



Working for the Enemy: Ford, General Motors, and Forced Labor in Germany during the Second World War

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General Motors, the largest corporation on earth today, has been the owner since 1929 of Adam Opel AG, Russelsheim, the maker of Opel cars. Ford Motor Company in 1931 built the Ford Werke factory in Cologne, now the headquarters of European Ford. In this book, historians tell the astonishing story of what happened at Opel and Ford Werke under the Third Reich, and of the aftermath today.

Long before the Second World War, key American executives at Ford and General Motors were eager to do business with Nazi Germany. Ford Werke and Opel became indispensable suppliers to the German armed forces, together providing most of the trucks that later motorized the Nazi attempt to conquer Europe. After the outbreak of war in 1939, Opel converted its largest factory to warplane parts production, and both companies set up extensive maintenance and repair networks to help keep the war machine on wheels.

During the war, the Nazi Reich used millions of POWs, civilians from German-occupied countries, and concentration camp prisoners as forced laborers in the German homefront economy. Starting in 1940, Ford Werke and Opel also made use of thousands of forced laborers. POWs and civilian detainees, deported to Germany by the Nazi authorities, were kept at private camps owned and managed by the companies. In the longest section of the book, ten people who were forced to work at Ford Werke recall their experiences in oral testimonies.

For more than fifty years, legal and political obstacles frustrated efforts to gain compensation for Nazi-era forced labor; in the most recent case, a \$12 billion lawsuit was filed against the computer giant I.B.M. by a group of Gypsy organizations. In 1998, former forced laborers filed dozens of class action lawsuits against German corporations in U.S. courts. The concluding chapter reviews the subsequent, immensely complex negotiations towards a settlement - which involved Germany, the United States, Poland, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Czech Republic, Israel and several other countries, as well as dozens of well-known German corporations.

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