

Hinschaun!
Poglejmo.

arbeit

1938-1945



→ EXHIBITION | MAY through DECEMBER 2025

→ ÖGB/AK Bildungsforum

→ KLAGENFURT

→ KEY IDEAS

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80 years after the end of the Second World War, the Carinthian Chamber of Labor sees it as its task to deal with the profound changes and the instrumentalization of work during the Nazi era. The exhibition “work 1938-1945” contributes to historical remembrance by showing how deeply the regime intervened in working conditions and what consequences this had for employees.

For the National Socialists, work was not only an economic factor, but also a means of achieving ideological goals. While the everyday lives of many workers were characterized by propaganda and control, forced laborers were exploited under inhumane conditions. Furthermore, the Nazi regime turned the actual goals of an independent and self-governing representation of workers' interests into the opposite.

The rights that employees have today cannot be taken for granted. They are the result of conflicts and constructive negotiation processes. With the help of this exhibition the Carinthian Chamber of Labor would like to encourage people to come to terms with the past, and thereby illustrate how important it is to protect and further develop democracy and the achievements of the welfare state.

Günther Goach

President of the Carinthian Chamber of Labor

→ IMPRINT

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Klagenfurt am Wörthersee, May 2025

WORKERS' LIVES

control, exploitation and propaganda

The National Socialist regime reorganized the labor relations according to the "Führerprinzip". The basis for this was the "Law on the Order of National Labor of January 20, 1934", which established the factory managers as the sole decision-makers. The opportunities for co-determination and rights of employees were massively restricted. Anyone who was deemed "unreliable" had to reckon with penalties or being sent to a labor education camp from the beginning of the war.

The so-called "company community" was intended to restructure relationships between employers and employees – in fact, it only strengthened the "company managers" alone. Life within the company was controlled and monitored by the German Labor Front/Deutsche Arbeitsfront (DAF). But even outside of everyday working life the Nazi regime also intervened: "Strength

ARBEITERLEBEN

ÖNB Wien/PLA16307385



Nazi propaganda posters were intended to emphasize the connectedness between soldiers and workers on the "home front".



ÖNB Wien/S 164/31

From 1943 on children were evacuated from cities endangered by bombing raids – an upheaval in the private lives of many people.



KLA

Within the framework of company appeals, the "company community", modeled on the "front community", came to the fore.

through Joy"/"Kraft durch Freude" (KdF), a sub-organization of the German Labor Front, guided people's leisure activities in the interests of the regime. The aim was the complete acquisition and mobilization of the workforce both inside and outside the company.

Conditions became tougher with the war: Working hours – especially in the armaments industry – were increased and the supply situation also worsened. This applied to "German" workers. Forced laborers, who according to Nazi ideology were not part of the "national community", were exploited in factories, agriculture and in the context of infrastructure projects. Their everyday life was characterized by control, discrimination and coercion.

FORCED LABOR

→ a system of violence and deprivation of rights

The system of forced labor was a central element of National Socialist rule. Even before the Second World War Jews and other groups classified as “alien to the community” were forced to work. The National Socialists expanded the system to Austria after the “Anschluss” in 1938. In addition to Jews also Roma and Romezzes, Sinti and Sintezze, concentration camp prisoners as well as civilian workers from occupied territories were forced to work.

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Gerd Rühle, Das Dritte Reich, Das vierte Jahr 1936, Berlin 1937, 462

Forced laborers were exposed to catastrophic working and living conditions in the camps.

Gerd Rühle, Das Dritte Reich, Das vierte Jahr 1936, Berlin 1937, 462



Strict rules and reprisals shaped everyday life in forced laborers' camps.



The Allies estimated that in January 1945 around 1.4 million forced laborers and prisoners of war were in Austria – around 60,000 forced laborers in Carinthia. Many of them were used in industry, agriculture and construction. Their everyday life was characterized by hard physical work, oppression and strict regulations. “Eastern workers” in particular were considered “alien” and were subjected to massive discrimination. They had to wear special identification marks, were hardly allowed to move freely and had no social rights.

Forced labor was used in almost all economic sectors – from agriculture to the armaments industry to large infrastructure projects. One example of this is the Wunderstätten-Lavamünd camp, which was used for the construction of the Drau power plants. Prisoners of war and forced laborers worked here under inhumane conditions. Jewish prisoners in particular were brutally treated and had to perform the hardest physical work. Many of them did not survive the forced labor.

ÖNB Wien/S 205/25



During the construction of the power plants in Schwabegg and Lavamünd Viennese Jews had to work under the most adverse conditions.

