true, and slave laborers those for whom condition (3) does not hold true. Not every foreign laborer was a forced laborer, but every slave laborer was. Following Benjamin Ferencz, those workers for whom condition (4) does not apply were less-than-slave laborers⁹. Disregarding the German workers, three criteria remain, the first two of which being – in the terminology of Albert Hirschman – exit and voice, and the other the probability of survival¹⁰. The four categories of foreign laborers in Germany are privileged, forced (in the narrow sense), slave, and less-than-slaves. See Table 1 for an overview.

Any categorization like the one in Table 1 has to oversimplify. For example, most groups of civilian laborers contained early volunteers who were able to return home, at least in the first years of the war. Among the three main Soviet ethnic groups, the Ukrainians sometimes had minor privileges. The evidence concerning some groups is scarce. For example, the fate of Yugoslav civilian laborers (mainly Croats and Serbs)

⁹ B.B. FERENCZ, *Less Than Slaves. Jewish Forced Labor and the Quest for Compensation*, Cambridge MA 1979.

¹⁰ A.O. HIRSCHMAN, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*, Cambridge MA 1970.

and POWs (mainly Serbs) in Germany has never been researched in detail, nor has that of the other groups from the Balkans and the Baltic states. The Czechs are a puzzling case, as formally classified second-class German citizens, their legal position surpassed that of other foreigners, notwithstanding the drastic penalties that they could incur for having a sexual relationship with a German woman or for being found guilty of breaching the labor contract¹¹. Recent research also stresses the role of gender¹². On the one hand, women faced the risk of sexual harassment and exploitation in addition to their fate of forced or slave laborers. On the other, female concentration camp inmates were much more likely to experience sympathetic behavior from their oppressors than their male fellow-sufferers.

The use of the term slave laborer should definitely not be extended to inmate groups or to Soviet and Jewish Polish POWs. In the Anglo-Saxon tradition, especially in the literature on the Holocaust or Shoa, inmate laborers are usually classified as slave laborers. However, the typical slaveholder has an economic interest in the lives of his slaves. The SS, as the inmates' slaveholder, leased them to firms and other employers. Although higher SS authorities emphasized the economic value of the inmates, especially after 1942, the SS camp guards, most of whom were primitive men and women, nevertheless often continued their practice of driving the inmates to exhaustion and death¹³. To call the most ill treated foreign laborers slaves is almost euphemistic; Soviet and Jewish Polish POWs were subjected to an abnormally high mortality risk and thus were less-than-slave laborers.

In the following, «foreign laborers» refers to all four groups, and «forced laborers» in a broad sense for what is defined in Table 1 as (1) forced laborers (in the narrow sense), (2) slave laborers, and (3) less-than-slave laborers, if not specified otherwise (see Figure 1).

¹¹ See S. POSTA, *Tschechische «Fremdarbeiter» in der nationalsozialistischen Kriegswirtschaft*, Dresden 2002.

¹² See G. HAUCH, *Zwangsarbeiterinnen und ihre Kinder: Zum Geschlecht der Zwangsarbeit*, in O. RATHKOLB (ed), *NS-Zwangsarbeit: Der Standort Linz der «Reichswerke Hermann Göring AG»*, Berlin, 1938-1945, 2 vols, Wien 2001, vol. 1, pp. 355-448.

