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Between Extermination and Child-Rearing: The Foreign Child-Care Facilities of Volkswagen and Velpke

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BETWEEN EXTERMINATION AND CHILD-REARING: THE FOREIGN CHILD-CARE FACILITIES OF VOLKSWAGEN AND VELPKE

A Thesis Presented

by

Lauren Fedewa

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Abstract

During World War Two, approximately 400 to 450 Ausländerkinder-Pflegestätten, or foreign child-care facilities, were established across the German Reich as collection centers for the infants born to Polish and Soviet civilian laborers employed in the German war economy. My thesis examines two such foreign child-care facilities, the Volkswagen and Velpke children’s homes, where over 450 Polish and Soviet infants perished. Three themes provide the framework for an analysis of these two facilities: the conflict between two of the main goals of the Third Reich—racial cleansing and the exploitation of forced labor; the question of whether the establishment of the facilities and treatment of the children depended on orders from upper-level or local-level authorities; and the issue of whether the children’s deaths stemmed from intent to cause their deaths or indifference toward their fate. This thesis addresses the following questions: In terms of racial ideology and economic pragmatism, was one factor more significant in the establishment and use of the Volkswagen and Velpke children’s homes? Who, among upper-level and lower-level Nazi officials, ordinary Germans, medical professionals, and factory executives, was responsible for the children’s deaths? Were the children’s deaths intentional? What do these two facilities tell us about the other foreign child-care facilities that existed across the Third Reich? The research for this thesis draws upon two British war crimes trials held in Braunschweig and Helmstedt, Germany in 1946, the “Velpke Baby Home Case” and the “Rühen Baby Farm Case,” as well as records from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives in Washington, DC, the National Archives at College Park in College Park, MD, and digital records from the International Tracing Service Archives.

Ultimately, this thesis highlights the connections between the three conflicting—and often opposing—themes. First, the trial records revealed that both facilities were exclusively established, managed, and operated by local-level officials and personnel. Second, upper-level Nazi authorities deemed alleged racial enemies a threat to the German “master race,” and were intent on enforcing a racial hierarchy in the German Reich; however, the local-level officials and staff responsible for these two children’s homes were far more concerned with maintaining productivity from the Polish and Soviet workforce, remaining indifferent toward the fate of the children at the homes. Third, while both the need for economic efficiency from workers and the belief in Nazi racial ideology influenced the establishment, management, and operation of the Volkswagen and Velpke children’s homes, there is minimal evidence that local authorities and personnel prioritized racial ideology over economics. Since both facilities were controlled locally, this thesis reveals that rather than putting racial ideological into practice and intentionally killing the children, local officials prioritized economic production. This left the fate of the children somewhere between extermination and child-rearing—between being left to die, murdered, or raised.
This thesis was made possible thanks to my tenure as an Albert Abramson Family Foundation Summer Graduate Research Assistant at the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, as well as through funding and support from the Carolyn and Leonard Miller Center for Holocaust Studies, University of Vermont.

Thank you to the Holocaust historians at UVM—Francis Nicosia, Alan Steinweis, Susanna Schrafstetter, and Jonathan Huener—for being my teachers, mentors, and role models, and for providing endless advice and encouragement. A special thank you to my advisor, Jonathan Huener, for your patience, guidance, and the countless invaluable lessons. I am also grateful to the entire faculty of the UVM History Department, especially Nicole Phelps, Sarah Osten, Denise Youngblood, and David Massell, for expanding my horizons and introducing me to new areas of study.

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And to my friends and family, thank you for always believing in me.
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Introduction

In a sworn statement to American war crimes investigators on June 4, 1945, former Soviet forced laborer Antonia Sivakova recalled her memories of the final moments of separation between a mother and child at the Volkswagen (VW) Children’s Home¹ in Rühen, Germany:

The last minutes of farewell are now over. The unfortunate grief of the young mother, who kisses her baby innumerable times, and gives it the caressing care of a mother, knowing that the baby will never grow up, is a pathetic site. Her eyes are filled with tears, because they do not give her a chance to see her dear lovable child […] she knows that on her next visit she will not recognize its cheerful look, laughing eyes, and its former jovial face; its eyes looking up, not understanding its fate. In the next moment she hears a penetrative rough cry, “Get out, it is time.” […] Then the nearly half-conscious woman, with her eyes wide open, seeming that she wants to scream, tries to look at us for help. We are as helpless as she. It seemed that she tried to find a good-hearted soul, and would give half her life for the life of her child. But the child stayed alone, in a wooden bed, with a hard mattress, covered with a white sheet on a cold and coarse oil-cloth […] On the [mother’s] next visit, a short time after the baby came into this world, it could not be recognized. The outline of the baby is sickly in appearance, sunken skull, fallen eyes […] It no longer cries, because it hasn’t enough strength […] In place of tender care, the baby was merely tortured.²

Sivakova’s dramatized account provided minimal direct evidence for prosecutors to use in the later “Rühen Baby Farm Case,” a war crimes trial convened in Helmstedt, Germany in June 1946.³ There are no dates, names, or identifying information that would

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¹ Because the children in the VW and Velpke facilities were the victims of neglect and mistreatment, the terms “home” and “children’s home” do not accurately describe the nature of these facilities; however, as both are referred to in trial records as home and children’s home, these terms will be used in this thesis without quotations. The author’s ideological distance from this terminology should nonetheless be clear.

² Sworn statement of Antonia Sivakova; Deaths of 350-400 Russian and Polish Infants in the Towns of KdF Stadt and Rühen, Germany, File No. 000-12-397, Box 486; Records of U.S. Army, Europe; War Crimes Case Branch; Record Group (RG) 549; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD (NACP).

have corroborated other witnesses’ statements about the children’s home. Yet, it was her account under sworn oath of what she experienced while employed as an assistant at the children’s home. Sivakova repeatedly witnessed tragic events such as these. The seemingly never-ending cycle of a mother arriving with a baby, its health declining, and the baby’s death, blurred together in her memory to create this one single scene—a scene without names or details, but only images of the constant “injustice” and “pain” she saw and felt while “trapped,” “helpless,” and forced to keep quiet. Thus, in her recollection, the anonymity of the mother and child symbolizes the collective experience of the mothers and children whom Sivakova saw passing through VW’s children’s home.

While Sivakova’s account portrays what occurred at one facility, it stands as an example of the experiences of women and children at Ausländerkinder-Pflegestätten, or foreign child-care facilities, across the Third Reich. Between 1943 and 1945, 400 to 450 Ausländerkinder-Pflegestätten were established in Germany to accommodate pregnant forced Polish and Soviet laborers and their infant children. Despite the sophisticated-sounding name, these were not facilities where children were cared for properly and raised. They functioned under primitive and inadequate conditions, usually without appropriate medicine, equipment, or personnel. Most became centers of death for the “racially inferior” foreign infants who were forcibly removed from their mothers’ care so that the mothers could continue to work. While the death rates were extremely high, the

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4 Sworn statement of Antonia Sivakova; Deaths of 350–400 Russian and Polish Infants in the Towns of KdF Stadt and Rühen, Germany, File No. 000-12-397, Box 486; Records of U.S. Army, Europe; War Crimes Case Branch; RG 549; NACP.
5 Foreign child-care facilities are also referred to in the literature as Institutions for the Care of Foreign Children, Kindersammelstätte für die Ausländische (Children’s Collection Point for Foreign Children), Polen-Entbindungs-und Kinderheime (Maternity and Children’s Homes for Poles), Ausländer Kinderlager (Foreign Children’s Camp), and Kinderheime (Children’s Homes).
number of lives they claimed is unknown. Furthermore, the exact number of facilities, or how many women and children passed through them, remains unclear. Missing, incomplete, or destroyed records have left hundreds of unanswered questions. Foreign child-care facilities are shrouded in mystery and confusion, and they remain one of the most significant gaps in scholarly research on the study of foreign forced labor during World War Two.

Among countless other questions, there exists a fundamental question about these facilities: What were the motives behind their creation? Although some historians would argue that the establishments existed solely to ensure that pregnant laborers returned to work as quickly as possible, unburdened by their newborns, there was also another, more cynical motivator at work: these facilities were intended to cause the deaths of “racially inferior” Polish and Soviet children because of their low status on the Nazis’ racial hierarchy. Thus, the “unworthy” life was ended when it had only just begun. The conflict between two main goals of the Third Reich—the exploitation of foreign labor and racial cleansing—defined the existence of foreign child-care facilities. The tension between these two forces will be the underlying focus of this thesis.

