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WITOLD W. MĘDYKOWSKI, *MACHT ARBEIT FREI?  
GERMAN ECONOMIC POLICY AND FORCED LABOR  
OF JEWS IN THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT, 1939–1943*,  
ACADEMIC STUDIES PRESS, BOSTON 2018, PP. 418 [454],  
ISBN: 1618115960 (PAPERBACK);  
ISBN: 978-1618115966 (HARDCOVER)

This is a review of a book by Witold W. Mędykowski entitled *Macht Arbeit Frei? German Economic Policy and Forced Labor of Jews in the General Government, 1939–1943*. The work was published in Boston in 2018 thanks to the efforts of the Academic Studies Press as part of their series ‘Jews of Poland’, and is 418 pages in length. In the introduction, apart from thanking the people who contributed to the book, the author mentions the German Erinnerung, Verantwortung, Zukunft Foundation,<sup>1</sup> which is also responsible for running a project

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<sup>1</sup> In January 2020, the Erinnerung, Verantwortung, Zukunft foundation conducted a total of 2922 research projects: in Portugal (1), Spain (2), France (18), Switzerland (6), Belgium (5), the Netherlands (15), Italy (6), Germany (1816, including 19 in Berlin), Denmark (4), Norway (6), Sweden (3), the Czech Republic (92), Austria (21), Croatia (27), Poland (252), Slovakia (10), Hungary (40), Bosnia & Herzegovina (35), Kosovo (5), Macedonia (14), Albania (6), Greece (16), Bulgaria (6), Romania (28), Moldova (19), Ukraine (488), Belarus (191), Lithuania (18), Latvia (8), Estonia (4), Finland (1), Russia (261), Turkey (2), Israel (171), Georgia (5), Armenia (5), Azerbaijan (1), Kazakhstan (4), Kyrgyzstan (3), and Tanzania (1) (*Projektfinder*, <https://www.stiftung-evz.de/projekte/projektfinder.html>, accessed 14 January 2020).

related to the history of forced labour in the Third Reich. Mędykowski also discusses the archives that he used in conducting his research.<sup>2</sup> The work is chronologically divided into two parts: the first covers the period from the beginning of the war to the beginning of operations in the East on 22 June 1941, and consists of four chapters; the second presents the issue of Jewish forced labour from the beginning of the war with the USSR until 1943, and is divided into five chapters.

Mędykowski points out that the reason for the change in how the Jews on German-occupied territories were treated was Operation Reinhardt; the commencement of hostilities against the USSR was of less influence on German conduct toward the Jewish population. However, he highlights the actions undertaken by the *Einsatzgruppen*<sup>3</sup> in the East, where Jews were murdered *en masse*. From the point of view of the book's thesis, it is important to connect the forced labour aspect with the Holocaust in the General Government. Two important threads intertwine here: the exploitation of the Jewish population as a workforce, and its importance for the war industry of the Third Reich. Mędykowski explains that the greatest change in the treatment of Jews took place at the beginning of Operation Reinhardt. Despite the diametrical differences, attempts were made throughout the German occupation to deliberately marginalise the members of this group, and this marginalisation took place simultaneously on the social (exclusion from society) and economic (extreme pauperisation) levels. The actions taken were part of the policy of the total annihilation of the Jewish population in the occupied territories and in the countries allied with the Third Reich.

The author has divided the introduction into several sections to help the reader better understand the issue of Jewish forced labour. The first, entitled 'Beginning of the war', deals with the change in approach to the Jews. With the establishment of the German administration, first in the military and later the civilian spheres, the attitude towards the Jews began to evolve. The author believes that initially in occupied Poland they

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<sup>2</sup> These archives are mainly located in Poland, Germany, and Israel.

<sup>3</sup> *Einsatzgruppen (Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, Operational Groups of the Security Police and Security Service (S. Datner, J. Gumowski, K. Leszczyński, 'Einsatzgruppen (wyrok i uzasadnienie)', Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce 1963, vol. 14; W. Mędykowski, W cieniu gigantów. Pogromy 1941 r. w byłej sowieckiej strefie okupacyjnej, Warszawa 2012; Wokół Jedwabnego, vol. 1: Studia, vol. 2: Dokumenty, ed. P. Machcewicz, K. Persak, Warszawa 2002).*

enjoyed relative peace and their lives were stable.<sup>4</sup> Operation Barbarossa saw the first changes; from this point we can discuss the mass murders that the *Einsatzgruppen* carried out in the areas captured in the East. The negative attitude towards the Jewish population also escalated after the *Galizien* District was incorporated into the General Government (hereinafter: GG) and the subsequent Operation Reinhardt.<sup>5</sup> The Jews' fate was influenced by the Germans' decision to liquidate the large ghettos that they themselves had previously created. One of the effects of the extermination policy was the creation of a system of 'residual ghettos' where those who had not been sent to extermination camps vegetated. Labour camps were set up next to them, and their inmates were used in the war economy of the Third Reich. This method was also a form of extermination, albeit indirect, consisting of 'destruction through labour'.

The next part of the introduction is entitled 'Definitions'. Mędykowski first explains what forced labour is and how it should be understood; this undoubtedly broadens the perspective, allowing for a different look at the main problem raised in the book (p. xv). This theoretical part of the introduction helps the reader understand why the system for exterminating the Jews which the Germans created was so effective. Mędykowski highlights its organisational effectiveness and the overlapping of competences characteristic of Nazism, as well as the complete moral degeneration of the people who manned the system (pp. xvii–xviii).

The next section is entitled 'The types of forced labor: Categorization'. There are three main types:

- the obligation to work (*Arbeitspflicht*);<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This view may be considered too general if, for example, we take into account the German 'cleansing' of the areas of Gdańsk-Pomerania. According to information provided by Grzegorz Berendt, the mass terror against Jews in Pomerania started at the beginning of September 1939. Due to the small number of Jews there, the area's Jewish population had been completely exterminated by the end of the year. For example, in the Starogard powiat, extermination took place on 18 October 1939. A similar situation took place in other powiats in occupied Pomerania (G. Berendt, 'Żydzi w Okręgu Rzeszy Gdańsk-Prusy Zachodnie w latach 1939–1945', in *Wyniszczyć, wynarodowić, wypędzić. Szkice do dziejów okupacji niemieckiej na Kaszubach i Kociewiu (1939–1945)*, ed. G. Berendt, Gdańsk 2010, p. 185; Szpęgawsk, ed. J. Milewski, Tczew-Starogard Gdański 1989, pp. 19–20; id., *Kociewie w latach okupacji hitlerowskiej 1939–1945*, Warszawa 1977, p. 62; M. Kubicki, *Zbrodnia w Lesie Szpęgawskim 1939–1940*, Gdańsk-Warszawa 2019, pp. 113–20).