SHATTERED INTERESTS

→ employee representation under National Socialism?

With the seizure of power by the National Socialists any independent representation of employees was smashed. Already under the Austrofascist regime (1934–1938), the free trade unions had been banned and the chambers of labor deprived of their self-administration. After the “Anschluss” in 1938, they were finally dissolved, their assets were confiscated and transferred to the German Labor Front/Deutsche Arbeitsfront (DAF).

In Carinthia, the former building of the Chamber of Labor and Trade Unions in Bahnhofstrasse was converted into the headquarters of the German Labor Front (DAF). From here it controlled all measures and propaganda activities. Legally membership of the Nazi mass organization was voluntary, but anyone who

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Archiv der AK Kärnten

The building of the Chamber of Labor in Bahnhofstrasse was completely destroyed by bombing raids.



Archiv der AK Kärnten

The reconstruction of the destroyed building was a sign of the symbolic reconstruction of the labor movement after the Second World War.

→ refused to join had to reckon with reprisals – up to and including the loss of their job.

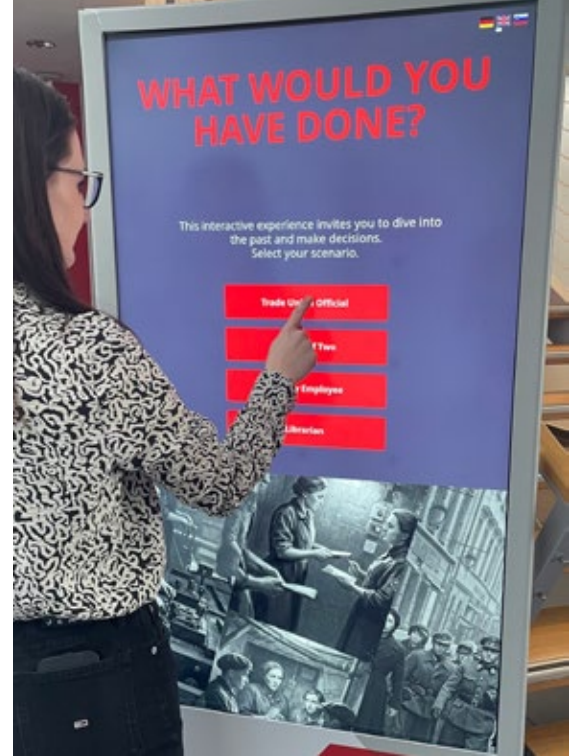
With the beginning of the war, the control over the workforce intensified. The German Labor Front (DAF) was involved in the organization of forced labor and served to mobilize the entire society for the war effort. Only with the end of the Nazi regime in 1945 trade unions and chambers of labor could be rebuilt: On 22 July 1945, the first national conference of the Austrian Trade Union Federation/Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund (ÖGB) met in Carinthia, and in 1946 the Carinthian Chamber of Labor resumed its activities as a democratic representation of the employees. With the reconstruction of the Chamber of Labor (AK) building in Bahnhofstrasse, which had been completely destroyed by bombing raids, a symbolic sign of a new beginning was set.

THE EXHIBITION

Under National Socialism, work was far more than an economic necessity – it became a means of control, exclusion and discipline. The Nazi regime propagated work as a duty towards the “national community” and used it as a tool of ideological “education”. Work discipline was seen as a political demand, and companies and organizations were integrated into the system of rule. Anyone who did not correspond with the ideas of the National Socialists were disenfranchised, excluded or conscripted into forced labor.

The exhibition “work 1938–1945” illustrates how deeply the regime intervened in working conditions and the consequences this had for the people. In Carinthia, too, the world of work changed fundamentally: existing structures were reshaped, new coercive measures were introduced, and workers were systematically evaluated and managed according to ideological criteria. Moreover, the National Socialists put numerous people from occupied territories to work as forced laborers in industry and agriculture.

Based on six main themes, the exhibition sheds light on the workings of the National Socialist labor policy and its impact on people. It invites to engage with this topic and to reflect on the significance that work can have in political systems. Digital elements promote the personal reflection of visitors and provide an overview of places of remembrance in Carinthia that are connected to the general theme of the exhibition.



THE EXHIBITION

May through December 2025

ÖGB/AK Bildungsforum
Bahnhofstraße 44
9020 Klagenfurt am Wörthersee

Open: Mon-Fri 9 a.m.–4 p.m.

Admission free

Guided tours and workshops can be booked here: ak-akademie.at/lehreundschule



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