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RUHR COAL MINERS AND HITLER'S WAR

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RUHR COAL MINERS AND HITLER'S WAR*

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* The author would like to acknowledge the generous assistance of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and to thank in particular Professor Dietmar Petzina, Ruhruniversitaet Bochum, his Betreuner as a Fellow of it.

"It must be emphasized," said Reichsminister Albert Speer at the Linz armaments meeting of 24 June 1944, "that coal is the basis for everything necessary in war."¹ For Hitler's war it was indeed. Apart from the customary uses, it had to compensate for the Reich's petroleum deficit. More than nine-tenths of the Reich's 1937 energy consumption was derived from coal as opposed, for instance, to slightly less than half in the United States. The synthetics industries sponsored by the Four Year Plan were, not surprisingly, predicated on the consumption of coal as a raw material. Coal was also normally the largest German export commodity by value and therefore critical as a source of precious foreign exchange earnings. Coal fueled the German war effort itself to an extent which seemed to the economists of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey altogether disproportionate.²

It is, then, obvious that after 1937 a break, or even a sharp decline, in German coal output, 70% of which was normally mined in the Ruhr Valley (Ruhrgebiet), would have had catastrophic consequences for Hitler's strategy of aggression. Excessive demand for coal did in fact give rise to a chronic crisis situation from that year until the end of the war. Temporary reductions in coke consumption had to be edicted in Spring 1939 to ease shortages. Coal supply became a matter of critical urgency in the winters of 1941-1942 and 1942-1943. The breakdown in railroad transportation beginning in May 1944 resulted in coal shortages which eventually crippled the war economy. Coal

production, on the other hand, never became a bottleneck in it. The Ruhr coal industry operated at record levels from 1937 on, with output in that year of approximately 127 million T, 4 million T above the previous high of 1929. Output was virtually the same the following year, then rose to 129 million T in 1940-1941 and 1941-1942, and in 1942-1943 reached an historic high of 131.2 million T. For the calendar year 1943 it was 135 million T. The declines thereafter were due to enemy action.

The record outputs of 1937-1943 represent a remarkable feat. They occurred without benefit of new technologies, significant capital investment, or additions to the German labor force (which in fact decreased by 45,000 men during these years) but rather entirely by dint of more thorough utilization of it. Twenty-four work days per month was the rule in 1937, 1938, and to August 1939, when for the first time since World War I, twenty-seven were worked. From then until the end of the war, twenty-six days per month was the norm. On 1 April 1939, work hours were raised from nine per day to nine and three-quarters, with a total "shift-time" (Schichtzeit), including entry and exit, of ten and one-half hours.³ The output increases also involved a significant "upgrading" of labor skills, and in this particular sense: during the war itself tens of thousands of German miners (Hauer) transformed themselves from production workers to supervisors of the slave laborers brought in to do menial labor in the pits. The example of Ruhr coal, in short, lends credence to Speer's remarks of 9 June 1944 before the

magnates of Ruhr heavy industry: "This 'armaments miracle,' which has enabled us to achieve further production increases in the face of mounting serial attacks has, as its most important presupposition, the soldierly bearing of our German workers."⁴

But how is it to be explained? The historical study of labor relations under national socialism is still in its infancy, and may well have been set off on the wrong foot by the man whose influence utterly overshadows it. Timothy Mason's 173 page introduction to Arbeiterklasse und Volksgemeinschaft,⁵ the most recent of his voluminous writings on the subject, presents a large number of highly theoretical arguments in support of the proposition that "class conflict" was the "fundamental reality" of German life during the Third Reich and therefore central to labor relations as well. Ruhr coal provides a good place to look for it. In many parts of the world coal districts have provided classic scenes of labor-management confrontation, and the period 1933-1945 is no exception. British coal production fell from 231 million T. in 1939 to 184 million T in 1944, average daily manshift output of face workers from 3.00 T to 2.70 T. These results occurred in spite of an increase of 11% in the amount of coal cut mechanically. Industrial relations, poor at the war's outbreak, worsened steadily during it. In 1939 612,000 man-days were lost to "industrial stoppages" and daily absenteeism was at a rate of 6.4%. In 1944 the corresponding figures increased to 2,495,000 and 13.6%. In the United States, wildcat striking began in January 1943 and continued through

November of that year. As many as 500,000 workers were involved. These events had no counterpart in the Ruhr, where no organized resistance or even statistically perceptible acts of individual sabotage took place. "Class conflict," while in some sense doubtless present, had no measurable effect on coal production.

Hitler's vaunted Volksgemeinschaft, on the other hand, was, at least at the mines, a palpable sham. "Labor idealism," such as nazi propaganda had hoped to inspire, was conspicuous by its absence.⁶ The influence of the Party and its ancillaries was in fact slight. This circumstance should cause little surprise. Under Hitler, industry, in return for supporting the aims of the regime, was allowed to run its own affairs. So-called "industrial self-administration" (industrieller Selbstverwaltung) was the rule, and labor relations were no exception to it. The main enactments of the regime echoed its express desires: strikes were outlawed, unions disappeared, and wages were frozen. In addition, the Third Reich gave management an opportunity to inculcate labor with its own philosophy, namely, that work itself is the supreme virtue, and production all that counts. The record Ruhr coal outputs achieved between 1937 and 1943 can be taken as evidence that it succeeded in the effort.