<sup>5</sup> Mędykowski emphasises the important role of the so-called 'Final Solution to the Jewish Question', i.e. the murder of most European Jews as planned by the Germans.

<sup>6</sup> On the territory of the Third Reich, forced labour was introduced by a law of 3 May 1935. This allowed for the control of the flow of labour and the assignment of specific groups of people

- forced labour (*Zwangsarbeit*);<sup>7</sup>
- slave labour (*Sklavenarbeit*).<sup>8</sup>

At this point, the author also makes a typology of the various concentration, extermination and labour camps. He lists the places where the obligation to work was imposed on the Jews. The next element of the introduction has been separated out as a sub-chapter entitled 'Forced labor in occupied Poland'. Its purpose is to demonstrate that the Jews were obliged to work as early as September 1939. The situation became even worse after the creation of the General Government, in which the obligation to work was extended to Poles as well as Jews (p. xviii). One of the elements of labour-related extermination was the so-called building battalions that were created from the first days of the German occupation (p. xix).<sup>9</sup>

Then, the literature used in the creation of this publication is described. It is shown that the first works on the Holocaust were published in Poland in 1946; the leading position in this field belonged to the Main Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poland [*Główniej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Niemieckich w Polsce*]. Mędykowski mentions that the most important institutions contributing

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to individual industries (W. Jastrzębski, 'Warunki życia i pracy robotników przymusowych', in *Polscy robotnicy przymusowi w Trzeciej Rzeszy*, ed. W. Bonusiak, Rzeszów 2005, p. 103; C. Łuczak, 'Polityka zatrudnienia w Trzeciej Rzeszy', in *ibid.*, p. 19).

<sup>7</sup> As part of their theoretical consultations, German leaders searched for the optimal model to exploit the areas that were about to be conquered. During one such meeting (23 May 1939), Adolf Hitler decided that the population in the conquered territories would not be included in the obligation to join the armed forces and the police apparatus. However, it was decided to force them to work for the benefit of the German economy. These workers received very modest remuneration, which took various forms (money or food). The first changes in this system date to the end of 1941, when the campaign in the East stalled and the Wehrmacht needed reinforcements. From 1942, conscription to the German armed forces on the basis of the DVL (*Deutsche Volksliste*) began (*Berlin. Wspomnienia Polaków z robót przymusowych w stolicy III Rzeszy w latach 1939–1945*, ed. J. Gmitruk et al., Warszawa 2012, p. 12).

<sup>8</sup> The Jewish population were subjected to slave labour from the first months of the occupation. After the start of the attack on the USSR, Soviet prisoners of war were also included. It was also one of the elements of the General Plan for the East (*Generalplan Ost*). After the population shifts in Central and Eastern Europe, there was a plan to create a system in which slave labour would be widely used. This was called the Great Plan (*Großplanung*) and was to be implemented for 25–30 years after the successful conclusion of the campaign in the East. In the case of occupied Poland, the plan was for about 10–15 million people to be used as slaves in the Third Reich's industry. Ultimately this plan was not implemented, except for the use of Jews and Soviet prisoners of war, and partially Polish workers.

<sup>9</sup> See. M. Wróblewski, *Służba budowlana (Baudienst) w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie 1940–1945*, Warszawa 1984.

to the study of the extermination of the Jews and other nationalities should include the Institute for Western Affairs (*Instytut Zachodni*), the Jewish Historical Institute (*Żydowski Instytut Historyczny*) and the Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against the Polish Nation, known since 2001 as the Institute of National Remembrance – the Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation (*Instytut Pamięci Narodowej – Komisję Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu*), formerly the Main Research Commission of Nazi Crimes in Poland (p. xxii). Then he mentions the most important researchers in the field, Czesław Madajczyk<sup>10</sup> and Czesław Łuczak.<sup>11</sup> Among the authors who have been important from the point of view of research into the economics of the Third Reich during the Second World War, he mentions Franciszek Skalniak, who dealt with issues related to fiscal and monetary policy.<sup>12</sup> He also emphasises the importance of publications issued by the museums of martyrdom (the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial & Museum in Oświęcim and the State Museum at Majdanek) as well as the cases which came before the International Court of Justice in Nuremberg.<sup>13</sup> This literature is supplemented by books describing the activities of individual ghettos and enterprises associated with the SS. During his research, Mędykowski mainly sought works related to the sociological and economic aspects of the Jewish population's forced labour in the occupied territories.<sup>14</sup>

The book's first full chapter is called 'War against Poland and the beginning of German economic policy in the occupied territory'. As an introduction, the basics of the economic policy towards the Jews initiated in Germany before the outbreak of the Second World War are presented. Mędykowski supplements this with an

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<sup>10</sup> Among the most important works in this area, Mędykowski names C. Madajczyk, *Polityka III Rzeszy w okupowanej Polsce*, Warszawa 1970; id., *Faszyzm i okupacje 1938–1945. Wykonywanie okupacji przez państwa Osi w Europie*, vol. 1: *Ukształtowanie się rządów okupacyjnych*, Poznań 1983, vol. 2: *Mechanizmy realizowania okupacji*, Poznań 1984; id., *Generalplan Ost*, Poznań 1962; id., *Generalna Gubernia w planach hitlerowskich. Studia*, Warszawa 1961.

<sup>11</sup> Among the most important works in this field, Mędykowski lists C. Łuczak, *Polityka ludnościowa i ekonomiczna hitlerowskich Niemiec w okupowanej Polsce*, Poznań 1979.

<sup>12</sup> The works mentioned include F. Skalniak, *Polityka pieniężna i budżetowa tzw. Generalnego Gubernatorstwa narzędziem finansowania potrzeb III Rzeszy*, Warszawa 1976; id., *Stopa życiowa społeczeństwa polskiego w okresie okupacji na terenie Generalnego Gubernatorstwa*, Warszawa 1979.

<sup>13</sup> Mędykowski mentions the IG Farben trial as a model example.

<sup>14</sup> In this field, he also used the work of the Erinnerung, Verantwortung und Zukunft Association. Thanks to their work over recent years, according to the author, they represent the best state of research and the highest level of accuracy.

examination of the issues in the field of nationality policy, the basis of which can be found in the failure of German demands against Poland, the aftermath of which was the Obersalzberg conference.<sup>15</sup> It is worth emphasising at this point that such a broad background allows the reader to place the forced labour imposed on Polish territory in a broader context. The author lists some of the places where Polish troops held out the longest, though he omitted the defence of the coast. Such information should have been included in a footnote; if this had been done, the reader would have had an even better picture of the course of Poland's defensive war in 1939. Next, the first chapter presents the beginning of Germany's aggression against Poland and a clear description of Operation Tannenberg (p. 7).<sup>16</sup> One positive element is the quotation here of the words of Reinhard Heydrich (p. 8);<sup>17</sup> this quote allows the reader to understand the motives of the Germans as they were deciding on the mass murder of the Polish population.

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<sup>15</sup> During a secret meeting in Obersalzberg (22 August 1939), Hitler outlined his plans to increase German domination in the East. Issues related to Poland were also discussed at the meeting. Hitler stated: "The destruction of Poland is in the foreground. The task is to destroy living forces, not to reach a certain line. Even if war breaks out in the West, the destruction of Poland must be the primary goal. It is necessary to settle quickly because of the time of year. I will give the propaganda reason for starting the war, whether it is real or not. The winners will not be asked later whether they are telling the truth or not. Close your hearts to pity. Act brutally. 80 million people must get their rights". During the Nuremberg trial, a second version of the speech was revealed: "I have given orders – and anyone who utters a word of criticism will be shot – that the purpose of war is [...] the physical destruction of the enemy. That is why I have sent my *Totenkopfverbände*, for the time being only to the East, with the order to kill without mercy or pity all men, women and children of the Polish race and language. Only in this way will we win the living space we need. [...] Poland will be depopulated and colonised by the Germans" (quoted after A. Chmielarz, 'Kategorie represji stosowanych przez okupanta niemieckiego wobec obywateli polskich', in *Polska 1939–1945. Straty osobowe i ofiary represji pod dwiema okupacjami*, ed. W. Materski, T. Szarota, Warszawa 2009, p. 94; M. Wardzyńska, 'Kategorie obozów pod okupacją niemiecką w latach II wojny światowej', in *Polska 1939–1945*, p. 101; Ch. Hale, *Kaci Hitlera. Brudny sekret Europy*, transl. M. Habura, Kraków 2012, p. 39; B. Chrzanowski, 'Ogólne założenia polityki niemieckiej na polskich ziemiach wcielonych do Rzeszy', in *Kościerzyna i powiat kościerski w latach II wojny światowej 1939–1945*, ed. A. Gąsiorowski, Kościerzyna 2009, p. 60).

<sup>16</sup> Operation Tannenberg was a programme whose primary goal was to eliminate the 'Polish leadership layer'. It was one of the elements of the *Intelligenzaktion* campaign carried out on the territories incorporated into the Third Reich and the General Government (see A.L. Szcześniak, *Plan zagłady Słowian. Generalplan Ost*, Radom 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Reinhard Heydrich described the course of Operation Tannenberg: "In Poland, executions of the Polish intelligentsia, nobility, clergy, generally of all the elements that could be considered carriers of national resistance, are taking place" (M. Wardzyńska, *Był rok 1939. Operacje niemieckiej policji bezpieczeństwa w Polsce. Intelligenzaktion*, Warszawa 2009, p. 71; D. Schenk, *Hitlers Mann in Danzig: Albert Forster und die NS-Verbrechen in Danzig-Westpreussen* (J.H.W. Dietz, 2000); translated into Polish as *Albert Forster – gdański namiestnik Hitlera. Zbrodnie hitlerowskie w Gdańsku i Prusach Zachodnich*, transl. W. Tycner, J. Tycner, Gdańsk 2002, p. 236).

The first chapter, in addition to the above-mentioned issues related to the beginning of the war and the German plans, briefly describes the impact of propaganda on the perception among German society of the Jewish people (p. 9). This influence resulted from the universality of propaganda activities and the creation in the Third Reich of organisations such as the *Hitlerjugend* (HJ) or the *Bund deutscher Mädel* (BdM); these gathered together young people who were extremely susceptible to the influences of Nazi ideology and agitation. The concept of *Lebensraum*,<sup>18</sup> which was one of the foundational ideas behind expanding the size of German-held territory in Eastern Europe, fits into all of this. Another example of German propaganda was the reintroduction of the concept of *polnische Wirtschaft* into general circulation.<sup>19</sup> Its purpose was to ridicule the statehood of Poland and show the pointlessness of its existence. The whole is complemented by a short description of relations among the nationalities on the territory of the Second Polish Republic before the outbreak of the war (p. 11).

The beginning of the German occupation introduced completely new rules for the functioning of Polish society. This is dealt with in the section entitled 'Violence against the Jews'. When introducing the military administration, the Germans punished with death those people who, despite the bans, still possessed weapons and radio receivers (p. 12). The same treatment applied to persons committing 'misdemeanours' against the Wehrmacht. Mędykowski emphasises that in most cases these provisions were abused, and thus legally legitimised the mass killing of Jews. The practice of forcing contributions from the Jewish population was common (p. 14); it was in line with the policy of the economic pauperisation of this group. Such practices were often accompanied by blackmail and violence. The author emphasises that from the very start of the war, representatives of

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<sup>18</sup> *Lebensraum*, literally 'living space'. As National Socialist Germany's power grew, their leaders decided to enlarge the territory of the country. The plan was to conquer areas in the East, which were to provide Germany with greater freedom and opportunities to act. This doctrine assumed the marginalisation of peoples defined in the National Socialist ideology as 'different races' and their complete economic exhaustion. One of the elements for creating this 'living space' was the mass extermination of the peoples living in these areas.