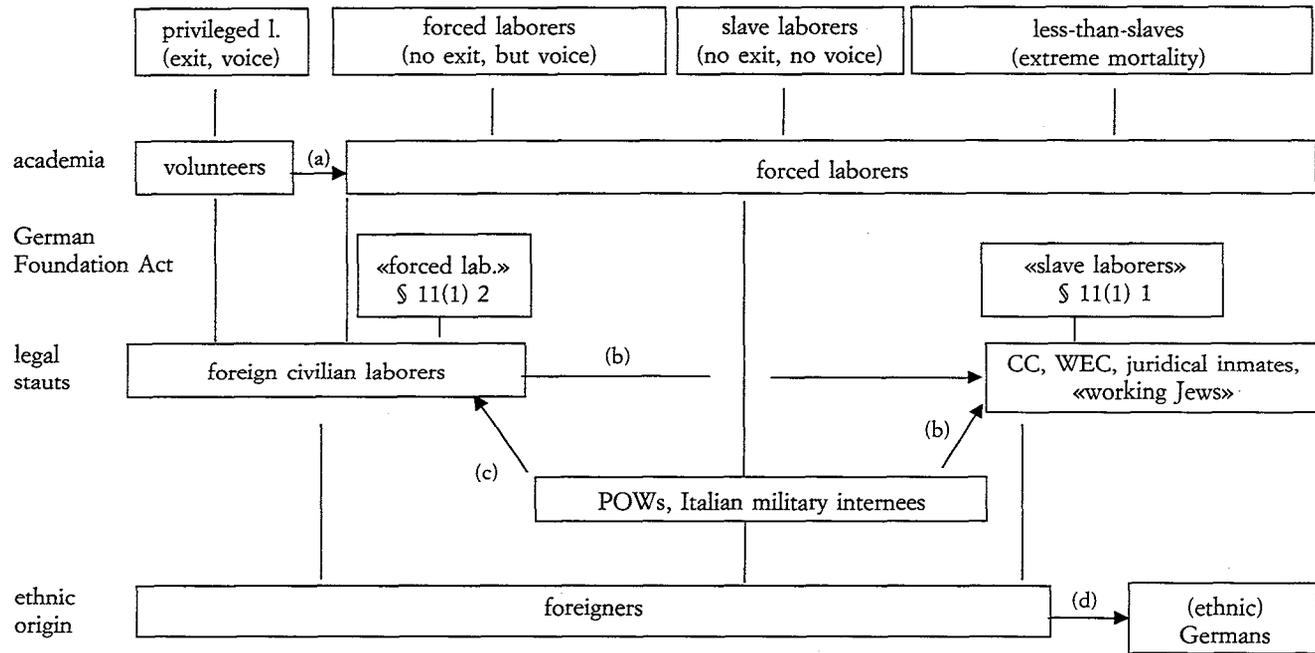
¹³ See, for example, K. ORTH, *Das System der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager. Eine politische Organisationsgeschichte*, Hamburg 1999; K. ORTH, *Die Konzentrationslager – SS. Sozialstrukturelle Analysen und biographische Studien*, Göttingen 2000; J.E. SCHULTE, *Zwangsarbeit und Vernichtung: Das Wirtschaftsimperium der SS. Oswald Pohl und das SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt 1933-1945*, Paderborn 2001, and M.T. ALLEN, *The Business of Genocide: The SS, Slave Labor, and the Concentration Camps*, Chapel Hill NC 2002.

Tab. 1: *Main foreign labor groups in Germany during World War II ranked by degree of discrimination*

	<i>privileged</i> exit and voice	<i>forced no</i> exit but voice	<i>slave no exit,</i> no voice		<i>forced no exit</i> but voice	<i>slave no exit,</i> no voice	<i>less-than-slave</i>
<i>Civilian Laborers</i>				<i>POWs</i>			
Croatians	X			French	X		
Italians	X ^a		X ^b	Serbs	X		
Slovaks	X			UK/US citizens	X		
Balts		X		Italians		X	
Belgians		X		Poles		X ^c	X ^d
Czechs		X		USSR citizens			X
Dutch		X					
French		X		<i>Inmates</i>			
Serbs		X?		CC inmates			X
Poles			X	[«working Jews»]			X
USSR citizens			X	WEC inmates			X

CC = concentration camp; WEC = work education camp; ^a until September 1943; ^b from September 1943; ^c non-jews; ^d jews

Fig. 1: Forced labor categories in Nazi Germany



(a) enforced postponement of labor contract that was originally concluded voluntarily; (b) sent to prison, work education camp (WEC) or concentration camp (CC); (c) voluntary or enforced transformation into civilian status; (d) voluntary or enforced «Rегermanization»

Figure 1 distinguishes between Germans and non-Germans. According to the definitions, herein Germans are regarded as forced laborers (in the broad sense) only if they experienced internment in a concentration camp or another work internment camp, or were «working Jews». The foreigners fall into the three formal categories of civilian, POW, and inmate laborers. Only the civilian laborers included volunteers. Among them, many who had come as volunteers were forced to stay in Germany (a) or sent to concentration or work education camps (b). POWs were also sent to concentration camps (b) or given civilian status (c).

