

Small wonder that Auler captured the attention of Joseph Goebbels, who not only discussed his ideas with the Führer but also awarded him the hefty sum of RM 100,000 to carry on his studies.⁵⁵

The horrendous outcomes of Nazi racial hygiene are well known, and well publicized. Less well publicized, however, is the fact that Nazi eugenics actually stimulated research into the toxic effects of mutagens and carcinogens—everything from alcohol and tobacco to workplace toxins and genotoxic contraceptives.⁵⁶ The next three chapters explore Nazi-era examples of research of this sort—in the areas of occupational health, food protection, and the aggressive war on tobacco. In each case, what we find is that Nazi ideology pushed and pulled on cancer research, sometimes for better, sometimes for worse.

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Occupational Carcinogenesis



The extraordinary powers exerted by a rising people cannot be maintained without some health dangers to the population.

Leonardo Conti, May 25, 1939

ONE surprising aspect of the Nazi cancer program is its emphasis on occupational carcinogenesis. German physicians had a long tradition of support for industrial hygiene,¹ and Nazi physicians continued this emphasis, though with contradictory agendas revealing tensions between ideology and *realpolitik*.² Many different kinds of occupational cancers had been discovered by the 1930s, the most important of these being skin, bone, and blood cancers caused by X-rays, internal cancers caused by radium ingestion, bladder cancers among dye workers, lung cancers caused by chromate exposure and uranium mining, the arsenic cancers occasionally found among vintners, glassworkers, and steelworkers,³ and the skin cancers caused by prolonged contact with paraffin, tar, soot, and certain types of mineral oil.⁴ The contribution of such cancers to the overall burden was disputed (Fischer-Wasels in 1934 remarked that occupational cancers constituted only a “tiny fraction” of the overall cancer burden in Germany),⁵ but their political significance was magnified by virtue of their being, by almost all accounts, preventable.

We begin with a general look at occupational health and safety in the 1930s, turning then to an analysis of how Nazi authorities dealt with the most notorious occupational carcinogens of the era: