

INTRODUCTION

In the articles that will be presented below, the historically given reality of forced labor will be dealt with in terms of its medical aspects and consequences for health. One might say that what is depicted here is the practice of a particular state of affairs, an undeniable reality that we are accustomed to regard today in modern Western societies as pathological and unacceptable. However, in not so distant times, under Nazi rule, this was a reality that did in fact exist and whose creators were convinced that it would continue to exist for a thousand years.

During the time of National Socialism in Germany, the issue of forced labor was present in all areas: from large manufacturing companies to local small businesses and private households. It shaped the daily life of not only millions of people, who were forced to work but also of average citizens, who in many cases were perpetrators, accomplices, or just witnesses. The massive war-effort and concentration on increasing war production entailed that forced laborers, in various numbers deported from almost all countries under the German occupation, were coerced to provide for the economy, which main aim was conduct of war. The exploitation of the largest possible number of foreigners from the occupied territories in the Reich economy was the focus of employment policy in National Socialist Germany throughout the war.

Polish forced laborers were one of the main groups represented among forced laborers in Germany. First transports with Poles arrived already shortly after the Polish defeat in September and October 1939. In the following years, the number of Polish nationals recruited or coerced to work systematically rose. In order to provide sufficient workforce for the Reich economy, the German authorities employed two methods: voluntary recruitment and coercive measures. Volunteered relatively a small number of people, mostly for economic reasons – under the conditions at the time they saw this decision as a way out of their difficult material situation. Failing to secure sufficient number of workers, the German authorities increasingly employed coercive measures. People were gathered during police raids, selected based on their capability to work, and directly transported to locations in Germany. Moreover, obligatory assignments for work in Germany were issued. Under threat of imprisonment and even death

sentences, people were summoned to be transported to the Reich. Those who opposed were subjected to brutal punishments. Not all of them were in Germany throughout the whole duration of the war; some stayed there only a few weeks or months – be it because of a serious illness or for other reasons.

The relationship between Polish forced laborers and German general population, among it also healthcare providers, cannot be shortly or simply summarized. In most of the cases, it depended on the form of work, the employer, or purely on personal relations between individuals. Stereotypes, in which such relationship is sometimes presented do not correspond to the individual experiences, which were indeed complicated and based on many levels. One of the important factors that played a role here is without doubt the role of national socialist propaganda and the legal system of orders and prohibitions, which was mandatory for German population in their dealings with foreign forced laborers, especially with Poles. According to these, both nations should be separated, Polish and German workers should not interact more than it was required for their joint work. A wide network of police informers kept under surveillance whether these orders were followed in practice. In this situation, part of the German population held back from any relations with Polish workers, either for fear of impending punishments or because they obeyed the regulations.

In research on the situation and daily life of forced laborers in general and Polish forced laborers in particular, the question of medical care is one of the main issues; and yet, it is the one to which insufficient attention has been paid up to now. Nonetheless, it constitutes one of the key questions in the research from several perspectives: historical, political and also medico-ethical. Here, similarly to the question of relationship between German population and forced laborers, no simple answer can be given. At least in the late phase of the war, the deported Poles who were forced to work constituted for many of their German employers merely a manpower required for upkeep of production. For this reason, the laborers were ruthlessly exploited by many German employers and often brutally treated. In such situations, medical care was provided only with the goal of maintaining their capability to work. However, a detailed look into this issue is needed. Depending on the industrial sector, the form of the work, and on individual relationship between healthcare professional and forced laborers, provision of medical care could have varied. Although some scientific work in this area has already been accomplished, the picture is still far from being complete and a number of questions remain open: What kind, if any, medical care received forced laborers during their deployment? How looked the daily provision of such care for people working in the industry, in the agriculture, or in private households? In which way existed a structural discrimination in provision of healthcare? How much systematic deficiency in provision of healthcare depended on the role of the racist policy of the Third Reich, legal framework, or interpersonal relationships? And importantly, what

was the role of medical personnel in provision of medical care? The authors of contributions to this volume endeavor to answer these questions and fill this research gap.

The study of the articles collected in this volume of the “*Folia Philosophica*” should encourage reflection on these questions but also on general questions of legitimization and justification of forced labor. The material presented in this volume reveals an abhorrent state of affairs: the merciless exploitation of human labor. Moral evaluation of this state is unequivocal and unquestionable – it should never have occurred. However, there can be no illusion that such an assessment was shared by all. A large number of people were involved in the system of work coercion or were direct beneficiaries of this system. The simplest answer given to the question of why they did not share this moral disapproval is, of course, because it purely served their interests well. However, pointing to the interests of the functionaries and beneficiaries, while correctly identifies an important founding factor of this coercive system, does not yet bring to light its other important pillar – its legitimization. Because violence and coercion existed, they needed to be legitimized. Legitimizing explanations were addressed primarily to the various functionaries – such as healthcare professionals – and to the beneficiaries of that system, as well as to those members of the population, who did not directly object violence and coercion. In this case, legitimizing explanations provided interpretations intended to make violence and coercion justifiable and deserving of acceptance. We have to keep this justification effort in mind, when assessing the phenomenon of forced labor.

Moreover, we should not forget that the practice of forced labor also took place in the orders of reality constructed by Christians, and that, as late as in the seventeenth century, attempts were still made to provide legitimacy for this type of enslavement. The abandonment of these attempts, however, seems to have been in line with the main theses of Christian doctrine. Would the Nazi doctrine permit such a thing? Although the answer seems straightforward and obvious, it would be worthwhile in the future to examine exactly what elements and characteristics of the two worldviews make enslavement and forced labor morally indifferent or morally unacceptable.

