

X-ray cancers, radium and uranium cancers, arsenic, chromium, and asbestos cancers, and the chemical industry cancers associated with the production of aniline dyes. Each of these agents has a convoluted political history, as we shall see. In the Nazi period, health officials developed safeguards against exposure to deadly chemical toxins at the same time that efforts were also underway to use some of those very same toxins to kill millions of Jews and Gypsies.

HEALTH AND WORK IN THE REICH

Hitler assumed power in January of 1933, promising to put an end to Germany's joblessness and to diverse "malaises" identified with Weimar culture. Millions of laborers were out of work, and the promise struck a positive chord with many desperate people. The Communist party had grown in recent years, though internecine squabbling had kept the Left from forming a united front, giving Hitler and his acolytes their opening. Hitler's party did not scare off business as did the communists: when asked whether he would nationalize industry, Hitler replied: "why nationalize industry when you can nationalize the people?"

Labor projected a special, almost magical, aura for the Nazis. Art and literature celebrated the virtues of the workingman, echoing similar serenades by the Stakhanovites in Russia and the social realists in America (Edward Hopper, for example). The workingman was a hero, the nonworking man a degenerate asocial. Work was a "moral duty," an obligation comparable to military service or, for women, the bearing and rearing of children. People had not so much a right to work as a duty to work⁶—a change signaled also by the dissolution of the trade unions. In May of 1933 Robert Ley engineered a coup d'état against the unions, after which time all workers and employers were required to join the Nazi successor organization, the German Labor Front (DAF), a factory-policing agency with unprecedented powers over life in the workplace. Shirking in this climate becomes tantamount to treason, as people formerly not expected to work are pressed into service—first

women, then people with tuberculosis, then the underage and elderly, and eventually millions of foreign and slave laborers from conquered territories. For people unfortunate enough to land in a concentration camp, inability to work becomes a virtual death sentence.

Hitler's mobilization dramatically increased the pace of work. Production of iron, steel, chemicals, machines, and agricultural products grew by leaps and bounds, as more and more people entered the labor force, working harder and for longer hours. Overtime became routine at iron- and other metalworks, in automobile and aircraft production, in work in the mining field and cement industry (the Nazis poured a lot of cement). In the summer of 1938, uniform makers were working twelve hours a day to fulfill military demands. The same was true for tank makers and manufacturers of explosives and ammunition—as in many other industries. Armaments workers often worked sixty hours a week, including Saturdays; similar schedules were kept by laborers erecting the massive fortifications along the French border known as the *West-wall* or Siegfried Line.

The rapid militarization of the German economy increased the number of accidents and injuries suffered by German workers. The rate of fatal accidents rose by 10 percent in the first four years of Nazi rule, an increase health officials openly traced to the escalating tempo of work.⁷ (Brewery-workers suffered the highest accident rates, higher even than those of miners.)⁸ The number of laborers forced to retire owing to injuries rose, from 4,000 in 1933 (excluding mining) to more than 6,000 three years later.⁹ A 1938 propaganda campaign pointed out that 1.5 million Germans would suffer accidents or injuries at work that year; another 8,000 would die from injuries on the job. Two years later, the émigré physician Martin Gumpert predicted that if Germany's feverish work-frenzy did not slow down, the nation would suffer "a collapse much more dreadful than that of 1918."¹⁰

German labor officials worried about the growing number of accidents and illnesses. A dozen-odd journals published a steady stream of articles on threats to occupational health and safety, from the debilitating effects of asbestos to the hazards of zinc. The