While it is clear that foreign child-care facilities stemmed from both the need for productivity from foreign forced laborers and the priority of upholding a racial hierarchy, it remains to be seen whether economic or racial priorities motivated the facilities’ development and operation to a greater extent than the other. This question is central to scholars’ understanding of these facilities. Because hundreds of foreign child-care
facilities remain both unknown and unnamed, small-scale case studies are needed of facilities with surviving documentation to confront this question.

This thesis contributes to this gap in scholarly research by examining two such foreign child-care facilities, the Volkswagen and Velpke children’s homes, where approximately 456 Polish and Soviet children perished. The VW and Velpke facilities were located only twelve kilometers from one another in Lower Saxony—a region where there were a high number of births among female foreign laborers. One facility was founded to house the children of industrial workers, and the other was opened for children born to the area’s agricultural laborers. One existed in three separate facilities between 1943 and 1945, while the other operated in a single barrack for eight months in 1944. One was run by a major German industrial enterprise, the other, by the local Nazi Party. Finally, one was regarded at one time by factory and Party officials as a model facility, while the other lacked electricity, running water, heat, and a trained medical staff. At both, the mortality rate reached at least ninety percent. A comparison of these two children’s homes reveals countless more commonalities and discrepancies in their establishment, management, and day-to-day operation—all of which show their relevance as case studies of foreign child-care facilities.

The VW and Velpke homes are illustrative of the wide-ranging issues that determined the circumstances at foreign child-care facilities across the Reich. Consequently, through an analysis of the VW and Velpke facilities, this thesis will address the principle question introduced above. This work explores the motivations behind these two facilities’ establishment and their intended purpose by connecting them
to Nazi racial and economic policies toward pregnant foreign laborers and foreign child-
care facilities at the central level. Moreover, it examines the varied involvement of
central and local authorities by discussing the extent to which central Nazi authorities
were involved in the facilities’ operation, as well as the roles and responsibilities of local
officials and personnel. It also introduces several theories about the causes of the
children’s deaths, delving into suspicions that the children were deliberately killed.
Lastly, this work demonstrates how the lasting conflict between enforcing a racial
hierarchy and ensuring economic productivity from the foreign workforce ultimately
determined the children’s fate. These case studies of the Volkswagen and Velpke
children’s homes offer conclusions that pave the way for future study of the hundreds of
facilities that have yet to be extensively researched.

Chapter One begins with a historiographical overview of the state of the field and
current body of knowledge on foreign forced labor and foreign child-care facilities. It
introduces three significant themes from the historiography, which will provide the
framework for the examinations of the VW and Velpke children’s homes. Chapter Two
discusses the economic and ideological context of the employment of Eastern European
civilian laborers, the problem of pregnancy and childbirth among female foreign workers,
and the development of foreign child-care facilities. This chapter lays the foundation for
the analysis of the VW and Velpke facilities through an overview of the enduring conflict
between the regime’s belief in racial ideology and the practical needs of production.
Chapters Three and Four tell the stories of the VW and Velpke children’s homes in the
framework of two themes introduced in the historiography chapter: the question of local-
level versus upper-level management of the homes, and the question of intent versus indifference as causes of the children’s deaths. Chapters Three and Four also expand upon the conclusions reached in the second chapter regarding central authorities’ involvement in the establishment of foreign child-care facilities by examining how central policy was put into practice at a local level. They therefore address the conditions at the facilities, the treatment of the children, and the causes of the children’s deaths. Finally, this analysis concludes by synthesizing the patterns and findings emerging in the first four chapters. It will emphasize how this thesis clarifies the extent to which racial ideology and economics motivated the establishment, management, and operation of the Volkswagen and Velpke children’s homes.
Chapter One: Historiography

With the plethora of studies on the Holocaust that steadily emerged throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the topic of non-Jewish foreign forced labor under National Socialist rule was overshadowed by scholarly and public focus on Jewish victims. Although scholars have investigated the history of foreign labor since the 1960s, it took secondary importance to studies on the destruction of the European Jews, leaving the field relatively unexplored until Ulrich Herbert published his groundbreaking work, *Fremdarbeiter: Politik und Praxis des 'Ausländer-Einsatzes' in der Kriegswirtschaft des Dritten Reiches*, in 1985. With Herbert at the forefront, the study of foreign labor has become a focus of extensive research only over the last thirty years.