<sup>19</sup> See E.C. Król, *Polska i Polacy w propagandzie narodowego socjalizmu w Niemczech 1919–1945*, Warszawa 1999; id., *Propaganda i indoktrynacja narodowego socjalizmu w Niemczech 1919–1945. Studium organizacji, treści, metod i technik masowego oddziaływania*, Warszawa 1999.

the German administration at almost every level allowed the general pillage of property belonging to the Jews.

Chapter two, entitled 'Forced labor from the period of military government until the beginning of ghettoisation,' constructs the text in a transparent fashion. It begins by citing the order issued by General Walther von Brauchitsch, commander of the attack on Poland in September 1939, concerning the treatment of civilians (p. 18).<sup>20</sup> Officially, the Germans wanted to introduce order to the conquered territories without harming their inhabitants. The author highlights that as part of this 'liberal policy'; summary courts (*Standgerichte*) were established shortly after this order was issued.<sup>21</sup> Then he discusses the organisation of the administration in the annexed territories and the General Government (p. 20). At this point, however, he mistakenly names General Walter Heitz as the head of the military administration in East Prussia, because he commanded the Military District of West Prussia (*Militärbezirk Westpreussen*) from 8 September 1939.<sup>22</sup> Mędykowski then quotes the words of the Governor General Hans Frank, who clearly stated that the production potential of the former Polish state should be dismantled, in order to bring about the pauperisation of the population in the General Government as soon as possible (p. 20). This extract clearly indicates the goals of German policy on the occupied territories.

One of the most important parts of this book describes the German preparation of reports on the condition of industry and agriculture in the GG (pp. 22–23).

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<sup>20</sup> The order of 1 September 1939 concerned the submission of the civilian population to the German military administration. They promised to respect international rights and not to terrorise the civilian population. Factories, workplaces and the civil administration were to continue to function. Severe penalties were decreed for any attempts at sabotage or passive resistance.

<sup>21</sup> The German authorities used temporary courts (*Standgerichte*) to strengthen the terror apparatus on the occupied territories of the Second Polish Republic in 1939–1945. The first was established in September 1939, and was permanently incorporated into the German occupation administration. Under the guise of legality, they made it possible to intensify the programme of extermination against the population. After a cursory 'trial', the average court hearing lasted just a few minutes, after which most of the accused were sentenced to death. The judgements usually did not contain any justification (see M. Cygański, 'Polityka narodowościowa III Rzeszy w okupowanej Polsce', in *Zbrodnie i sprawcy. Ludobójstwo hitlerowskie przed sądem ludzkości i historii*, ed. C. Pilichowski, Warszawa 1980; C. Madajczyk, *Polityka III Rzeszy w okupowanej Polsce*, vol. 1, Warszawa 1970).

<sup>22</sup> Walter Heitz headed the military administration in the West Prussia Military District until 25 October 1939, when a civil administration took power (Cf. Kubicki, *Zbrodnia w Lesie Szpęgawskim*, pp. 77–78).



It is supplemented by a presentation of the person of Hans Frank and the position resulting from his role as governor general. Here the role of the intelligentsia, which the Germans also called the 'leadership layer', is highlighted. According to the Third Reich's decision makers, it was first necessary to exclude the occupied territories' representatives from everyday life.<sup>23</sup> The manner in which Frank planned to include the Jewish population in the industry of the Third Reich was also presented; the first step in the introduction of total exploitation was to remove this social group from economic life.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to matters related to Frank's perception of the Jews' role in the German economy, Mędykowski explains the role of the *Einsatzgruppen* and the *Einsatzkommando*. In the initial phase of the occupation, due to the small number of these units, they were mainly used for activities related to the murder of representatives of the intelligentsia (p. 27). Mędykowski writes that in the case of the Jews it was decided that they would be relocated *en masse* to eastern Galicia.<sup>25</sup> The Germans who held offices in the General Government called for this process to be spread out over time; this was due to the limited capacity of the transport network, which would become completely paralysed due to the increased traffic (p. 28). In order to implement the plan to exploit the Jewish population, a mass appointment of Councils of (Jewish) Elders began; these were to take responsibility for:

- censuses of the population residing in the areas under their jurisdiction;
- breakdowns of people by sex and age;
- listing the enterprises and real estate located in a given area.

As a result, economic and demographic information was obtained indicating which of the Jews could be used by the Third Reich as forced labourers. Enterprises and stores in the General Government were obliged to provide compulsory military contingents. On 21 September 1939,

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<sup>23</sup> In this case, the Germans used the terms 'elimination' or 'displacement'. In both cases, these words were intended to conceal the real intentions. Those referred to as the 'intelligentsia or 'leadership layer' were planned to be murdered at the beginning of the war.

<sup>24</sup> According to Mędykowski, in some cities it took place as early as 6 September 1939 (W.W. Mędykowski, *Macht Arbeit Frei? German Economic Policy and Forced Labor of Jews in the General Government, 1939–1943*, Boston 2018, pp. 25–26).

<sup>25</sup> This did not only apply to the territory of eastern Galicia; the Germans planned to transform the entire Lublin region into a 'reservation for Jews'.

a decision was made to transport the Jewish population from small towns and villages to ghettos in large cities (p. 29). Mędykowski rightly emphasises the violence of the resettlement actions, as the task was to be completed within a maximum of four weeks from the publication of the regulation. In practice, the leading role of the SS in this practice gradually crystallised (p. 30). The first labour camp was established at the beginning of December 1939 in Lublin, at 7 Lipowa Street.

According to the author, there was a general state of chaos regarding Jewish labour during the military occupation. Decisions on how to exploit this group of people were taken by many different authorities, and were mainly aimed at humiliating them. Jews were first arrested in the streets, then used for all kinds of work, including sweeping, cleaning sewage pits and washing cars. Wearing the Star of David was compulsory, which should be considered a method of social humiliation. Photographing or filming the Jews' treatment was common. In order to improve the organisation of the labour, workers' battalions were created and assigned to perform public work (p. 42). A network of employment offices was founded to help better plan the workforce exploitation; twenty-three of these offices were established on the territory of the General Government. Mędykowski also points to the differences between the treatment of the Poles and Jews who were forced to work from the very beginning of the occupation.