After having established these definitions, I take Herbert's book as the starting point and I will focus on the findings of subsequent research. Hundreds of regional, local, and business studies have been published ever since, which clearly outpace the scope of a survey. A considerable part of that research was – and often still is – carried out in a state of mind that I would like to call the trap of *Betroffenheit*. (The dictionaries give quite unsatisfactory translations like «concernment», «perplexity», etc.) Overwhelmed by the often gruesome and cruel facts that they found in archival documents or that they were told by eyewitnesses, many authors exclusively focused on the historical narrative, to the disadvantage of a thorough analytical treatment. I will focus on analytical studies here.

The more analytical research after Herbert has taken his results for the macropolitical and macroeconomic levels for granted and focused on the micropolitical and microeconomic levels¹⁴. How did the local bureaucracy cope with the flow of ordinances from Berlin, which were often contradictory? Did they have room for maneuver in respect to the treatment of foreigners, and how did they use it? How did firms react to the chances and risks involved in the employment of forced labor? What about their room for maneuver and use thereof? How, in turn, did the foreigners react to the way the Germans treated them?

As our – or at least my – point of interest are human decisions and what stands behind them, the relevant categories are motives, incentives, constraints, and room for maneuver. More thorough studies on the subject implicitly or explicitly make use of these categories and thus do not confine themselves to the narrative but explore the forces, which drove it.

¹⁴ For a summary see M. SPOERER, *Zwangsarbeit unter dem Hakenkreuz. Ausländische Zivilarbeiter, Kriegsgefangene und Häftlinge im Dritten Reich und im besetzten Europa 1939-1945*, Stuttgart - München 2001.

To sum up this vast literature and its most important findings is of course somewhat pretentious given the sheer number of books and articles devoted to the topic. In my perspective, and that might be the constricted one of an economic and business historian, I see four fields in which we know much more by now than we knew when Herbert's book was published for the first time.

2. *Inmate labor*

Herbert's focus was confined to civilian laborers and prisoners of war. The third large category of foreign laborers is that of inmates. This group comprises concentration camp inmates and ghetto inhabitants – both groups usually had to work for the Germans – as well as so-called «working Jews». Moreover, juridical prisoners and work education camp inmates temporarily held the status of inmates¹⁵.

From a chronological perspective, concentration camp prisoners formed the first group of forced laborers. However, when the SS put them to work in the 1930s this was more as a means of punishment than for the sake of production. In the beginning, this held also for Austrian, and, shortly afterwards, German Jews who were coerced to perform degrading work in the autumn of 1938. In 1939, many German Jews were detached to work in the armaments industry, especially Berlin's electrotechnical works¹⁶. Though they were clearly forced laborers in the sense defined above, they should not be regarded as inmate workers at that time since they still lived in flats or rooms, not in camps or ghettos. From 1939-1943, they were deported eastwards. In the annexed or occupied parts of Poland and the Soviet Union they were placed in ghettos and, along with the local Jews, put to work under humiliating conditions. When the ghettos were dissolved between 1942 and 1944, the survivors were sent to Jewish work camps or concentration camps, where Jews nevertheless were a small minority. Both camp types were under command of the SS

¹⁵ While there is still no study on forced work of juridical prisoners, a recent study deals extensively with the work education camp inmates, G. LOTFI, *KZ der Gestapo. Arbeitserziehungslager im Dritten Reich*, Stuttgart 2000.

¹⁶ W. GRUNER, *Terra Inkognita? The Camps for «Jewish Labor Conscriptio» 1938-1943 and the German Population*, in «Yad Vashem Studies», 24, 1994, pp. 1-41; W. GRUNER, *Der Geschlossene Arbeitseinsatz deutscher Juden. Zur Zwangsarbeit als Element der Verfolgung 1938-1943*, Berlin 1996; W. GRUNER, *Zwangsarbeit und Verfolgung österreichischer Juden im NS-Staat*, Innsbruck 2000.

who leased the inmates to German occupation forces or firms in need of labor¹⁷.

Evidently, inmate labor is where the forced labor system and genocide intersect. As the war prospects deteriorated, German security forces increasingly gave way to the imperative of production. In his struggle for power, Heinrich Himmler used the ever-growing number of concentration camp inmates as a strategic device. From early 1942 he increasingly focused on their productive capacity and leased them to public and private employers even within Germany which meant that the Reich was no longer «judenfrei» (cleared of Jews)¹⁸. When deployed in outdoor construction units, many inmates faced lethal working conditions, whereas production tasks took a much lower death toll. This does not only find its explanation in the less uncomfortable working conditions of so-called «production inmates», but in the fact that the employers trained them on the job. In the cold view of the employer, trained inmates carried human capital with them and were not as easy to replace as so-called «construction inmates». A lot of scholarly discussion is devoted to the meaning of «extermination through work», i.e., whether work was a device of the SS to kill the inmates, or whether driving them slowly to death was the most effective

¹⁷ F. KARAY, *Death Comes in Yellow. Skarzysko-Kamienna Slave Labor Camp*, Amsterdam 1996; T. SANDKÜHLER, «Endlösung» in Galizien. Der Judenmord in Ostpolen und die Rettungsinitiativen von Berthold Beitz 1941-1944, Bonn 1996; T. SANDKÜHLER, *Das Zwangsarbeiterlager Lemberg-Janowska 1941-1944*, in U. HERBERT - K. ORTH - C. DIECKMANN (eds), *Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager. Entwicklung und Struktur*, Göttingen 1998, pp. 606-635; D. POHL, *Die großen Zwangsarbeiterlager der SS- und Polizeiführer für Juden im Generalgouvernement 1942-1945*, *ibidem*, pp. 415-438; C.A. BROWNING, *Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers, German Killers*, Cambridge 2000.

¹⁸ W. BENZ - B. DISTEL (eds), *Sklavenarbeit im KZ, Dachau 1986*; W. BENZ - B. DISTEL (edd), *Zwangsarbeit, Dachau 2000*; F. FREUND, «Arbeitslager Zement». *Das Konzentrationslager Ebensee und die Raketenrüstung*, Wien 1989; F. PIPER, *Industrieunternehmen als Initiatoren des Einsatzes von KZ-Häftlingen. Das Beispiel Auschwitz*, in HAMBURGER STIFTUNG ZUR FÖRDERUNG VON WISSENSCHAFT UND KULTUR (ed), «*Deutsche Wirtschaft*». *Zwangsarbeit von KZ-Häftlingen für Industrie und Behörden*, Hamburg 1991, pp. 97-139; R. FRÖBE, *Der Arbeitseinsatz von KZ-Häftlingen und die Perspektive der Industrie, 1943-1945*, in U. HERBERT (ed), *Europa und der «Reichseinsatz». Ausländische Zivilarbeiter, Kriegsgefangene und KZ-Häftlinge in Deutschland 1938-1945*, Essen 1991, pp. 351-383; R. FRÖBE, *KZ-Häftlinge als Reserve qualifizierter Arbeitskraft. Eine späte Entdeckung der deutschen Industrie und ihre Folgen*, in U. HERBERT - K. ORTH - C. DIECKMANN (eds), *Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager*, pp. 636-681; F. PIPER, *Arbeitseinsatz der Häftlinge aus dem KL Auschwitz*, Oswiecim 1995; H. KAIENBURG (ed), *Konzentrationslager und deutsche Wirtschaft 1939-1945*, Opladen 1996; M. SPOERER, *Profitierten Unternehmen von KZ-Arbeit? Eine kritische Analyse der Literatur*, in «*Historische Zeitschrift*», 268, 1999, pp. 61-95 (English translation available from the author).

way of economic exploitation¹⁹. Towards the end of the war, the conditions of life and work deteriorated and reached their mortal climax with the death marches of winter and spring 1945²⁰.

