

## Book Review

***Unter Zurückstellung aller möglichen Bedenken: Die NS-Betriebsgruppe 'Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring' (REIMAHG) und der Zwangsarbeitereinsatz 1944/45.* By Marc Bartuschka. Göttingen: Wallstein. 2011. 784 pp. €64 (hardback).**

During and in the wake of the most recent debate about the compensation of forced labourers and the setting up of the German foundation 'Remembrance, Responsibility and Future', regional and local research into this crucial aspect of Nazi Germany has surged immensely. However, it has usually focused either on particular places and companies or on the experiences of those concerned, few of which have systematically been set into larger frames of reference. Additionally, the focus on the plight of the victims has created a tendency to overlook the roles of the perpetrators and bystanders. Now these various strands of development are combined in Marc Bartuschka's dissertation, the result of his research at the graduate school of the prestigious Jena Centre for Twentieth-Century History. In particular, the book scrutinizes the industrial conglomerate 'Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring' (REIMAHG) and its deployment of forced labour. This case study is integrated into the overall development of Germany's wartime economy, put into comparative perspective and also examined with reference to its various legacies and remembrance issues. The book was published by Wallstein, which again proves its strong interest in making available research into the history of the National Socialist era, even if it comes in the shape of rather voluminous theses.

In his general introduction Bartuschka points to the fact that there are still quite a few national groups of forced labourers that have not yet been sufficiently researched. While it appears a bit arbitrary at first glance to single out Slovakian prisoners of the 1944 uprising and Italian civilian deportees in this respect, this is empirically justified by their numerical presence at REIMAHG. Bartuschka goes on to give a short overview of Germany's wartime economy and its regional framework in Thuringia. Rather *en passant*, he rightly qualifies the myths surrounding Albert Speer and the alleged modernity of National Socialism that have both claimed historians' attention for some time. The author then presents the immediate prerequisites for the founding of REIMAHG with regard to arms production, subterranean relocation of production, and the economic and administrative organization of Germany's war efforts. Afterwards he elaborates on the actual setting up of REIMAHG, paying special attention to the German actors involved on various levels.

This lays the groundwork for the following two-thirds of the book, which deals with various aspects of the forced labour deployment. Bartuschka focuses on the living and working conditions of the forced labourers, especially highlighting interactions with German guards, superiors and the local population. He provides targeted views into exchanges between forced labourers and German civilians, with the welcome and necessary inclusion of the role played by youths in general and by members of the Hitler Youth in particular. The following parts on medical care and deaths are detailed case studies in themselves and are also fruitfully included into the author's various comparative perspectives. The main part of the book (Chapter 4) is then concluded with an analysis of forced labour at REIMAHG in comparison with similar industrial forced labour sites in the German Reich. Generally, the comparative perspectives the author adopts take the empirical analysis to another level, though the concrete results are at times shrouded by a variety of individual findings and changing bases of comparison (pp. 621–30) which gives those sections a slightly unfinished look. And although this seems hardly avoidable when dealing with history on the level of everyday life phenomena, sometimes numerical statements are backed up with only scattered evidence (pp. 649–53).

Bartuschka then takes stock of the afterlives of both perpetrators and victims, and of the former company and its location. In this chapter, special emphasis is laid on remembrance, again combining a local or rather regional approach with a nationally and internationally comparative perspective. Especially the various modes of remembrance in the former East and West Germany and after reunification are soundly assessed. This is followed by a rather short conclusion which mostly picks up questions of remembrance and extends them further into the future. Although this matter appears to be rather contentious, Bartuschka's evaluations are balanced and well-founded but also at times rather too didactic. This might be even more sensitive since he himself seems to be genuinely involved with ongoing remembrance activities and organizations.

This leads on to two minor critical remarks. Very early in the book, Bartuschka questions the use of the term 'Jew' for Jews (p. 11, fn. 8) in forced labour research because not all of those referred to as Jews necessarily identified themselves primarily as such. While the claim is accurate, his proposed solution—to use the term in inverted commas instead—hardly offers a solution to the problem. Fortunately he drops the idea as his book develops. And, as is hardly avoidable given the wide span of comparative issues covered by the study, here and there the comparative benchmarks tend to become a bit imprecise. For example, he states that there was hardly any categorization established among French former forced labourer after the war (p. 707) while it was actually quite the opposite.

On the whole Bartuschka successfully brings together the different perspectives of victims' and perpetrators' history, of everyday and corporate history, in a thoroughly integrative way. Furthermore, things which might somehow have been generally known among forced labour researchers but had so far never seriously been researched receive the necessary empirical support here. The study therefore contains a number of insights, even if they are at times masked by an abundance of detail. However, given the sheer length of the book, Bartuschka has written a very readable volume that has all the necessary ingredients of comprehensive research into National Socialist forced labour, and therefore sets standards for those who will follow suit to deal with remaining *lacunae*.

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