# Labour

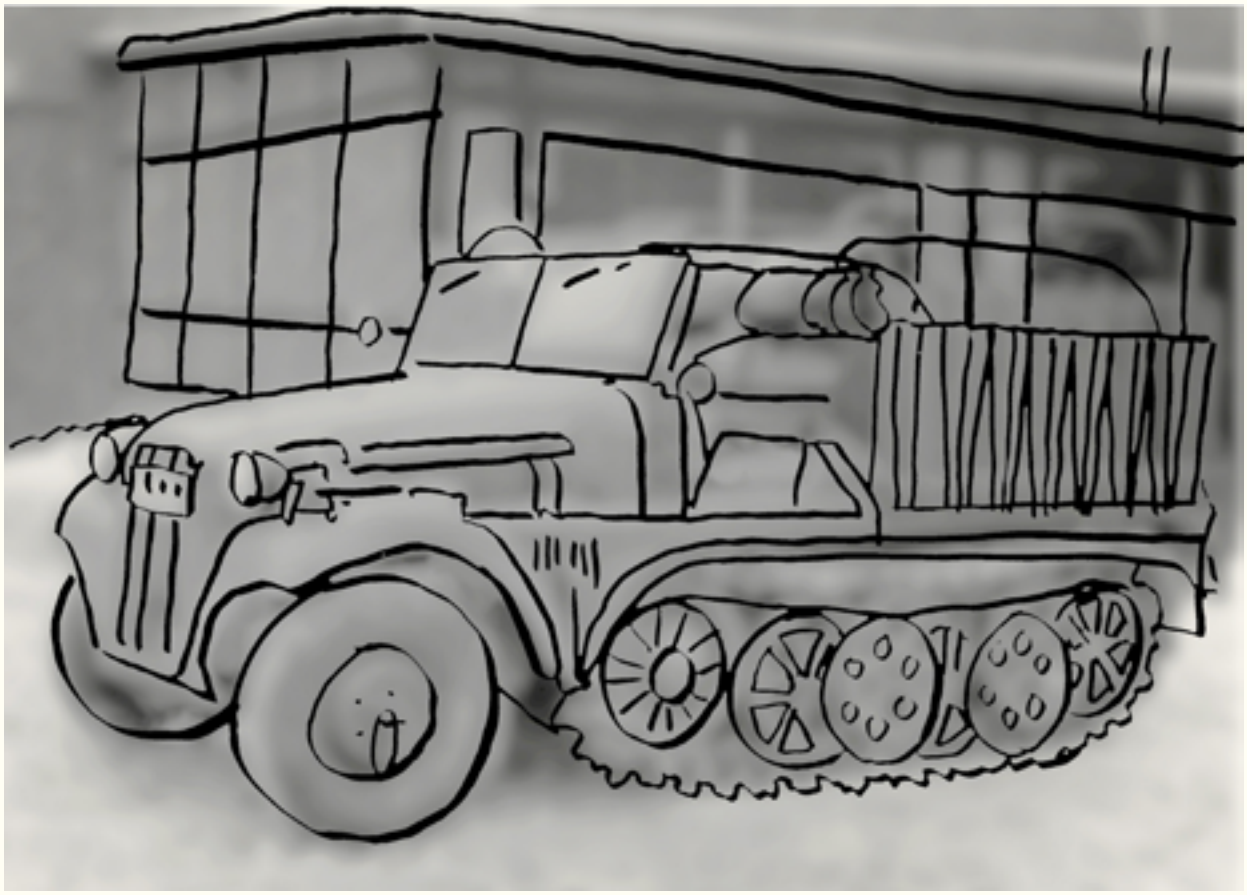
“They brought deportees from the concentration camp and made them work like animals. At 18 degrees below zero I saw these men, dressed in nothing but striped jackets. The jackets were the equivalent of, um ... our pyjamas. They stood closely crowded together; every little while one of them collapsed.”

Roger Echinard, French civilian worker at the Adlerwerke (interview, 2006)

# Labour in production

The inmates worked primarily in the production of heavy three-ton traction vehicles. Many of them operated automated lathes, multi-spindle drills, milling or grinding machines. Others had to carry out welding work. Although severely enfeebled by hunger and imprisonment, they had to lift and transport heavy pieces of machinery. They were generally supposed to work in departments of their own, separated from the civilian forced labourers and the factory employees. However, it was not always possible to maintain that separation.