Regarding the study of the occupation economy, the issues related to the rights, obligations and prohibitions that applied to the Jewish population are important. The author describes how people were drafted and divided into groups (pp. 50–51). They were defined by the colour of their work card. One drawback of the text is that it is not explained how these cards were assigned to particular groups (p. 54). The *Judenräte* were responsible for provisioning the Jewish workers. Under German law, the salaries of Jews were 20 per cent lower than those paid to the Poles; this did not apply to camps run by the SS, where there was no form of remuneration at all. A valuable supplement in the text is the description of the GG's economy as a whole. One example of how the Jewish population in the Lublin district were exploited is the approach taken by Odilo Globocnik, who created the first camps in this area (p. 63). An extreme example of this was

the 'Otto' programme<sup>26</sup> (pp. 70–71), where the model of 'mobile work camps' developed by Globocnik was used for the first time.

Chapter three, entitled 'Forced labor in the ghettos and labor detachments', begins with the question of the establishment of the *Judenräte*. Their activity in organising the Jews as a workforce and providing social welfare and health protection is described here. In practice, due to the scarcity of resources, it was impossible to carry out these tasks (pp. 80–81). The *Judenräte* were also obliged to register the forced labourers, which facilitated the Germans' organisation of the practice (pp. 84–86). Mędykowski points out the brutality employed in drafting the workforce and the ruthlessness with which the occupiers treated it. Although Jews had already been working for the Third Reich's war machine, in the winter of 1940 they were delegated to clearing snow, which further aggravated the humiliation of their workload (p. 87). It was common for Germans to set up workshops where unpaid Jewish labour was used (p. 90), a process which intensified after the attack on the USSR was launched.

As part of the repressive system of extermination through labour, the occupiers established a group whose task was to obtain the materials necessary to the German war economy. Due to the importance of this task, this group was treated better than the Jews employed in industrial plants (pp. 95–96). Mędykowski describes exactly what materials were collected and what privileges its members enjoyed. He also compares it with other groups of forced labourers working outside the ghetto (pp. 98–99). Contact with the 'outside world' made it possible to trade, and thus to obtain better provisions. At this point, it is helpful to introduce the concept of the 'black market', and to present the principles of its operation in the reality of the occupation.

Because it was the Germans who set up the system of ghettos, it seems necessary to describe the conditions under which these places operated. The author begins by presenting the process of transporting the Jews to the ghettos and how their property was plundered (pp. 101–02). It was principally the Germans who took part in the general theft of equipment

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<sup>26</sup> According to Mędykowski, the 'Otto' programme concerned the expansion of road and rail infrastructure in the General Government and the border fortifications on the border with the USSR (Mędykowski, *Macht Arbeit frei?*, p. 70).

and other objects from individual apartments or houses. The same was done with the equipment of shops and production workshops. The people thus affected lost about 90 per cent of their pre-war belongings when the transports to the ghetto began.<sup>27</sup> To complete the picture of the reality of the occupation, Mędykowski precisely describes the conditions in the ghetto. These were principally characterised by extreme shortages in production and supply. This situation resulted in the creation of a secondary circulation of second-hand objects. The author pointed out that used things appeared on the market at least three times: at the time of the ghetto's creation, during the creation of the transitional ghetto, and finally at the time of its liquidation (p. 107).

The very institution of the ghetto forced the people gathered there to change their behaviour. They became more ruthless as a result of German policy.<sup>28</sup> Initially, they were able to run production workshops, although the Germans strictly regulated their existence through a system of official permits (p. 111). Later, the so-called city workshops were created (p. 112). In the opinion of this reviewer, this was in line with the occupiers' policy of aggregating production, with the intention of increasing its effectiveness on a broader basis.<sup>29</sup> Deficiencies in the equipment made this highly time-consuming and energy-consuming. Although the conditions for the operation of manufacturing in the ghetto were so difficult, some 'Aryan' enterprises nevertheless commissioned production there. Mędykowski notes that private initiative did exist in the ghettos,<sup>30</sup> consisting in the creation of enterprises which cooperated with the occupiers, even though this was officially forbidden (p. 115). Due to the shortage of materials, there were numerous shortages of finished articles. This condition contributed to the existence of the shadow economy and a black market for products and labour.

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<sup>27</sup> When preparing for transportation, the Jews were forced to leave most of their belongings in their houses. After their resettlement to the ghetto, what little property they had was also stolen, which resulted in the accelerated pauperisation of the population.

<sup>28</sup> Mędykowski shows that, according to official estimates, about 350,000 Jews were gathered in the ghetto in Warsaw (Mędykowski, *Macht Arbeit frei?*, p. 109).

<sup>29</sup> One example is the textile workshops located in the Łódź ghetto (*ibid.*, p. 115).

<sup>30</sup> In this case, this refers to the small- or medium-sized workshops run by Jews, using the workforce from individual ghettos. Due to shortages in production, the Germans gave 'tacit consent' to their existence.

As the course of the hostilities changed, so did the conditions under which the Jews lived in the ghettos. The food supply situation deteriorated after June 1941, when Germany attacked the USSR. The Wehrmacht needed more and more war material; in this situation, the Polish and Jewish enterprises were exploited increasingly heavily (p. 129). One example was the brush-making industry, which was almost entirely dominated by enterprises operating in the ghettos. The same was true of the supply of timber products to the market. Due to the simple production technique, the production of these goods did not require automation, and so could take place in the ghettos. The low quality of the products manufactured there was compensated for by their low price.

Chapter four, 'Forced labor in the labor camps', begins by discussing the Jewish camps located in occupied Poland. Some camps had production workshops, while others did not. As an example of the activity of the former, the author mentions the camp at 7 Lipowa Street in Lublin, which used Jewish labour in the workshops (p. 137).