Hitler led Germany into war without benefit of workable mobilization policies for either coal or labor. Coal planning, in any meaningful sense of the word, was simply absent. "Unfortunately," said Speer, "we did not pay sufficient attention to coal production before the war. We built up coal-devouring

industries such as chemicals but presumed that coal output at pre-war levels would do."⁷ The Ruhr mines were virtually overlooked in the investment programs of the Four Year Plan.⁸ There was not even an adequate mechanism to allocate the insufficient amounts that could be produced. The regulatory machinery set up in 1919 was simply allowed to fall into disuetude. The appointment in early 1940 of Paul Walter as Coal Commissar represented the single, and belated, attempt to impose central control over allocation and production. It had, however, to be abandoned in failure a year later. Reichsvereinigung Kohle (RVK) was then set up to fill the breach. It was an industry-run affair, a confirmation of sorts that it alone was in a position to manage the coal problems arising from the war.

Labor mobilization, although the subject of much theoretical planning, faced insurmountable institutional handicaps. One approach had to be dismissed from the outset. General labor conscription---in any case normally a wartime measure---was recognized as being politically risky as well as administratively unworkable. Labor allocation through the market was also extremely difficult because of the wage freezes in effect after April 1934. Expedients therefore had to be adopted to deal with the labor shortages. Promotions of a purely nominal character provided one means of granting "unofficial" wage increases. The Price Commissioner did grant them officially in a few especially pressing cases, but the procedures of his office were too cumbersome to be used often. Critical cases normally gave rise to

directive restraints on labor mobility and compulsory transfers (Dienstverpflichtung). The wage freezes also caused a deep and pervasive employee morale problem, for they deprived wage and salary earners of their "rightful share" in the national income increases. It actually declined from 56.6 in 1929 to 51.8 in 1939.⁹ Nazi labor organizations in fact never had more than a shadow existence. There was, to be sure, no shortage of them. Their names litter the history of the Third Reich: Nationalsozialistische Betriebszellenorganisation, Treuhaender der Arbeit, and, above, all, Deutsche Arbeitsfront (DAF)---the creation of Robert Ley. Ley was a master bureaucrat: author of the Volkswagenprojekt, temporary administrator (through his stand-in, Walter) of the coal industry, and chief houser and feeder of foreign slave laborers. Because his organization could not bargain, however, its influence in industrial relations was limited to propagandizing. Its usefulness as an instrument of labor mobilization (as for instance was the case with British unions during both World Wars) was nil. As for Ley, his memory is associated with little more than a string of joke-words: Kraft durch Freude, Schoenheit der Arbeit, Leistungswettkampfe, Musterbetriebe, and Werkspiele.

The Bergassessoren (operators) were not well-positioned to make good the deficiencies in coal mobilization policy. Their conservative, indeed rigid, frame of mind if it ruled out (on patriotic grounds) opposition to Hitler, also made cooperation with him difficult. As was the case during Weimar, the Ruhr

coal industry fought a running battle with the government in the years after 1933. It concerned the terms of the sales syndicate merger with the Saar and Aachen districts, compensation payments for exports, railroad rates and changes in them, sale prices to Four Year Plan projects, cartel pricing policy, delivery priorities, allocations to the mines, and labor questions generally. Ruhr coal was, if anything, the least popular branch of industry with the policy-makers in Berlin, and the only one ever to have been put under commissarial administration. Its official representatives, the Referent in the Bergbauabteilung of the Reichswirtschaftsministerium and, after June 1941, RVK Chief Pleiger received harsh treatment not only at the hands of Speer and Kehrl but from third-raters such as General von Hanneken. Demands for the special consideration appropriate to its problems received, on the whole, short shrift.¹⁰

Labor constituted the biggest portion of the coal mobilization problem. At prevailing technologies of "partial mechanization," it comprised some three-fifths of total production costs, the highest proportion for any branch of industry. The poor financial condition of Ruhr coal ruled out a shift to "full mechanization" such as occurred after World War II. It required not only the introduction of new machinery---mechanical cutter-scrapers, loaders, and conveyors---but the widening of shafts and tunnels and the construction at the surface of more powerful steam generators. The effort to introduce "full mechanization" step-by-step, begun in the late-1920's with the Schraemmaschine,

had proved by the Depression to be a costly failure, and the number of such machines in use actually declined thereafter.¹¹ During the 1930's gains in both production and productivity could in fact only be made by adding to the size of the labor force, reassignment of working places (Abbaubetriebspunkte), intensified exploitation, and "upgrading" of skills. Each of these approaches was adopted at different times and with different degrees of success. The reduction of Abbaubetriebspunkte had in fact begun during the Depression, which brought a drop from 12,500 in 1929 to 3,669 by the end of 1934, and continued, albeit at a reduced rate, until 1938, with 3,280 in operation.¹² This concentration process is probably behind the improvements in man-shift productivity from 1,271 kg in 1928, a record year, to 1,547 kg in 1937. To increase output significantly above the theoretical "full operating capacity" level of 125 million T per year required additions to the mine labor force. Miner recruitment therefore became the critical problem facing the industry after 1937. For failure in this respect left open--- given existing political realities---only two alternatives. The first of them, to overwork the existing mine labor force, could only provide a temporary solution to the coal shortage problem. The second, the more or less forcible employment of foreign labor, was fraught with unknown risks for both security and the production process. Its ultimate success was due to a possibility unforeseen by the regime, the operators or the miners themselves: the "upgrading" of their skills to include

responsibility for labor management as well as production.