The inmates often had to operate several machines at once. That increased the stress level and the probability of making errors. Errors, in turn, were often considered sabotage, an offence punishable by death. The work was monotonous and physically strenuous and there were hardly any breaks.



Adlerwerke half-track vehicle for military use, type 3

Source: Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt am Main, W1-14 Nr. 5329

# Labour in the detachments

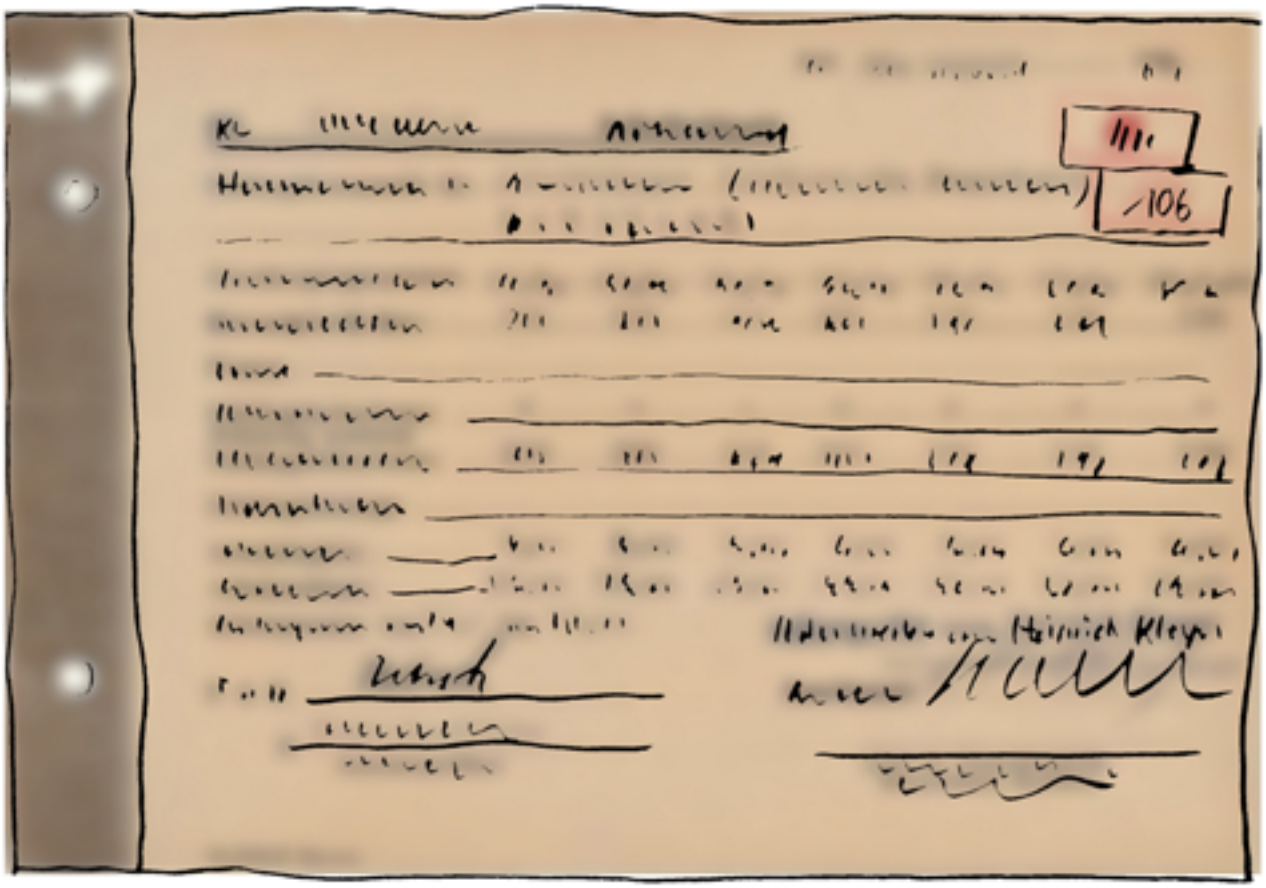
A group of inmates assigned to a particular task was referred to as a “Kommando” (detachment). Many inmates performed labour in “internal camp service”. This included work in the infirmary, the kitchen, the administrative office, and the shoemakers’ workshop.