3. *The role of public and private employers and their room for maneuver*

Herbert gave examples to show that the authorities at the intermediate and lower levels had abundant room for maneuver, and he assumed that this held throughout the *Reich*. Although we still lack a synthesis on this subject, it seems to me that most or even all subsequent local studies confirm this assumption. As these studies show, the conditions of life and work differed widely on the local level. Even though this might have been caused by different degrees of resource shortages, the evidence points to the conclusion that many everyday decisions were at the discretion of local lower-rank bureaucrats and executives. This underlines once more that the racist hierarchy of the forced labor system as a whole was not confined to the wording of the laws decreed in Berlin, but found its extension in the interpretation of these laws in the province²¹.

¹⁹ M. KÁRNÝ, «Vernichtung durch Arbeit». *Sterblichkeit in den NS-Konzentrationslagern*, in G. ALY et al., *Sozialpolitik und Judenvernichtung. Gibt es eine Ökonomie der Endlösung*, Berlin 1987, pp. 133-158; F. PINGEL, *Die KZ-Häftlinge zwischen Vernichtung und NS-Arbeitseinsatz*, in W. MICHALKA (ed), *Der Zweite Weltkrieg. Analysen, Grundzüge, Forschungsbilanz*, München - Zürich 1989, pp. 784-797; U. HERBERT, *Labor and Extermination. Economic Interest and the Primacy of Weltanschauung in National Socialism*, in «Past and Present», 138, 1990, pp. 145-195; H. KAIENBURG, «Vernichtung durch Arbeit». *Der Fall Neuengamme. Die Wirtschaftsbestrebungen der SS und ihre Auswirkungen auf die Existenzbedingungen der KZ-Gefangenen*, Bonn 1990; L. BUDRASS - M. GRIEGER, *Die Moral der Effizienz. Die Beschäftigung von KZ-Häftlingen am Beispiel des Volkswagenwerkes und der Henschel Flugzeug-Werke*, in «Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte», 1993, 2, pp. 89-136; J. NEANDER, «Hat in Europa kein annäherndes Beispiel». *Mittelbau-Dora: ein KZ für Hitlers Krieg*, Berlin 2000; B.C. WAGNER, *IG Auschwitz. Zwangsarbeit und Vernichtung von Häftlingen des Lagers Monowitz 1941-1945*, München 2000; J.-C. WAGNER, *Noch einmal Arbeit und Vernichtung. Häftlingseinsatz im KL Mittelbau-Dora*, in N. FREI - S. STEINBACHER - B.C. WAGNER (eds), *Ausbeutung, Vernichtung, Öffentlichkeit: Neue Studien zur national-sozialistischen Lagerpolitik*, München 2000, pp. 11-41; M. SPOERER, *Zwangsarbeit*, pp. 180-183; J.E. SCHULTE, *Zwangsarbeit*; M.T. ALLEN, *Business of Genocide*.

²⁰ S. KRAKOWSKI, *Death Marches*, in I. GUTMAN (ed), *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, New York 1990, vol. 1, pp. 348-354.

²¹ R. PETER, *Rüstungspolitik in Baden. Kriegswirtschaft und Arbeitseinsatz in einer Grenzregion im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, München 1995; A. HEUSLER, *Ausländereinsatz. Zwangsarbeit für die Münchner Kriegswirtschaft 1939-1945*, München 1996.

Most research so far has focused on employers in mining, manufacturing, and, increasingly, agriculture²². In the meantime it has become clear, that public institutions were important employers as well. E.g., many administrative bodies deployed forced workers for dangerous clearing-up operations after allied air raids. The SS held several «construction brigades» that were manned by concentration camp prisoners and even employed them on the occupied island of Alderney²³. The German railways, to cite another example, were one of the largest single employers. In the Soviet Union, the Germans started to regauge the whole track system to the continental European standard that led to the employment of more than six hundred thousand Soviet workers, both civilians and POWs²⁴.