One of the most important institutions in the German system of exploiting the Jewish labour force was the labour camp in Bełżec.<sup>31</sup> It had been created as the result of decisions already made in 1939, when plans were made to build a defence line along the German-Soviet border. It fit in with the vision of Odilo Globocnik, who coined the concept of "unconditional use of the labour of the Jews". Mędykowski points out that the people who passed through the camp in Bełżec were no longer fit for further work after leaving the facility. This was due to the extremely bad living conditions, poor food supply and the inmates' physical exhaustion. The author also discusses how the Bełżec camp was developed, considering it a model facility in the German machine for the extermination of the Jews (p. 152). It should be mentioned here that by focusing on the 'usefulness' of the Jews at work, the Germans gave priority to providing better conditions for the specialised workers and craftsmen. In this light, it was decided to murder representatives of the Jewish intelligentsia, deeming them completely useless. The camp in Bełżec,

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<sup>31</sup> The labour camp in Bełżec was organised in the spring of 1940; it was mainly Jews, Poles, Roma and Sinti who were sent there. The living conditions were terrible, and its overseers were characterised by their extreme brutality. It is estimated that a significant number of prisoners died as a result of work-related exhaustion and poor conditions.

with its terrible living conditions, was thus a place of general extermination, and not only due to the forced labour. The author also claims that the best conditions were in the agricultural camps.<sup>32</sup>

Another problem was the issue of releasing individuals from the camps. These decisions were taken by the managements of the individual centres which used forced labour. Due to the extremely negative attitude of the Germans who formed the camp administrations, the release of any prisoner from the obligation to work was a matter of total chance, and not the goodwill of the occupiers. Although this question is undoubtedly interesting, the author only presents it in a general outline.

The first part of the book ends with a description of the construction of the border fortifications in the east, which was interrupted in May 1941; according to Mędykowski, this was related to the planned attack on the USSR (p. 180).

Part two begins with chapter five, entitled 'The war in the East: Galicia during the first weeks of the war'. It begins with a description of German-Soviet relations until the beginning of Operation Barbarossa, that is 22 June 1941. Then preparations for the attack are discussed (pp. 181–82). This element of description is an accessible work of synthesis (p. 185). Mędykowski indicates which *Einsatzgruppen* operated in the East shortly after the passage of the Wehrmacht (p. 187). However, his work only deals with topics related to people who were important for the functioning of the economy in the conquered areas (pp. 188–89); this approach is in line with the subject of the publication here reviewed.

The commencement of Operation Barbarossa resulted in changes to the treatment of the Jewish population on the conquered territories. The German administration began to make efforts to completely eliminate the Jews from the economic and social space. As an example, Arthur Greiser, an NSDAP *Gauleiter* and the governor of the *Warthegau*, wanted the areas under his control to be *judenfrei*, that is, 'free of Jews' (p. 191). Representatives of other nationalities were engaged in the mass murder of the Jewish population

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<sup>32</sup> This was because the Jews had easy access to food and were treated better (Mędykowski, *Macht Arbeit frei?*, p. 174).

in the eastern areas. One example of this is the support given by some Ukrainians to the German administration (p. 193).

Chapter six, 'Jewish labour in Galicia', focuses solely on the area of the Galicia district (*Distrikt Galizien*) established on 7 August 1941. It begins with a description of the German administration which operated in this area (p. 194); Mędykowski then deals with the economic problems there. One of the reasons behind them was the nationalisation carried out there by the Soviets after 1939. After the outbreak of the war with the USSR, entities which had been previously nationalised were easily incorporated into the German system of economic exploitation (p. 199). This led to the inclusion of the Jews in the economy of Galicia at the beginning of the war with the USSR.<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, most of the population was deported to the GG. Meanwhile, shortly after the establishment of the Galicia district, the Jews there were divided into three categories:

A – those who were to remain in place as necessary to sustain production (such as artisans);

B – those intended for placement in labour camps;

C – those destined to be murdered in extermination camps.<sup>34</sup>

At the same time, the *Judenräte* operating in the Galicia district were ordered to establish municipal workshops where craftsmen were employed.

The progress of the campaign in the East required the introduction of new forces and funding into the economy. One method for boosting the Third Reich's production capacity was to use qualified Jewish workers and include them in production (p. 206); this plan also concerned agriculture in the GG (p. 207). The author points out that those who were not fit for forced labour were destined to be exterminated. This action began in 1942, when some Jews did not have their identification cards stamped; this was tantamount to a death sentence (p. 208). The situation stabilised when the *Judenräte* were obligated to pay the German administration for Jews to be employed (p. 209).<sup>35</sup> In order to better understand

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<sup>33</sup> Mędykowski mentions that in order to increase economic opportunities in Galicia, Jews were forced to work from the age of 10 (Mędykowski, *Macht Arbeit frei?*, p. 201).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

<sup>35</sup> German companies took advantage of this, exploiting the unpaid Jewish labour ruthlessly (*ibid.*, p. 209).

the phenomenon of the use of forced labour, the actual relationship between the remuneration paid to the Jews and the prices of the articles they produced is given (p. 210). Thanks to this, Mędykowski vividly portrays the economic decline of the Jewish population in the Galicia district.

One of the most important institutions dealing with the exploitation of the Jews for forced labour were the agricultural enterprises; these were often under Ukrainian management.<sup>36</sup> With the advent of the German occupation, the leadership of individual entities of this type remained unchanged; however, an element of forced labour was added to increase their efficiency (pp. 210–11). The second industry in which Jewish forced labour was widely used was the railway companies in the East (*Ostbahn*) (p. 211). In larger urban centres, such as Lviv, municipal workshops were established whose primary task was to increase supplies for the Wehrmacht. These mainly produced uniforms and items of uniforms. By spring 1942, the existence of such workshops was common. All these undertakings were created top-down by the Germans.

When the German occupation of the Galicia district began, labour camps for the Jewish population were established. Initially, their main task was to support the development of the local infrastructure. Mędykowski points out that this role evolved over time, and the camp inmates were transferred to transport companies (p. 213). In both cases, the Jews were treated as unpaid labour. The remaining labour camps were to become elements of the so-called 'Final Solution of the Jewish Question' (*Endlösung der Judenfrage*). The conditions in Galician centres did not differ from those in other districts of the General Government. One of the author's most valuable contributions is his listing of the German enterprises that used slave labour in the Galicia district (p. 218).