Yet there were also detachments for cleaning, food transports, and meal distribution. What is more, the guards used the inmates to carry out private jobs for them.

A ‘good’ detachment was that of the electricians. The 3 to 6 inmates accompanied the factory electrician, carried the equipment, knocked holes in the wall and filled them up again after the cables had been laid or the repair work carried out. Encounters with German civilians gave them a means of learning about the course of the war. Work in the mine detection detachment, on the other hand, was extremely dangerous. This detachment had to defuse unexploded bombs.

“Most frequently, they were forced to go to the railway station to unload waggons, above all scrap metal. That was hard and dangerous work. The inmates were hungry and weak from exhaustion. They had no protective gloves and worked in wooden clogs. The unloading pace was murderous. Heavy, rusty iron. Nearly every day, they returned with injuries, above all bruises on their legs and hands. Every one of those injuries, even the less complicated ones, ended in infection and sepsis.”

Józef Marcinkowski, concentration camp inmate (autobiographical novel, 1976)



Weekly construction detachment report to the Natzweiler concentration camp command headquarters, 28 August 1944

Arolsen Archives, 1.1.29.0 / 82129453

# Working hours

Eleven hours a day, six days a week—those were the concentration camp inmates' working hours. Starting in October 1944, the shift went from 7.00 am to 6.00 pm. There was only one half-hour break at midday. From the end of October 1944, there were also night shifts. They lasted for twelve hours without a break. Now many inmates alternated every week between day and night shifts.

For the day shift, the inmates had to step up for roll call at 4.30 am. After a sparse breakfast, it was off to the workplace at a run. In the evening there was another roll call before the evening soup was portioned out.