Ulrich Herbert was very critical in regard to the behavior of individual firms and their lobby groups. While it seems to me that this is largely undisputed concerning the lobby groups, which were mostly *gleichgeschaltet* (set in line with the regime), I have doubts whether this holds for firms as well. On the surface, it may generally be true that no firm was coerced to employ forced workers. But a firm that would have left its costly equipment unmanned rather than to order foreigners from the local labor office would surely have run into danger of being closed or dismantled by the armaments authorities, at least after 1942. Yet this point pertains only to the employment of civilian laborers and POWs who came to the employers *via* the labor office. Concerning inmates, who came *via* the SS, I doubt that firms really faced insurmountable problems to avoid their deployment. Inmates were a scarce resource, and only firms who were very actively engaged in the armaments production were able to employ them. In fact, many firms even competed for inmates²⁵.

²² E.g., B. HOPMANN et al., *Zwangsarbeit bei Daimler-Benz*, Stuttgart 1994; H. MOMMSEN - M. GRIEGER, *Das Volkswagenwerk und seine Arbeiter im Dritten Reich*, Düsseldorf 1996; G. FREITAG, *Zwangsarbeiter im Lipper Land. Der Einsatz von Arbeitskräften aus Osteuropa in der Landwirtschaft Lippes 1939-1945*, Bochum 1996; O. RATHKOLB (ed), *NS-Zwangsarbeit*.

²³ K. FINGS, *Kommunen und Zwangsarbeit*, in U. WINKLER (ed), *Stiften gehen: NS-Zwangsarbeit und Entschädigungsdebatte*, Köln 2000, pp. 108-129; K. FINGS, *Die Kommunen, der Krieg und die Konzentrationslager. Himmlers SS-Baubrigaden*, PhD thesis Düsseldorf, 2001; A. SCHÄFER, *Zwangsarbeit in den Kommunen. «Ausländereinsatz» in Württemberg 1939-1945*, in «Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte», 49, 2001, pp. 53-75.

²⁴ To my knowledge, this has not yet been subject of academic research. For a start, see the apologetic booklet by H. POTTGIESSER, *Die Deutsche Reichsbahn im Ostfeldzug 1939-1944*, Neckargemünd 1975.

²⁵ L. BUDRASS - M. GRIEGER, *Moral der Effizienz*; M. SPOERER, *Profitierten Unternehmen*; M. SPOERER, *Zwangsarbeit*, pp. 233-241; M. SPOERER, *Zur Verantwortlichkeit privatwirtschaft-*

My conclusion from that is that, from a moral perspective, the question whether a firm employed non-inmate foreigners or not is in itself irrelevant: every medium or large sized German firm in the manufacturing sector did so, and this fact alone illustrates the constraints that the firms faced towards the end of the war – unless one believes that every single German firm was run by crooks. The point is how a firm treated the foreigners, and whether the firm continued to vigorously request foreign workers from the labor office even when it had realized that the foreigners were no longer volunteers. Whereas it is difficult to find reliable evidence for the latter issue, there is evidence that a number of firms treated their foreign workers in a decent manner²⁶. Of course the sources do not reveal whether this was in respect to humanitarian motives or simply a means of improving labor productivity. But the point is that, contrary to what they claimed after the war, firms were able to provide decent living and working conditions, and some did. Yet, what emerges from many case studies is that the attitude of most employers was somewhere between indifference towards the misery of the foreign workers and outright exploitation.

4. *Numbers of forced laborers*

A third point is the number of forced laborers. Herbert was very well acquainted with Nazi labor statistics and knew their problems²⁷. He has always been very cautious concerning the total number of foreigners employed in the German war economy and put it at somewhere between 12 and 12.5 million²⁸. I was somewhat less scrupulous and dared a rough estimate that resulted in 13.5 million foreign civilian laborers, POWs, and inmates who worked on German territory. Among them, about 80 to 90% were forced laborers. 2.5 million, that is nearly 20%, perished in German custody, the overwhelming majority of which were concentra-

licher Industrieunternehmen für den Einsatz von NS-Zwangsarbeitern: das Beispiel Daimler-Benz, in G. HAUCH - B. KIRCHMAYR (eds), *Industrie und Zwangsarbeit*, Innsbruck 2003.