This volume of the “*Folia Philosophica*” presents the results of the workshop “Polish forced laborers in Germany. Medical care and the consequences of forced labor” (“*Polnische Zwangsbeschäftigte in Deutschland. Medizinische Versorgung während der Zwangsarbeit und deren Folgen*”), which took place from 24 to 25 February 2020 in Łódź. The workshop was organized by the Institute of the History, Philosophy and Ethics of the Medicine of Ulm University (Prof. Dr. Florian Steger) in cooperation with the Institute of Philosophy, Faculty of History and Philosophy of the Łódź University (Prof. Dr. Andrzej M. Kaniowski). During the workshop, participants from Germany, Poland, and Austria gathered together to discuss ethical and philosophical aspects of forced labor with a special focus

on medical care for Polish forced laborers during the Second World War. The exchange of ideas that took place during the workshop resulted in the preparation of a series of essays, in which the questions of forced labor were presented from the ethical, historical, philosophical, and legal perspective. The following passages describe individual contributions to the volume.

The question of forced labor from a philosophical and legal perspective is addressed in Wilhelm G. Jacobs' essay "State, law, coercion" ("Staat, Recht, Zwang"). The author argues that forced labor presents a case of a perversion of the law. A coercive rule that forces people to provide labor and that denies free will and human dignity is not only illegal but also profoundly immoral – so Jacobs. The Third Reich, with its racial ideological background and legal framework that aimed at the exploitation of whole groups of people through work, is an example of such an illegitimate state. When the law is massively twisted and broken, as in the Third Reich, the inviolability of human life and human dignity are defenseless. And in many cases, the victims of immoral states and laws are not only exploited foreign workers but also their citizens, when they are obliged to participate in the injustice.

In the contribution "Experiences of Polish forced laborers from Łódź employed for Telefunken in Ulm in years 1944–1945 with consideration of medical care," Florian Steger and Marcin Orzechowski recount the daily life and medical care for young girls and women from Łódź working for the arms manufacturer Telefunken in Ulm. Based on archival records and interviews with contemporary witnesses, the authors present how atrocious living and working conditions contributed to deteriorating health and deaths among forced workers. The medical care provided for them was rudimentary and aimed mostly at the prevention of outbreaks of epidemics or at the restoration of health to the level that allowed further work. Steger and Orzechowski argue that such a system of exploitation was symptomatic for the final phase of the war, during which efforts towards maximization of production efficiency dominated over the provision of adequate healthcare.

Eva Hallama presents in her contribution "Between the Projection of Danger, Objectification, and Exploitation. Medical Examination of Polish Civilian Forced Laborers Before Their Deportation into the German Reich" the practice of medical examination of Polish forced laborers. Through analysis of historical documents, Hallama explores to what extent such medical examination may be regarded as a strategy for the objectification and dehumanization of the forced laborers. She states that in the context of Nazi ideology and economic policy, the classification of someone as able to work was essentially determined by factors such as the need for manpower, force and oppression. Polish forced laborers were used as an instrument of a market economy, and the medical assessments served as quality control of the workforce.

The contribution of Katarzyna Woniak “Poles as Patients in the Nazi Forced Labor System” (“Polen als Patienten während der NS-Zwangsarbeit”) focuses on the patient-doctor relationship between Polish forced laborers and German physicians during the Second World War. As Woniak presents, this relationship was mainly shaped by ideological and economic factors. The intention of maintaining the laborers’ health by minimal efforts was a part of an economy-driven strategy. German doctors were able to provide the Poles with medical care, but only insofar as this was requested by health insurance companies, employers and employment offices. These decided not only about the possible change of work tasks, repatriation to the home country or the admission to a “sickness camp,” but ultimately also about the life or death of the forced laborers.

In his essay “Medical Care for Polish Forced Laborers in the Bielefeld Region” (“Medizinische Versorgung polnischer Zwangsarbeiter in der Region Bielefeld”) Wojciech Kwieciński analyzes the delivery of medical care for Polish forced laborers in the city Bielefeld. Kwieciński states that the system of forced labor followed in its daily practical implementation the prevailing racial ideology of the Third Reich set down by legal rules. Working and living conditions, as well as healthcare for the forced laborers, were dictated by racial ideological motives and interests. This led to the situation where the medical care of the Polish forced laborers had features of a discriminatory and repressive system.

The question of dealing with mentally ill forced laborers stands in the focus of Bernhard Bremberger’s article “‘Eastern Workers Invasion’ and ‘Fantastic Mortality.’ The Killing of Sick Foreign Forced Laborers in the Pfafferoode Sanatorium 1944–1945” (“Ostarbeiterinvasion” und “fantastische Mortalität.” Die Tötung kranker ausländischer Zwangsarbeiter in der Heil- und Pflegeanstalt Pfafferoode 1944–1945”). Since 1944, mentally ill forced laborers from Poland were to be moved to special institutions. One of such institutions was the Pfafferoode asylum, which since 1944, under the direction of Theodor Steinmayer served as a collection point for mentally ill forced laborers from Poland and the Soviet Union. Based on a detailed analysis of the official documents and a reconstruction of operation procedures, Bremberger argues that Eastern European laborers brought to Pfafferoode were victims of organized murder.

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