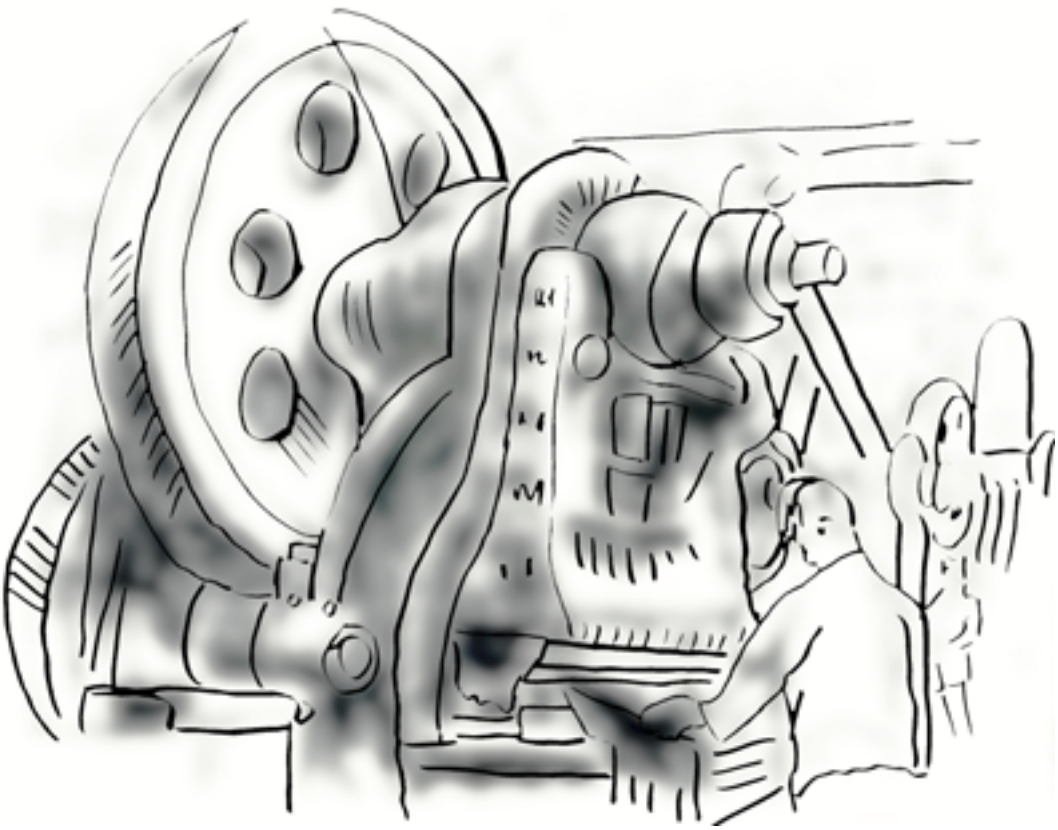
# Labour at risk of life

The working conditions for the concentration camp inmates were harsh. They were poorly trained and instructed. They suffered from hunger and fatigue. Many could not keep up with the fast work pace. It could happen to anyone that he damaged a work-piece or a machine. There was constant danger of hurting oneself. There were no safety measures—no helmets, work boots, gloves, or goggles. Accidents at the workplace came about as a result, often causing serious injuries. The eyes of the men assigned to welding were in the greatest danger. They fashioned protective goggles for themselves using glass blackened with soot.

The guard units and civilian colleagues constantly suspected the concentration camp inmates of sabotage. The guards incessantly threatened them with the death penalty.

> "It would be difficult to refer to the instructions—which lasted just a few minutes and were given primarily with the aid of sign language and gestures—as training in the operation of a machine."

Ryszard Kojer, concentration camp inmate (letter to Ernst Kaiser, 11 February 1993)



Worker at a punching machine at the Adlerwerke Drawing, ca. 1930
Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt am Main, S7A Nr 1998-28991

# Contacts in the factory

Civilian forced labourers sometimes worked under the same foremen as the concentration camp inmates. The inmates' poor condition and maltreatment were clear to see. No talking amongst one another was allowed. From time to time, forced labourers nevertheless shared potatoes or bread with the inmates.

Concentration camp inmates who had received cigarettes as bonuses sometimes managed to exchange them for food.

The inmates also learned news of the course of the war from their contacts in the factory. Knowledge of the situation at the front helped them hold on to hope.

"I took the potato, shot a glance at them from the distance, and put the potato on a machine; then they came. ... You could see that they were hungry."

Roger Echinard, French civilian worker at the Adlerwerke (interview, 2006)

“With all certainty and complete objectivity, I contend that I have you alone, dear Wilhelm, to thank for my life. If you hadn’t helped me, I surely would have died of hunger, just like hundreds of my colleagues died from inhuman treatment.

Despite the danger to your own life, you had the courage to pass on food, medicine, newspapers, and messages to me that kept my spirit upright. Also regarding my colleagues, you gathered the courage to stand up against the brutal treatment by the SS men and loudly express your outrage in cases when wrongs were done to concentration camp inmates. You protected many inmates from brutal blows, even saved their lives by cleverly concealing defective production … .”

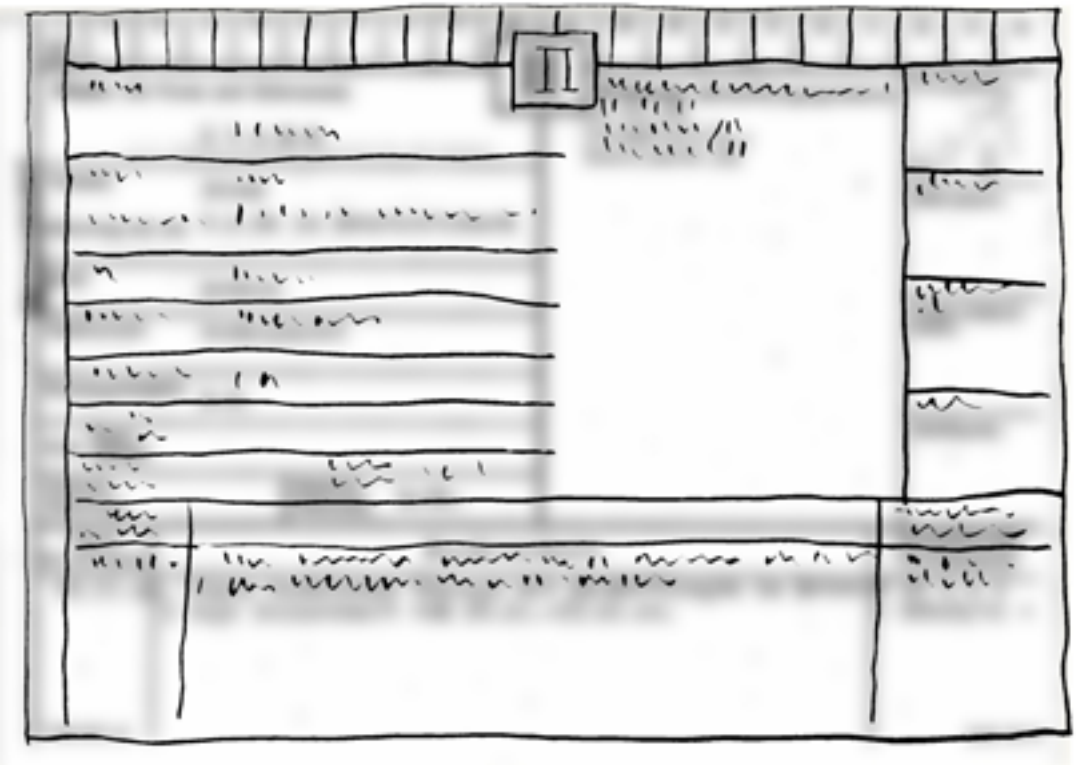
Kazimierz Doszla, concentration camp inmate
(Letter to the auto mechanic Wilhelm Beihofer, 21 August 1946)