An uphill battle had to be waged to step up the recruitment of mine labor. Coal mining, never an attractive career, was becoming less so. The work itself was physically demanding, dirty, and hazardous. The pneumatic pick (Abbauhammer) had added significantly to its hardships. From 1925 to 1945 some 85-90% of Ruhr coal was mined annually with this bone-jarring instrument, the highest rate of any coal mining district in the world. Its use joined the breakneck pace of mechanized operations with the heavy muscle strain of manual labor, caused severe daily aches and pains and was, over the long run, physically and psychologically debilitating. The industry held it responsible for destroying miner tradition, a reflection of which was seen in the shrinkage of the Stammebelegschaft* after 1925. Miners, numerous surveys confirmed, counselled their sons to pursue any career but their own.¹³

Pay and benefits had, moreover, ceased to serve as incentives to entry into the mining profession. Traditionally, the industry had been more concerned with retention than recruitment inasmuch as mine labor is artisanal in character and requires years of on-the-job training. Thus the development long before

*The term, which lacks any English equivalent, means literally "trunk employees," those, in other words, working on a more or less permanent basis and including supervisors (Steiger), technical personnel, as well as most face-workers (Hauer).

World War I of special miner welfare institutions: the Knappschaften for medical and accident insurance, the Bergmannssiedlungen to provide subsidized housing near the pit-head, and so on. The industry recognized, at the same time, that the harsh nature of the miner's work necessitated paying him at the highest prevailing rates for skilled labor. The trends of the interwar period, however, worked against the effectiveness of both parts of this compensation policy. State insurance benefits were, first of all, extended throughout industry, thus ending the special attractiveness of the arrangements in coal. The industry was, at the same time, required to pay into the new system while remaining saddled with the high overhead costs of the old one. This fact, together with the falling yield per ton of coal after 1928, made it increasingly difficult for it to grant pay increases. Miner wage primacy had all but disappeared by 30 April 1934 when wages, along with prices, were frozen.¹⁴ The industry's situation did not fundamentally change after the seizure of power. Although sales increased, yields did not. Ruhr coal's returns on capital remained the lowest of any major branch of industry, and its earnings, if the operators are to be believed, barely sufficed to cover amortizations.¹⁵ These facts perhaps explain the extraordinary vehemence of the industry's opposition to the regime's one serious effort to deal with the severe coal shortages felt in Winter 1938-1939, which resulted in the publication on 1 April 1939 of the Verordnung des Beauftragten für den Vierjahresplan zur Erhöhung der Foerderleistung.

und des Leistungslohnes im Bergbau. It included a productivity bonus in addition to extending the work day forty-five minutes. Although the impact of the measure differed somewhat from mine to mine, most Betriebsführer held that it provided windfalls to the fortunate few and demoralized the rest.¹⁶ The increase of 15-16% it brought in total Hauer earnings could not, however, have been much of an incentive. The fact of the matter is that the skewed supply situation resulting from price controls had effectively immobilized much of his purchasing power. Miners complained that they needed food but could only buy refrigerators!¹⁷ Extra hours spent on the job also meant correspondingly fewer to devote to income supplementing. Miners normally devoted the bulk of their leisure time to raising vegetables and domestic animals for personal consumption. The catastrophic fall in pig-raising (Schweinehaltung) by 1939 is but one index of decline in miner living standards.¹⁸ Thus nominal earnings became increasingly irrelevant as a guide to standards of living.

Mine employment, finally, lacked social prestige and offered little opportunity for social mobility. The industry neither expanded nor evolved technologically between 1925 and 1945. Promotions were comparatively infrequent. Miners were subject, moreover, to a quasi-military form of discipline in which harshness of language and even physical punishment were everyday, if much resented, realities. Prospective brides ranked coal mining as the very least desirable of careers for would-be mates. The results of an August 1938 survey conducted by Arbeitsamt Bochum

should have been predictable. Of the 970 Bochum school-leavers whose fathers were miners, only 114 would consider entering the pits. Of 577 essays written, only 23 indicated a willingness to do so. Of those remaining, 297 described a mining career as too dangerous; 239 as ill-paid; 150 as too physically demanding; 157 as uninteresting; 86 reported adverse reactions from accidents to friend and family; 103 objections of father; 224 fear of health hazards; 28 aversion to low status; 75 concern with inadequate benefits; and the rest "personal unsuitability."¹⁹

The recruitment efforts of 1937-1939 ended in dismal failure. It proved impossible to compete in a tight labor market against the Ruhr armaments industry, the Reichswerke Hermann Goering, and even the Autobahn and Westwall construction jobs of Organisation Todt. The underground labor force increased in size from approximately 290,000 to only 310,000 in these years. At the same time, an alarming number of key technicians left.²⁰ Worse, there was an overall decline in the quality of the labor force. Reports on the calibre of miner-recruits are simply appalling. To cite a typical example: "[School] counsellors are the most important persons directing youths to the mines. Most come, however, in the face of express opposition from parents, as well as over their own protests, and are, in addition, predominantly young persons whose inferior capabilities are such that they cannot otherwise be employed. ...Subsequent entries of young people from other professions have become unusually rare and are normally due to failure."²¹ The age structure of the labor

force worsened at the same time. As of June 1939, the 14-21 age group was but 52% of its theoretically normal size; the 22-25 age group, 29%; the 26-30 age group, 27%. The older age groups were oversized: 31-35, 141%; 36-40, 158%; 41-45, 114%; etc.²²

The preponderance of old men naturally grew during the war. As for the health of the mine labor force, it had visibly deteriorated as early as summer 1938. According to one Dr. Steckelberg, whose opinion is echoed in a plethora of reports compiled at this time, "The excessive demands being made on the physical strength of the miners cannot continue for any length of time without running the danger that, soon, not only the health of the individual but the productive process itself will be disturbed."²³ The operators generally agreed with medical opinion. At a meeting of 8 October 1938 summoned to deal with the problem of miner health, "Herr Kocker (Harpen Mine) mentioned that many hard-working people had come to him to plea that they were too exhausted to work any more. He could not believe that these people were 'faking it' in order to be excused from work but were rather really exhausted...He expected, because of the heavy strains being made on miners, that their exhaustion would worsen."²⁴

The strains of the work, when added to the inadequacy of incentives, made miner morale a pressing concern after 1937. It was poor and, if left unchecked, could well have disrupted production. The symptom of it was the phenomenon known as "malingering" (Bummelei). It was a "catch-all" for a wide

range of misbehavior: laziness on the job, unexcused absences from work, and feigned illness. Although often difficult to detect, the usual increase in the number of unexcused absences following paydays and on Mondays was proof positive of its existence. The contagion was not, however, allowed to spread. Rates of both sickness and absence, excused and unexcused, do not differ significantly from those of 1929. On the average day in 1929 5.91% of the work force reported sick and another 1.55% were absent; The corresponding figures for 1938 were 5.85% and 1.69%.²⁵ Bummelei indeed infected but a small group, the long-term unemployed hired after 1936.

Management was mainly responsible for having quarantined it. No other authority was in a position to have done so. By 1937 DAF had been effectively jockeyed out of power at the mines. The process was by no means easy. DAF had a special concern with Ruhr mine workers who, in addition to comprising the largest employee group in the Reich (and one out of every five employees in the Ruhr), were particularly hard-hit by the Depression. Total mine employment, 375,711 in 1929, had reached only 235,329 by 1939. As late as August of that year, the industry was unable to provide even twenty-one work days a month which, in the view of Gauleiter Terboven, was not enough to provide a living wage. He therefore launched a "large-scale emergency relief action" (grosszuegige Hilfsaktion) to rectify the situation.²⁶ The political reports (Stimmungsberichte) of Gau Essen for 1934 and 1935 depicted miner morale as singularly poor. DAF

therefore took special pains to provide spiritual sustenance. In Ley's May Day speech of 1935, he likened the heroism of miners to that of seafarers, and promised to introduce an "Ehrentag des Bergarbeiters." The press organ of Gau Essen, Der Ruhr Arbeiter, contained, as a regular feature, a column addressed, supposedly, to his special needs, "Hier Spricht der Bergmann!"²⁷ The operators nonetheless regarded all such efforts as presumptuous, meddlesome, and in general, Bergfremd.* While by no means averse to using DAF as agent or intermediary, they steadfastly opposed its efforts to establish an organizational presence at the mines. The attitude of Bergassessor Kellermann of Gutehoffnungshuette was characteristic. As Vorsitzender of the Rheinisch-Westfaelisches Kohlensyndikat after 1935, he was also the leading figure in the industry. He refused, among other things, to join the DAF committee on professional ethics (Berufsmoral), place a ban on the hiring of non-DAF members, require payment of dues to it or allow for their collection on company time, and provide the Vertrauensrat (works council) with either office or telephone. He objected to the summoning of factory formations (Betriebsappelle) as well as participation in May Day parades, social drinking with employees (Kamaradschaftsabende), factory competitions (Musterbetriebe), "skills battles" (Leistungswettkampfe), and factory psychodramas (Werkspiele). As Chief of RWKS he even refused to have any direct dealings with DAF.²⁸ He delegated responsibility for "social questions" to an operator with good Party connections, Ernst Tengemann of Hibernia Mine, and the latter deserves credit

* ("alien to the mines")

for having, on the whole, kept DAF at "arm's length" and, when necessary, putting it in the service of the industry.