²⁶ U. HERBERT, *Fremdarbeiter*, pp. 229-233; A. HEUSLER, *Ausländereinsatz*, pp. 423-425.

²⁷ A part of the latest census figures has been published recently, M. SPOERER, *Die NS-Zwangsarbeiter im Deutschen Reich. Eine Statistik vom 30. September 1944 nach Arbeitsamtsbezirken*, in «Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte», 49, 2001, pp. 665-684.

²⁸ U. HERBERT, *Fremdarbeiter*, p. 430.

tion camp inmates and Soviet POWs²⁹. A puzzling result of that research is the relatively high survival rate of the so-called «Eastern workers», which – despite their miserable plight – was somewhere around 90% (excluding those who were sent to the concentration camps). However, a 10% death toll was still far more than that experienced by all other civilian forced laborer groups, and six times the mortality of German workers of the same age³⁰.

5. *Forced labor in the occupied territories*

Since the democratic transformation of Eastern Europe, an increasing number of important studies covers forced labor within these countries. Starting already in the 1960s, several Polish authors published serious studies about forced labor in occupied Poland. In the 1990s German and American historians joined them. These authors focus their research on the Holocaust, but take increasing interest in the deployment of Jewish labor outside the concentration camps³¹. Very little research has been done on the forced work of non-Jewish residents in the occupied territories³². Recently a large research project was begun at the University of Bochum under the auspices of Klaus Tenfelde. This project is directed at forced labor in the hard-coal mining industry both in Germany and in the occupied territories, especially France, Belgium, Poland, and the Soviet Union³³.

6. *An agenda for future research*

The last two sections lead over to what we do not yet know on forced labor under the Nazis. Nobody has the slightest idea how many non-Germans were coerced to work for German public or private bodies

²⁹ M. SPOERER - J. FLEISCHHACKER, *Forced Laborers*; M. SPOERER - J. FLEISCHHACKER, *The Compensation of Nazi Germany's Forced Laborers: Demographic Findings and Political Implications*, in «Population Studies», 56, 2002, pp. 5-21.

³⁰ M. SPOERER - J. FLEISCHHACKER, *Forced Laborers*. This result is corroborated by the casualty estimates of P. POLIAN, *Die Deportation der Ostarbeiter im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, in A. GESTRICH - G. HIRSCHFELD - H. SONNABEND (eds), *Ausweisung und Deportation. Formen der Zwangsmigration in der Geschichte*, Stuttgart 1995, pp. 115-140, here p. 134.

³¹ See footnote no. 17.

³² For an overview, see M. SPOERER, *Zwangsarbeit*, pp. 37-86.

³³ http://www.ruhr-uni-bochum.iga/isb/frameset_isb.htm (April 30.2003).

outside the borders of the Reich, and we are largely ignorant on their conditions of life and work.

Those who could return to their home each night when their work was done might not have faced the same humiliating conditions of life and work as those deported to Germany. But what about forced civilian laborers deported within their home country, or to another country occupied by the Germans, and who had to bear a miserable life in camps?

We have little information on Soviet citizens deported to work units in Norway or Hungarian Jews deported to Ukraine, and know next to nothing about French citizens deported to Poland, or Soviet citizens deported within their country, just to give some examples. The number and fate of forced laborers in German-occupied Europe is, in my view, the largest gap in the field. If we turn to the conditions inside Germany we profit from the fact that – now – there is hardly another episode in German history that has been so intensively researched as the topic of forced labor in the Third Reich. For dozens, presumably hundreds of municipalities we have local accounts. However, there are still gaps. A quite prominent one is that we know very little about the conditions of life and work of foreign laborers from the Balkans and the Baltic states. How many of them were volunteers? Were workers from axis countries treated according to their privileged legal position, or did their fate resemble that of the other so-called «Slavic subhumans»? Consider, for example, the fate of civilian workers from Croatia. Croats were formally citizens of a friendly country, but many inhabitants of the newly formed Independent State of Croatia were not ethnic Croats, for example Serbs (the so-called «Pravoslavs») who were deported to Germany in the framework of ethnic cleansing programs or antipartisan measures.