# The company employees

It was the foremen who had the closest contact to the concentration camp inmates. They ruthlessly drove the enfeebled men to work faster. Survivors reported this about their superiors after their liberation. Only few foremen and fitters used violence themselves—but it did happen. However, there were others who tried to improve the conditions for the inmates. They reduced the workload or secretly brought them food, medicine, or clothing.

In 1946, Max Loock reported on the inspector Emil Kopp in a letter to the works council. According to Loock, Kopp had “put his life at risk for me and various inmates. … Although it had been announced … that every interaction with us would be regarded as treason and punished, Mr Kopp slipped me bread, jam, lunch, boiled potatoes, coffee, and the newspaper every day. What is more, he also often gave me food for 2 Jews and other inmates in my unit. Personally, I can say that Mr Kopp saved my life.” (Report, 1946)

Ryszard Olek received support once when he fell asleep at work. He later recalled: “He took a piece away that had accidentally been sanded down too far, exchanged it, and brought back the new piece.” (Interview, 2005)



**Gestapo index card on Peter Stamm**
In November 1944, the 50-year-old lathe operator Peter Stamm was punished with three days of police custody on a charge of “forbidden dealings with concentration camp inmates in the plant” for giving an inmate a piece of bread.
Source: Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Wiesbaden, 486, 114227

# Sources

Max Loock, report to the works council, 1 May1946,
in: HHStAW, 461/37574, Bl. 63f.

Ryszard Olek, interview
in: Joanna Skibinska: Die letzten Zeugen: Gespräche mit Überlebenden des Außenlagers “Katzbach” in den Adlerwerken in Frankfurt am Main (Hanau, 2005), pp. 133f.

Roger Echinard, interview, 13 July 2006, p. 20,
in: Digitales Archiv der Stiftung EVZ, FU Berlin und des DHM, ID ZA079.

Ryszard Kojer, letter to Ernst Kaiser, 11 February 1933,
in: HHStAW, Abt. 1273, Depositum Kaiser/Knorn.

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Pamiętnik Jasnowidza (Warsaw, 1976), p. 29.

Kazimierz Doszla, letter to Wilhelm Beihofer, 21 August 1946 (transcription), Kazimierz Doszla, statement, 2 December 1946,
in: HHStAW, 461/37574, Bl. 81, 126 R.

Roger Echinard, interview, 13 July 2006, pp. 19f.,
in: Digitales Archiv der Stiftung EVZ, FU Berlin und des DHM, ID ZA079.

Cover:
Zygmunt Świstak: Labour in production, drawing, detail.
The complete drawing is on view on the wall over this book.

Zygmunt Świstak was born in Działdowo (Poland) in 1924 and fought with the Armia Krajowa (AK; Home Army) in the Warsaw Uprising.
He lives in Australia.
Source: Zygmunt Świstak