DAF was particularly helpful in eliminating political dissidence at the mine, both "left" and "right" wing varieties. Thanks to its interventions, the Vertrauensrat at Concordia Mine was, for instance, made subservient to the production chief (Betriebsfuehrer). Vertrauensraete, successors to Betriebsraete, were particularly important in the coal industry because of the group piecework basis for wage calculation (Gedinge). It worked somewhat as follows: a miner (Hauer) normally belonged to a work gang assigned a specific job for which a production quota would be set. Premiums were paid for exceeding it, penalties for shortfalls. Much, however, depended on the bounties or niggardliness of nature---Bergmannsglueck. Confidence in the equitability of rate-setting was therefore critical to work morale. The Betriebsraete existed in part to air grievances connected with it, and the Vertrauensraete continued to serve this function. It could also serve as a conduit for management policy. The Concordia Betriebsrat elections of April 1933, the last ones for twelve years, had mixed results. The communists received 17.4% of the vote; the Social Democratic "Alter Verband," 23.5%; the Christlicher Verband, 34.5%; and the nazis, 24.5%.²⁹ The elimination of communist and socialist representatives from the Betriebsrat---a foregone conclusion---required only the order of the Betriebsfuehrer. The nazi-workers, organized as units of NSBO, presented management with a more severe problem, for they

demanded the right to make all appointments to it. Betriebs-
fuehrer Meuthen eventually solicited the intervention of
Parteigenosse Staubach of Gaufachamt Bergbau who, after a certain
amount of dithering, denounced the nazi workers as "mutinous" and
expelled them from the Vertrauensrat. The Betriebsfuehrer subse-
quently set up a new one composed of "conservatives" and obedient
nazis.³⁰ Cooperation between management and even the reconstituted
Vertrauensrat was often difficult. In two particulars, however,
it proved to be very significant indeed: in suppressing Bummelei
and integrating foreign slave labor into the production process.

The initiative for dealing with Bummelei, at Concordia as
elsewhere, came from management. The problem itself had been
anticipated as the inevitable consequence of the return to work
of the long-term unemployed. Concordia's annual report for 1937
noted that, over the year,

"The employee structure has been fundamentally altered.
Instead of working with people who have been schooled
and trained to work together, we must make do with
persons who often have been unemployed for six or seven
years and have become unaccustomed to work. Many of them
are embittered and have no comprehension whatsoever of
the idea, incorporated in the Labor Regulation Law, of
cooperation between leadership and followership. It is
evident that here only one thing can help, a painful
process of education. But the fast pace of work leaves
no time for it!"³¹

Because manpower was in short supply and work incentives were
inadequate, little could, in fact, be done to deal with the pro-
blem of Bummelei. At first, pay was docked at Concordia:
one-half day for the initial offense, a full day for the second.
The third one was to result in dismissal. These penalties had

no effect.³² Indeed, "The recently hired people were often glad to be sacked once again."³³ In July 1937 Dir. Dechamps of Concordia succeeded, through the Bezirksgruppe, in convincing the Treuhaender der Arbeit to deduct unexcused absences from vacation time. By the end of that year, however, it had in any case ceased to exist in all but name. And the practice of withholding heavy labor rations (Schwerstarbeiterzulage) from Bummelanten proved to be useless for the obvious reason that it reduced physical strength. Thus recourse had to be made to exemplary punishment. Summonings before Betriebsappelle having proved ineffective, Concordia's management, through Pg. Staubach of Gaufachamt Bergbau, enlisted the aid of the local Gestapo agent, Lewinski. On 4 December 1939, members of the Vertrauensrat singled out to him supposedly "notorious malingerers" as the latter entered the shower rooms (Waschkaue) after work. Several of them were, as intended, shipped off to Dachau.³⁴ Doubtless similar individual actions took place at other mines before disciplinary procedures were standardized in March 1940.³⁵ From then on, incidents of Bummelei were to be referred immediately to DAF which, if it so desired, could pass them on to the "responsible state-police office" (staatspolizeiliche Leitstelle) with a recommendation of mere "warning," ten to twenty-one day detention at an "education camp," or immediate referral to a Konzentrationslager.³⁶ Both managements and Vertrauensraete generally agreed, however, that these procedures were hopelessly bureaucratic and altogether inadequate. At the meeting of the

Gutehoffnungshuette Vertrauensrat of 26 August 1941, the Production Chief, Lennings, noted that he

"... could not do much to suppress disloyal behavior on the job. Experience has demonstrated that the means available do not suffice even to deal with notorious malingerers. We've got to force the authorities to intervene more decisively. Notorious malingerers must be taken out of the factories and given long sentences in forced labor camps in order to prevent their bad examples from further spoiling the good workers."³⁷

The 1941 annual report of Concordia, to cite another example, stated baldly that

"The official measures against malingerers have failed completely. They involve overly complicated procedures and every imaginable layer of the bureaucracy. When it takes weeks to punish malingering, punishment cannot be effective. Factory discipline---the only real remedy---suffers from the bureaucratic system rather than being strengthened by it."³⁸

Such criticism notwithstanding, the ineffectiveness of the Gestapo was due to the patent impossibility of imposing direct supervision over a work force of several hundred thousand men. Wartime attempts to introduce more severe discipline were therefore exercises in futility. As Dir. Tengemann interjected at one of them: Why discuss the use of re-education camps (Erziehungslager) when the wood was not available to build them?³⁹ Discipline, and production itself, indeed depended on little more than the cooperation of labor with management in maintaining it.

It was equally important with regard to foreign labor. The hiring of miners of non-German nationality had a long and honorable tradition in the Ruhr and would have provided one obvious solution to the problem of labor shortage after 1937.* Berlin,

*Another being the recruitment of female German labor ... a political near-impossibility.

however, never seriously considered it, doubtless because the operators opposed the use of all foreign labor. Compelling arguments could be made against it. Extra costs would result from training, not to mention the construction and maintenance of separate facilities. The political risks involved seemed self-evident. Experience with dienstverpflichtete (drafted) miners from the Saar and Silesia, moreover, hardened opposition to the use of labor from outside the Ruhr. The Saar miners, who were shifted there at the outbreak of the war, proved to be an administrative "headache": they complained of "depression," were less productive than local workers, had to be given non-critical jobs, complained about food, and actually demanded maid service in the barracks. Of the 325 originally engaged at Gutehoffnungshuette, only 24 remained in employment by March 1940, the rest having left for Fulda, where a colony of displaced Saar workers had formed.⁴⁰ The "Ost-West Aktion" of Spring 1941, occasioned by a railroad tie-up in Silesia, brought some 15,000 miners from there to the Ruhr but caused such bitterness that Arbeitsamt Kattowitz (Employment Office Kattowitz) ordered their return, and "under police protection if necessary." The complaints of the Silesians were legion: inadequate pay, improper assignments, lack of separation allowances, housing in barracks, and "treatment as non-Germans."⁴¹ The transfer of Aachen miners to the Ruhr, a sensible proposition from the standpoint of man-shift productivity, was considered but dropped by the Wirtschaftsgruppe* in Spring 1942.⁴² The German occupation of

* Business Group Coal Mining Industries

Belgium and North France made possible the one-time recruitment of 16,402 unemployed miners. They were as productive as their Ruhr counterparts but, thanks to special separation benefits, earned slightly more and were therefore resented. Within a year, one-third had left.⁴³ Experience with DAF-recruited Italian labor was, by all odds, the worst. Although hand-picked and supervised on the job by representatives of the Confederazione Fascista, they proved, in the words of Paul Pleiger, to be "utterly worthless at the mines." Of the approximately 5,000 recruited in May and June of 1940, one-half simply walked off the job over the following eight months. A second action, of April 1941, brought in another 8,000, nine-tenths of whom soon similarly "disappeared." In October 1941 the industry requested the repatriation of the remainder.⁴⁴ It also rejected out-of-hand offers by both the Wehrmacht and the Labor Ministry to provide low-cost Polish mine labor. It neither agreed to, nor had advance knowledge of, the plan launched by Labor Plenipotentiary Fritz Sauckel to draft several hundred thousand slave laborers out of POW camps and from occupied Europe.

Their influx into the mines presented management with what, at first, seemed like insuperable administrative problems. The arrivals were predominantly Soviet POW's, untrained and largely illiterate. A substantial number of them were too ill to be successfully "pumped up" (aufgepappelt) for heavy mine labor, and so had to be allowed to die or languish in detention camps, or be directed for employment elsewhere. By December 1942,

nonetheless, some 40,000 slave laborers were at work in Ruhr mines, and the figure doubled over the next twelve months.⁴⁵ To house this new component of the labor force, horse barracks (Pferdestallbaracken) had to be built, four per camp, each of them surrounded by two tons of accordion wire. DAF-run guard units (Wachmannschaft)---whose brutality, corruption, and general incompetence provided the source of many management complaints---were set up to police the encampments. Hilfswachmannschaften,⁴⁶ composed of miners, were set up to do likewise on the job. But policing proved to be a surprisingly easy task: the Soviet slaves, it soon became evident, would work hard if offered a chance by doing so to survive. Employing them productively presented more complicated problems. Simple procedures, at first improvised, were introduced at the mines to teach tool identification by picture and simple German mining terms. After five days of selection, "pumping-up" and instruction, work would normally begin, of course, at the most menial of jobs, "... schnippen, schleppen, kippen, ... Berge klauben,"⁴⁷ as sub-members of German work parties. It thus fell to German Hauer to engage the slave laborers in productive tasks and also to determine, periodically, whether they met the standard necessary to be kept at work. Productivity of less than 50% the German level was cause for referral to a detention center.

German Hauer were generally faithful to the spirit of Labor Plenipotentiary Sauckel's directives regarding the treatment of foreign labor. They called for "... exploitation to the highest

possible extent at the lowest conceivable degree of expenditure" but also expressly forbade "... all actions making...work difficult and unnecessarily unbearable and exceeding the hardships and restrictions [imposed] by the war."⁴⁸ Management initially feared that sympathy towards the slave laborers would undermine authority. Betriebsfuehrer Meuthen of Concordia Mine therefore warned

"All persons who come into direct contact with the Russians...to pay constant attention...to preventing the authority of the German worker from being undermined by false sentimentality (Gefuehlsduselei) since this could endanger the successful employment of them. It is strictly forbidden to give the Russians anything or do favors for them. Whatever is necessary for their successful employment is being handled by the management. Any irregularities involved in traffic with the Russians must be reported at once."⁴⁹

Complaints of mistreatment were, however, more frequent than those of "false sentimentality" (Gefuehlsduselei). A circular of the Bezirksgruppe of 29 January 1943 reported, for instance, that

"Both the Wehrmacht and civil authorities have complained repeatedly that treatment of Russian mine labor leaves much to be desired. Beatings and general roughness continue. Whether above or below ground, humane treatment is completely absent."⁵⁰

German miner complaints about the behavior of the foreign laborers abounded, particularly as, towards the end of the war, discipline slackened:

