

International Touring Exhibition

## **FORCED LABOUR**

### **THE GERMANS, THE FORCED LABOURERS AND THE WAR**

An international touring exhibition by the 'Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorials Foundation' at the LWL Zollern Colliery (*Zeche Zollverein*) Industrial Museum in Dortmund, initiated and sponsored by the Remembrance, Responsibility and Future Foundation (EVZ)

15 March 2012

#### **"Forced Labour. The Germans, the Forced Labourers and the War" International Touring Exhibition Is Making a Stop in Dortmund**

**Dortmund (Iwl).** Raymond Gros was 20 years old when he came to Zollern Colliery as a forced labourer in 1942. The Frenchman worked in the mine as a mine-car puller for 16 months before the Gestapo (Secret State Police) arrested him for refusal to work. Gros was first taken to the Steinwache central police prison and then to the Wewelsburg concentration camp. His traces vanished after his transfer to Flossenbürg concentration camp in 1944. The young Frenchman is one of 20 million men, women and children who were forced to work as foreign forced labourers, prisoners of war or concentration camp prisoners in Germany or in the occupied territories during the Second World War. The international 'Forced Labour. The Germans, the Forced Labourers and the War' touring exhibition that can be seen at the LWL Zollern Colliery Industrial Museum as from **18 March 2012** tells the story of this crime.

The show by the Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorials Foundation, initiated and sponsored by the Remembrance, Responsibility and Future Foundation (EVZ), comes to Dortmund after stops in Berlin and Moscow. Presented by the Dortmund City Council and the Westphalia-Lippe Regional Association, it can be viewed there until 30 September.

"Hundreds of thousands of forced labourers were exploited in the armament factories and coal mines around the Ruhr River during the Second World War," said Museum Director **Dirk Zache** on Thursday (15 March). "Zollern Colliery also contributed to this humiliation and extermination through labour. A minimum of 350 foreigners were deployed here. There were two barracks for Soviet prisoners of war on our site. Forced labour thus also becomes manifest here," Zache continued. "LWS has a special responsibility not only in its capacity as a supporter of the industrial museum but also because of its own Nazi past. Current projects and publications show that the topic of forced labour is now increasingly raised in the region. The exhibition can and will provide new stimuli. We will also continue to work on this chapter of industrial history at all eight locations."

The idea to get the touring exhibition to come to Westphalia originated from the Steinwache Memorial of the Dortmund City Council. Lord Mayor **Ullrich Sierau** said: "The knowledge of the Nazi crimes is a precondition for fighting the ideology of the extreme right. The fight against right-wing extremism is at the top of our urban agenda. That is why I welcome this exhibition in our city." An estimated 30,000 forced labourers were deployed in Dortmund during the Second World War. They were accommodated in about 300 camps, one of those being a branch of the Buchenwald concentration camp. "I am glad that, with third-party support, we can now extend our knowledge by a city map showing the former accommodations and workplaces of forced labourers in Dortmund," Sierau added.

"The Nazi regime of forced labour was a crime that made people throughout Europe slaves of the German war and business interests," emphasised **Günter Saathoff**, Director of the EVZ Foundation. "In contrast to the extermination camps in the east, the German population could not claim that they did not know anything about it because the wrongs were committed before their very eyes. Nevertheless, it was later denied or played down as a concomitant of war and the occupiers' rule. What forced labour as part of an overall racist system meant for

the victims can be seen in this exhibition. As an international touring exhibition, it should also be discussed in those countries from where a very high number of persons were deported. It thus becomes an element of a European remembrance culture and at the same time represents a contribution to the honouring of former forced labourers.”

“The exhibition pays special attention to the historical relationship between Germans and forced labourers,” is how the curator **Rikola-Gunnar Lüttgenau** describes the direction of the show. “This history cannot be limited to a small group of functionaries of the regime. Every German woman, every German man had to decide how to behave towards forced labourers: with the last bit of humanity or with the allegedly imperative coldness and relentlessness of a supposed higher race. There was scope of action and how such was made use of tells us something not only about the individual but also about the influence and attractiveness of National Socialist ideology and practice. In this respect, the exhibition goes beyond the history of forced labour in the narrow sense and illustrates the degree of National Socialist penetration of the German society.”

## **The Exhibition**

During World War II, forced labourers were exploited on almost every building site and farm, in every factory and even in private households in Germany. Almost all Germans encountered forced labourers, many benefitted from them. Forced labour was no secret, it was a public crime. The exhibition covers more than 60 representative case histories. Like the about 450 exhibited documents and photographs and the media stations with reports from 38 contemporary witnesses, they are the result of meticulous research in the archives in Europe, the USA, and Israel.

In terms of content, these case histories range from the degrading work of the politically persecuted in Chemnitz to the murderous slave labour of Jews in the occupied Soviet Union and the daily life of a forced labourer on a farm in Austria. The chronologically structured exhibition is divided into five sections that deal with the topic from 1933 to 2000, when the founding of the EVZ Foundation cleared the way for compensation payments to former forced labourers.

For the Dortmund stop, the show was adapted to the exhibition space of a total of 850 square metres and supplemented by the Ruhr mining topic. Forced labourers temporarily made up 40 per cent of the workforce of the mines on the Ruhr and Emscher rivers. The workers from the East, the so-called “Ostarbeiter” and Russian prisoners of war formed the largest part after 1942. They were one of the groups that had the worst living conditions in the system of the National Socialist race ideology. Hard work and meagre food rations drained the strength of the men. Physical violence was a daily occurrence. Cold and bad hygienic conditions were further accompanying aspects so that diseases like tuberculosis spread in many camps.

Forced labourers from six nations worked in the Zollern Colliery. Some of them are presented in the entrance area of the exhibition. Names, photographs and documents on index cards originating from the company’s files give fragmentary information on their biography. “This material will be used not only within the scope of the exhibition but also in future when we convey our findings to the public, especially school children,” explained Museum Director Dr. Ulrike Gilhaus. The forced labour topic will also be increasingly integrated into the permanent exhibition of the LWL Industrial Museum.

## **Supporting Programme**

Dr. Stefan Mühlhofer, Director of the Steinwache Memorial Site, compiled a comprehensive supporting programme for the exhibition. It includes speeches, tours, excursions and further events (see Appendix). There is a specially developed museum education programme and comprehensive teaching material for school classes. On two days in May and September,

former forced labourers will be available as contemporary witnesses for conversations with school children.

### **Companion Volume**

“Zwangsarbeit. Die Deutschen, die Zwangsarbeiter und der Krieg”. (*Forced Labour. The Germans, the Forced Labourers and the War*). A companion volume for the exhibition at the LWL Zollern Colliery Industrial Museum, published by Volkhard Knigge, Rikola-Gunnar Lüttgenau and Jens-Christian Wagner on behalf of the Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorials Foundation, Essen 2012, price: €19.80. ISBN 9783837507065

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18 March to 30 September 2012

LWL-Industriemuseum Zeche Zollern / LWL Zollern Colliery Industrial Museum

Grubenweg 5, 44388 Dortmund, Germany

Opening hours: Tuesday to Sunday 10.00 to 18.00 hrs.

You can find this information and current press photographs for downloading at [lwl.org/pressemitteilungen](http://lwl.org/pressemitteilungen)

Detailed information on the exhibition and further press photographs can be found at

[www.ausstellung-zwangsarbeit.lwl.org](http://www.ausstellung-zwangsarbeit.lwl.org)

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