

"VWI goes to the University of Vienna"

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Institut für Zeitgeschichte der Universität Wien
Seminarraum 2
Spitalgasse 2–4, Hof 1
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The *Oberschlesische Hydrierwerke AG* and the Auschwitz Subcamp of Blechhammer 1939-1945

Based on newly-accessible source material, this dissertation project investigates the history of the *Oberschlesische Hydrierwerke AG* (OHW), a synthetic fuel plant founded in Blechhammer (today Blachownia/Kędzierzyn-Koźle, Upper Silesia) by the Reich Office for Economic Development in 1939. The Four Year Plan enterprise not only formed part of the Third Reich's war effort and striving for autarchy from imported goods, but was also meant to contribute to the regime's racial policy of 'Germanising' Upper Silesia. Conscripted to the front, however, led to the replacement of Germans with foreign workers from all over Nazi-occupied Europe and the Axis states, as well as Allied prisoners of war and Jewish forced labourers.

By order of Albert Speer, the *Reichsautobahnbehörde* (Motorway Authority, RAB) started to supervise the construction work of the OHW plant from 1942 onwards. As the road-building works had come to a halt, the RAB transferred their Jewish forced labourers to the sites of the armaments industry. In March 1942, the first group of 70 Jewish men from RAB camp Gogolin thus arrived in Blechhammer's newly-established forced labour camp for Jews. The camp leader was Erich Hoffmann, a civilian employee of the Reichsautobahn; police veterans served as guards. In collaboration with representatives of *Organisation Schmelt*, more and more Jewish prisoners taken off deportation trains and out of ghettos were brought into Blechhammer. The camp was transformed into a satellite of Auschwitz in April 1944. With a prisoner population of 4,000-6,000, it became its second largest subcamp next to Monowitz.



This research project examines the plant's ideological and economic function in war-time Upper Silesia as well as the industrial elite's co-operation with the *Schmelt* organization and the Auschwitz extermination camp, while at the same time trying to reconstruct the daily life and suffering of Blechhammer prisoners.

Comments by Sybille STEINBACHER

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