Another point of interest is the economics of forced labor. Earlier research simply assumed that foreign laborers were cheap³⁴. In this general formulation, this view has been revised by recent research³⁵. Nobody doubts

³⁴ F. PINGEL, *Häftlingszwangsarbeit. Zum Verhältnis von Profit, Produktion und Rassenideologie in der nationalsozialistischen Wirtschaft*, in *Deutsche Wirtschaft*, pp. 141-152; T. KUCZYNSKI, *Entschädigungsansprüche für Zwangsarbeit im «Dritten Reich» auf der Basis der damals erzielten zusätzlichen Einnahmen und Gewinne*, in «1999. Zeitschrift für Sozialgeschichte des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts», 15, 2000, pp. 15-63.

³⁵ M. SPOERER, *Profitierten Unternehmen*; C. RAUH-KÜHNE, *Hitler's Hebler? Unternehmerprofite und Zwangsarbeiterlöhne*, in «Historische Zeitschrift», 275, 2002, pp. 1-55; J. NEANDER, *Wie «profitabel» waren KZ-Häftlinge wirklich? Versuch einer Annäherung* (unpublished manuscript).

that most German firms preferred employing foreigners to scaling back production, but the issue of how profitable forced labor actually was remains open. Another question is what role forced labor would have had in a German-controlled Europe. Did German firms plan to continue the use of conscripts and deportees after the *Endsieg*?

An extremely delicate question is that of foreign mothers' children. Only recently have gender issues found interest in the work on forced labor. From that research, it emerges that female forced workers were twice exploited: as workers and as women³⁶. The cruelest aspect in this regard was probably the treatment of Eastern European workers' babies. From scattered evidence we know that the mortality among babies of Eastern workers and Poles, who had to be held in special baby camps while their parents were at work, was extremely high. The figure of casualties could be as high as tens of thousands. Moreover, if a newborn's phenotype was «Aryan», it was released for adoption by German parents, while the East European mother would be told that her child had perished³⁷. The German public seems not to be aware that probably several thousand German citizens born between 1943 and 1945 are descendants of East European forced laborers. This alone indicates that the issue of forced labor in Nazi Germany is far more topical than many seem to believe.

A last point I would like to make is that we lack studies which allow to put the Nazi forced labor system into a comparative framework. Recently, I tried to find (German, English, or French language) literature on forced labor in Japan during World War II, on forced labor in World War I, or even before. The result was disappointing. Not that the Japanese in World War II or the Germans in World War I or others would not have made use of forced foreign labor, both from civilians and POWs. Yet, it seems that only the Nazis' forced labor system has caught the interest of historians. Let us hope that this changes soon.

³⁶ See A. SCHÄFER, *Zwangsarbeiter und NS-Rassenpolitik: russische und polnische Arbeitskräfte in Württemberg 1939-1945*, Stuttgart 2000, pp. 131-173; G. HAUCH, *Zwangsarbeiterinnen und ihre Kinder*.

³⁷ B. VÖGEL, «Entbindungsheim für Ostarbeiterinnen». Braunschweig, Broitzemer Straße 200, Hamburg 1989; R. HRABAR, *Die Zwangsarbeit der Frauen im Dritten Reich und das Schicksal ihrer Kinder*, in «Studia Historiae Oeconomicae», 20, 1993, pp. 181-194; R. REITER, *Tötungsstätten für ausländische Kinder im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Zum Spannungsverhältnis von kriegswirtschaftlichem Arbeitseinsatz und nationalsozialistischer Rassenpolitik in Niedersachsen*, Hanover 1993; G. SCHWARZE, *Kinder, die nicht zählten. Ostarbeiterinnen und ihre Kinder im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Essen 1997.