The beginning of chapter seven, entitled 'Jewish labor on the shadow of the Aktion Reinhardt' describes the places which held the greatest

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<sup>36</sup> In line with the Soviet policy of discriminating against the Polish nation, some of the industrial plants had only Ukrainians on their management boards; there were also cases of mixed Ukrainian-Russian managements. After the campaign in the East began, the Soviets either fled the approaching front or were murdered. The Germans introduced a similar model of discriminating against the Polish and Jewish populations, and therefore left some of the industrial plants to the Ukrainian managements. This was a deliberate measure intended to increase tensions between individual ethnic groups in the occupied areas.



concentrations of the Jewish population on the territory of the GG and the lands incorporated into the Third Reich; these were the ghettos in Warsaw and Łódź (Litzmannstadt). Then, the procedure of the 'liquidation' of the individual ghettos was presented. In the case of the smaller ones, evacuation units (*Räumungskommando*) were used. After the 'relocation of the population' – which should be understood as their deportation to extermination camps – the members of these commando units were themselves murdered or imprisoned in concentration camps (p. 224).<sup>37</sup> The loss of population in the ghettos is estimated at 85 per cent, as not all of their inhabitants were thus 'relocated'. This did not apply to people working in administration or employed in the Third Reich's war industry (pp. 224–25). According to Mędykowski, Jewish organisations continued to try to save as many people as possible. This was done by trying to convince the Germans that some of those designated for murder could still be used as forced labourers in industrial or agricultural production.<sup>38</sup> However, this chapter does not describe the entire phenomenon of the extermination of the Jews, nor is it placed in a broader context.

The extermination of the Jewish population contributed to the reduction of the effectiveness of the war economy in the General Government. As a result of the loss of people who had commonly been exploited as forced labourers, the total production volume of German enterprises decreased. The occupying authorities faced the problem of "replacing the Jewish workforce in a short time" (p. 235). This contributed to the escalation of the conflict between Albert Speer and Heinrich Himmler. The situation was also influenced by increased conscription to the Wehrmacht, which additionally depleted the resources of the available workforce. This resulted in an increase in the demand for Polish forced labourers, and at the same time raised labour costs, as the Jewish population had been the cheapest labour force

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<sup>37</sup> It was mainly the rail network which was used in the 'relocation' process. In smaller ghettos, far from the railroads and main roads, the Jews were murdered on the spot. One example was the activity of the 101st Reserve Police Battalion mentioned by Mędykowski, whose members took part in such executions (See Ch.R. Browning, *Zwykli ludzie. 101. Policyjny Batalion Rezerwy i "ostateczne rozwiązanie" w Polsce*, transl. P. Budkiewicz, Warszawa 2000; Mędykowski, *Macht Arbeit frei?*, p. 224).

<sup>38</sup> Ultimately, around 2500 people were saved; these people were then reassigned, mainly to work in agriculture. New labour camps were built for them; the conditions there did not differ from other sites of this type, or were even worse (Mędykowski, *Macht Arbeit frei?*, pp. 229–30).

available. The largest extermination centres for Jews are discussed later in this chapter;<sup>39</sup> although Mędykowski describes the camp at Bełżec in great detail, he makes only passing references to Treblinka and Sobibór. It would have been better to describe these places in more detail, for example in a footnote, as this would have complemented the narrative.

After Aktion Reinhardt had been completed, some of the ghettos were liquidated completely, while some were transformed into the so-called 'residual ghettos' (*Restgetto*) (p. 234). For example, about 35,000 people were left in the Warsaw ghetto; these individuals were used for forced labour in an ammunition factory (p. 243). A network of transit camps, which could be called distribution centres, was also created. There were limited possibilities for Jews to remain outside the places designated for them, and helping or hiding them was punishable by death; these provisions applied in particular to the Polish and Ukrainian populations (p. 241). A very important element of the seventh chapter is the summary of the influence of Aktion Reinhardt on the economy of the GG.<sup>40</sup> Mędykowski rightly claims that the extermination of such a huge number of people contributed to the collapse of production and the emergence of economic problems that impacted the effectiveness of frontline supplies.

In the next chapter, 'War industry requirements in the face of annihilation of the workforce', the author points out that as operations in the East expanded, Germany's demand for the manpower and materials necessary for offensive operations increased concomitantly. It also discusses the decisions related to the individual national groups that made up the slave labour population. He writes that from the beginning of Barbarossa until summer 1942, about 1.1 million Soviet prisoners of war were exterminated, and 1.2 million Polish forced labourers were deployed on the territories of the Third Reich and the GG. According to calculations by German leaders, including Governor General Hans Frank, German industry still needed about 400,000 people to work (p. 250). In view

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<sup>39</sup> See *Treblinka: historia i pamięć*, ed. E. Kopówka, Siedlce 2015; id., *Treblinka – nigdy więcej*, Treblinka–Siedlce 2002; *Treblinka*, Warszawa 1967; M. Wójcik, *Treblinka '43. Bunt w fabryce śmierci*, Kraków 2019; *Sobibór*, Warszawa 1967; M. Bem, *Sobibór. Niemiecki ośrodek zagłady*, Włodawa 2011; id., *Sobibór. Exodus 14 października 1943*, Warszawa 2013.

<sup>40</sup> Mędykowski estimates that about 300,000 people survived the 'Final Solution of the Jewish Question' in the General Government. Jews (Mędykowski, *Macht Arbeit frei?*, p. 245).

of the extermination of the Jews, it was planned to recruit these missing workers through intensified repression against the population of the General Government. A second element that reduced the effectiveness of the war industry was the Allies' bombing raids on German-held territory.

Mędykowski writes that in view of the initial successes in the East, officials who were involved in the German system of forced labour and the extermination of the Jews guaranteed that those murdered would be quickly replaced by prisoners from the eastern front (p. 253). The author estimates that the wartime German economy was powered by 1.7 million captured Soviet soldiers: 1 million were sent to work in industry, and 700,000 were used in agriculture. Additionally, it was hoped that the eastern territories, including the occupied territories of Poland, would provide even more forced labourers in the future (p. 254). The pressure related to the decline in industrial efficiency resulted in an increase in the activity of the German labour offices. More attempts were made to acquire a labour force, which came to resemble slave-hunting. The SS adapted easily to all this; in accordance with its long-term plans, it intended to transform the camps under its jurisdiction into profitable enterprises.