"The extraordinary off-the-job behavior of the inmates of the Concordia Street Camp (Cola) was also complained about. Our attention was brought to circumstances which are incompatible with orderly camp life. The Sunday afternoon tea parties with female Russian workers (Ostarbeiterrinnen) ...must be controlled more tightly and closely observed."⁵¹

At the root of German miner resentment was the fact that it was more difficult to earn one's wage when working together with unproductive Ostarbeiter. Thus Tengelmann's terse judgment:

"The inclusion of Russians in German work parties has reduced the enthusiasm of our boys to work, not least of all because of their effect on group piecework rates."⁵²

Rates were consequently altered in September 1942 to favor German workers at the expense of the foreign slave laborers:

"To give the German miner an incentive to take a foreigner into his work-party, the foreigner's share should be rated at 5-10% below his estimated productivity. In other words, when a Russian can produce at 50% of the German rate, he should be given a share of 40-50%."⁵³

This measure permitted average miner wages (Hauerdurchschnittsloehne) to be increased from 8.64 RM to 9.40 RM.⁵⁴ The wage table in effect as of 10 January 1944 set the following equivalencies:

<u>Wage rate of same type of German worker</u>	<u>Stalag - share</u>	<u>POW - share</u>
2 - 4	1.50	.50
10 - 12	6.25	1.25
21 - 24	13.50	2.50
30 - 35	20.00	4.00
40 - 45	26.00	5.00
50 - 55	33.00	6.00
60 - 65	40.00	7.00
70 - 75	46.00	8.00 ⁵⁵

In spite of such treatment, "The Russians," Pleiger reported to Zentrale Planung on 25 March 1944, "...are coming along marvelously, especially when we provide them with a bit to eat."⁵⁶

He was not, however, about to deny credit for the production accomplishments in coal to the Ruhr miner: "I would like to emphasize once again," he stated on 28 November 1942, "that they are due almost entirely to the sacrifices of the German miner, first in training [the foreigners], and then by his longer hours."⁵⁷ Thanks, in short, to them---and the seemingly unlimited exploitability of the Russians---it was possible to raise output from 129.2 million T in 1941-1942 to 131.2 million T in 1942-1943, at the same time as the number of Germans employed underground actually decreased from 220,000 to 175,000.⁵⁸

The accomplishments of Ruhr miners between 1937 and 1945 were due to the successful inculcation by management of the notion that the working man should put politics aside and think only about production. It was, of course, the theme of innumerable propaganda messages, such as "Gutehoffnungshuette Wochenspruch 1."

"Wollen wir den Krieg

gewinnen,

ist es Pflicht fuer jedermann,

ganz genau zu ueberlegen

wie man noch mehr leisten kann!"⁵⁹

The receptivity of labor to such messages must be considered, in part, an effect of schooling. The modern German system of technical education, a product of management thinking, in fact dates from the years after 1933. Its intellectual father was Professor Karl Arnhold, whose basic ideas were formulated in the aftermath of the First World War, found prominent business

patrons in the mid-1920's, and were taken over as official policy during the Third Reich. The life purpose of his work was to overcome "class conflict" by instilling "professional pride," or, as he put it, replace "Massenmensch" with "Leistungsmenschen." By 1923 a couple of hundred thousand pupils were enrolled in Berufsschulen of his design, including 20,000 in Bergschulen. Their curricula emphasized integration of coursework into the production process, cooperation with management, practical examinations, no "overschooling," and no "ideological" studies. In 1925 Director Albert Voegler, subsequent Board Chairman of Vereinigte Stahlwerke, set up under Arnhold an industry-financed foundation, DINTA*, to expand the technical education movement. After the seizure of power, Arnhold, who had been in touch with Hitler since 1931, brought DINTA into DAF as the Amt fuer Berufserziehung und Betriebsfuehrung. The result was an effort to launch a national career training program (berufspolitische Planwirtschaft). Arnhold's plans by no means all came to fruition: Hitler's Blitzkrieg strategy, in particular, made a mockery of industrial manpower projections. For the rest, Arnhold's work must be considered successful. In 1935 industry assumed primary responsibility for expanding and standardizing technical education. The Industrie- und Handelskammer supervised it in the discharge of this task. They also set up and administered a new examination procedure for industrial apprentices. Hundreds of thousands of young Germans passed through this system annually in the late 1930's, some 22,000 of them

* Deutsche Institut fuer Arbeitsschulung

through the Bergschulen. The Ruhr coal operators looked to them to provide the nucleus of the Stammbelegschaft---that is to say, productive and reliable workers to serve as a "good example" to the others and, if necessary, enforce it. It must be presumed that they found them.