The SS's plan was to leave alive about 20–30 per cent of the camps' best qualified and physically strongest workers (p. 258); the rest who did not meet these criteria were designated for extermination, a task which was duly carried out. Mędykowski highlights the conflict that developed between the SS and the Wehrmacht. The point of contention between them was the need for the qualified workers who would be necessary for the German army to keep operating efficiently in frontline conditions (p. 260).<sup>41</sup> Next to this, there was the problem of the efficiency of the civil administration of the occupied territories, which the SS officers considered corrupt and completely unable to act (p. 263). At this point, Mędykowski emphasises the role of Odilo Globocnik, who was one of the creators and most effective implementers of the German system of extermination through forced labour.<sup>42</sup>

The book's final chapter is entitled 'The harvest festival (*Erntefest*) – extermination of the remaining Jews in the district of Lublin'. The narrative is introduced with

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<sup>41</sup> These people were only to be left alive because of their skills (ibid., p. 260).

<sup>42</sup> The author does not give the reasons why Globocnik was dismissed from his functions; this was because he came into conflict with his superiors. Mędykowski does not provide this information until page 283 of his book.

a presentation of the role the Jews played in the Third Reich's armaments industry. An example of a similar activity was the plan to liquidate the ghetto in Warsaw. The Germans then carried out a partial transfer of the workforce (p. 276). By analogy, the author raises the issue of resistance in the ghettos and its influence on the occupiers' further actions (pp. 277–78). In this way he introduces and shows the similarities with the events taking place in the Lublin district. At this point, his list of the most important enterprises which used unpaid Jewish labour throughout almost the entire territory of the General Government should be mentioned (p. 289).

The next element of the narrative is the description of the uprising that broke out in the death camp in Sobibór. According to Mędykowski, this was one of the reasons for the decision to murder all Jews in the Lublin district. This action was codenamed 'Harvest festival' (*Erntefest*), and consisted in the murder of Jews in ghettos and camps. Mędykowski presents its course from the moment when the mass death pits were dug to the shooting operations. The information the author gives concerning the people who survived the massacres is particularly important; he indicates the places where the Germans concentrated them and, in the case of the escapees, also discusses their hiding places. Of the first group, some were used in the '1005' action.<sup>43</sup>

The summary begins with a recapitulation of how the treatment of Jews by the Germans changed – from the lack of any clear decisions, through their exclusion from society by being shut away in the ghettos, to their economic degradation, and ultimately their complete elimination (pp. 292–93). The author also discusses the attitude of individuals to the use of Jewish forced labour – from the fanatical Odilo Globocnik to the more pragmatic Hans Frank (pp. 292–94). Both of them, despite some differences in their behaviour, strove to eliminate Jews from the German 'ideal society.' The next element of the summary is the presentation of the changes in the perception and interpretation of the concept

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<sup>43</sup> Aktion 1005 was the programme carried out by the Germans in order to cover up the traces of mass murders in the occupied territories. This consisted of opening up the mass graves and burning the bodies of the murdered found therein. This work made it more difficult to determine the scale of German crimes, and made it impossible to identify some of the victims (J. Hoffmann, *„Das kann man nicht erzählen“*. *„Aktion 1005“ – Wie die Nazis die Spuren ihrer Massenmorde in Osteuropa beseitigten*, Hamburg 2013).

of forced labour in the years 1939–43. The labour camps were created differently on a total misunderstanding of theoretical evolution. At this point, the full spectrum of the types of Jewish forced labour is once again indicated, from full conscription into the economy of the Third Reich, with the widespread use of labour for military intervention (such as the construction of border fortifications), to complete extermination. The industries in which Jews worked (the production of ammunition, clothes and other items of equipment for the army) are indicated again (p. 308).

The narrative Mędykowski creates shows that the Germans planned to leave only the strongest and best qualified Jewish workers alive. The background to this was the conflict of interests between the SS and the Wehrmacht. The former sought 'physical elimination', that is, the mass murder of all Jews. The second, on the other hand, wanted to use them to increase production and service the military units. It should be remembered that this approach also involved forced labour, which should be categorised as 'extermination through labour' (*Vernichtung durch Arbeit*). This fitted in with Nazi social and economic policy, which was to contribute to the creation of a 'zone of prosperity' for the Germany of the time. This was especially apparent in the areas incorporated into the Third Reich and in the General Government, where plunder, deportations, the total exploitation of material resources and labour and the subordination of the conquered population were implemented. The latter method was harnessed to the economic system, and its slave labour was intended to contribute to the victory of the Third Reich. One more element appears in the system created, which was the attempts made by the Jewish population who, from the beginning of the occupation, tried to find a possibility of surviving the extermination programme in this destructive work (p. 316).

The decisions the Germans took meant that these people were the first to be ruthlessly robbed of their property, exploited in the workplaces, and finally murdered. This view was represented by the fanatical executors of the policy towards the Jews and the 'Final Solution' associated with the SS. Given the Germans' general pragmatism during the Second World War, from an economic and military point of view these actions were senseless. Mędykowski writes that Hans Frank was at the opposite extreme, as he wished to exploit the Jews ruthlessly and make

them slaves of the German war machine. The remaining elements of this system were the civil administration, the Wehrmacht and the entrepreneurs who benefited from the forced labour of the Jewish population.

One good aspect of Mędykowski's work is its appendices. The first consists of maps showing the administrative division of the Second Polish Republic in 1922–39, then the territorial changes made by the German occupiers until 1941, the GG in 1939–44, and the individual labour camps and places for the extermination of the Jews located in the Lublin district. The author also presents the locations of factories in the Radom district. The next part of the appendices includes numerous statistical tables presenting the most important numbers related to the use of Jewish labour in the period 1939–43. At the end of the publication there are photos of senior German decision makers, and of examples of forced labour.

Witold Mędykowski's book, as presented in this review, is an extensive study of the use of Jewish forced labour in the General Government in 1939–43. His work is a model example of a combination of historical and economic research, and thus deserves a place in the field of the economic history of the Second World War. Its undoubted positive is its multifaceted nature and its very good language, which allows for an easy grasp of even the most difficult issues. Placing the statistical material at the end of the publication allows the narrative to flow, and at the same time facilitates its analysis. *Macht Arbeit Frei? The German Economic Policy and Forced Labour of Jews in the General Government, 1939–1943* is a comprehensive work that fills an existing gap in research into the German economy during the Second World War.