The history of Ruhr coal compels re-examination of the idea that "class conflict"---if understood in any straightforward sense of the term---provided a brake on Hitler's expansionism. The contrary, if anything, was the case. The record coal outputs from 1937 to 1943 required enormous sacrifices from the shrinking number of aging and exhausted German miners at work underground. By historical standards they achieved the impossible. The regime can, however, take no credit for this accomplishment. It failed equally to plan and inspire, and its interventions into coal matters can justly be characterized as incompetent. The operators did much of the regime's work for it. They failed, of course, to overcome the shortages of manpower which provided the main restraint on increased outputs. They also refused in some cases, while being unable in others, to improve material incentives to those at work. They did, however, manage to stem the erosion of German miner morale and successfully introduce foreign slave labor into the production process. These accomplishments required cooperation, and even some initiative, on the part of German miners. The success of management in enlisting it occurred in an industry which, by all odds, provides a "worst case" in labor relations during the Third Reich. It is, then,

likely that similar results were obtained in more favored branches of it. If so, then they, too, must also be ascribed in part to the effort begun by industry during Weimar but put into practice on a large scale under Hitler to promote "professional pride" (Berufsethos) as a substitute for attachment to socialist doctrine.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 R3/1550 "Rede Reichsminister Speer auf die Rüstungstagung in Linz, 24.6.1944."
- 2 USSBS. The Effects of Strategic Bombing on the German War Economy. Overall Effects Division, October 31, 1945.
- 3 See Statistisches Heft. Produktions- und wirtschaftsstatistische Angaben aus der Montanindustrie. Essen, 1939; 400101305/g "Statistische Angaben aus dem Ruhrkohlenbergbau (Sept., 1943)."; USSBS, op. cit.; Economic Survey of Germany: The Mineral Industries. Foreign Office and Ministry of Economic Warfare. Economic Advisory Branch (Sept. 1944), p. 346.
- 4 R3/1550 "Rede Reichsminister Speer am 9 June 1944 vor Vertretern der Rheinisch- Westfälischen Industrie..."
- 5 (Opladen, 1575); see also Ludolf, Herbst, "Die Krise des NS-Regimes 1938/39. Zu den Themen von Tim Mason, VfZg, 265g. 1978/3 Heft/Juli pp. 347-92.
- 6 As expressed, for instance by Goering: "Wir muessen den Arbeiter teilnehmen lassen an den idealen Guetern, wenn wir seine materielle Lage nicht so schnell in wuensenswerte Weise verbessern koennen. Die Entlohnung ist jetzt noch nicht so weit, wie wir es wuenschen..." (400101303/0 "Ministerialpraesident Goering ueber die Durchfuehrung des Vierjahresplanes," 17.12.1936."
- 7 R3/1550 "Rede... 24.6.1944," op. cit.
- 8 See Dieter Petzina, Autarkiepolitik im Dritten Reich (Stuttgart, 1968).
- 9 John Gillingham, Belgian Business in the Nazi New Order (Gent, Belgium, 1977), p. 16.
- 10 See forthcoming book of author, Ruhr Coal and the Politics of Energy in the Third Reich.
- 11 B.I.O.S. Final Report No. 394 Technical Report on the Ruhr Coalfield v. I, pp. 6, 69-73; Ausschuss zur Untersuchung der Erzeugung und Absatzbedingungen der deutschen Wirtschaft. Die deutsche Kohlenwirtschaft. (Berlin, 1927) Statistisches Heft, op. cit., pp. 116, 118, 120.

- 12 Statistisches Heft, pp. 117, 27, op. cit.
- 13 Die deutsche Kohlenwirtschaft, p. 646, op. cit.; Ausschuß...
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- 14 Gerhard Bry, Wages in Germany, 1871-1945. (Princeton, N.J.,
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23.3.37.
- 15 Statistisches Heft, p. 116, op. cit.
- 16 F26/359 "Akttenotiz über die Sitzung des Beirats der Bezirks-
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"Bericht über die Auswirkung zur Erhöhung der Förder-
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B13/1760 "Vermerk über die Besprechung am 4. März 1941 ...
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to Vögler, 21.10.38."; 400101330/5 Kauert to Buskühl,
24.10.38.
- 17 Bry, p. 260, op. cit.; 400101330/5 "Niederschrift über die
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- 18 B13/1204 "Zur Lage des Bergarbeiters. Denkschrift erstellt
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F26/393 "Niederschrift über die Vertrauensratsitzung,
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- 19 400101330/13 "Arbeitsamt Bochum 6410/4, 23 Aug. 1938."
- 20 400101305/g "Statistische Angaben aus dem Ruhrkohlenbergbau,"
op. cit.
- 21 F26/365 "Zur Nachwuchserwerbung, Bericht von Bergrat
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- 22 F26/365 "Sogemaier an Herrn Mitglieder des Beirats ...
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- 23 B13/1205 "NSDAP Kreisleitung Recklunghausen. Sonderbericht
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- 24 B13/1057 "Aktennotiz über die Besprechung betreffend Krankfeiern und Unfallfeierschichten, 8.10.1938."
- 25 Statistisches Heft, pp. 75, 93, op. cit.; F26/241-1 "Jahresbericht der Concordia Bergbau A.G. für das Geschäftsjahr 1941."
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- 30 F26/390 "Sitzungen des Vertrauensrates," 7.5.34, 2.8.35, 14.12.35, 30.12.35.
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- 33 F26/391 "Aktennotiz über ein Telephongespräch mit dem Kreisobmann Staubach, 21 Nov 1939."
- 34 F26/393 "Niederschriften, Vertrauensratsitzungen" 20.2.39, 13.4.39, 12.5.39, 1.7.39, 14.7.39, 1.11.39; F26/391 "Aktennotiz über ein Telephongespräch mit den Kreisobmann Staubach, 21.11.39."; "...Besprechung mit dem Kreisobmann Staubach, 14.7.39."
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