This chapter introduces and discusses three principle issues by using them as a framework for an overview of the historiography of foreign forced labor: 1) whether enforcing a racial hierarchy among foreign workers or improving conditions to increase economic productivity motivated the treatment of foreign workers; 2) whether upper-level or local-level authorities had more control over the management and exploitation of workers; and 3) whether the mistreatment of foreign workers stemmed from intent to

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7 It is no simple task to determine who exactly was a forced laborer; the term still has no generally accepted definition. The Third Reich’s use of coerced labor is best described as a “continuum that stretches from obligatory, to enforced, to forced, and on to slave labor.” A simple definition is that “forced laborers were those set to work for, by, or in Nazi Germany under duress.” For more information, see Mark Spoerer and Jochen Fleischhacker, “Forced Laborers in Nazi Germany: Categories, Numbers and Survivors,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 33 (2002), 169–204; Laura J. Hilton, and John J. Delaney, “Forced Foreign Labourers, POWs and Jewish Slave Workers in the Third Reich: Regional Studies and New Directions,” *German History* 23, no. 1 (August 2003): 83-95; Peter Hayes, “Forced and Slave Labor: The State of the Field,” *Forced and Slave Labor in Nazi-Dominated Europe: Symposium Presentations* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2004).
cause them harm or indifference toward their fate. These three themes—in fact, conflicts—determined the employment and treatment of foreign forced laborers during World War Two, and they are conflicts that remain critical to historians’ understanding of the Nazis’ forced labor system.

After a historiographical analysis of foreign forced labor introduces the relevance of the questions introduced above, an overview of the historiography of foreign child-care facilities will provide a small-scale examination of the same three issues, revealing their significance to the study of these facilities. By using three principal themes from the historiography of foreign forced labor and foreign child-care facilities as a lens through which to analyze the Volkswagen and Velpke children’s homes, this thesis will address the broader issues and gaps in literature in both areas of study. The findings reached with this thematic framework will demonstrate this thesis’ contribution to the current body of knowledge.

Despite recent developments in the field since 1985, the issue of foreign forced labor remains difficult to comprehend because of the enormity of the Nazi system of foreign labor and the vast number of people subjected to it. Different categorizations of foreign forced laborers as prisoners of war, civilian workers, military internees, and concentration camp inmates contributes to the ambiguity. Each of these categories of workers suffered differently under the Nazi regime. Furthermore, the vastly different experiences of the twelve million foreign forced laborers makes generalizing about their predicament almost impossible. Their experiences varied depending on the time of the

8 Spoerer and Fleischhacker, “Forced Laborers,” 201.
war and location; whether they worked in industry, agriculture, or mining; and if they were employed by a private or state-owned enterprise. Furthermore, differences ranging from daily treatment, living and working conditions, gender, age, and nationality—especially between Eastern Europeans (such as Polish civilians and Soviet civilian workers, or Ostase) and Western Europeans—greatly impacted their situation.

While the publication of Herbert’s *Fremdarbeiter* provided one of the first major works on the topic of foreign forced labor, John Fried published *The Exploitation of Foreign Labour by Germany* in 1945, taking advantage of wartime documents on the Nazis’ vast scheme of European-wide labor mobilization. Although this book provided a first look at the recruitment of workers, the types of “contracts” under which they were employed, their wages, and working conditions, Fried’s use of German documents provides only one perspective. His perspective, that of the “employers,” portrays the plight of foreign laborers in too favorable a light.  

Additionally, two influential publications from the 1960s are worth mentioning. Edward L. Homze’s *Foreign Labor in Nazi Germany* and Hans Pfahlmann’s *Fremdarbeiter und Kriegsgefangene in der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft, 1939-1945,*

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9 Ostase (Eastern worker), or Ostaseinnen for female Soviet civilian workers, was a Nazi category of workers that applied to anyone living in the Soviet Union at the beginning of the war, along with residents of the district of Galicia and Bialystok. The term included Ukrainians and Belarussians. For more information, see Ulrich Herbert, *Hitler’s Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany under the Third Reich,* trans. William Templer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 72, 73, 165.

10 John H. E. Fried, *The Exploitation of Foreign Labour by Germany* (Montreal: International Labor Office), 1945. Fried was also one of the first to look at women’s experiences as forced laborers in Nazi Germany. He discusses the changes in policy throughout the war regarding pregnant women and provides a detailed discussion of the Maternity Protection Act and the rights of expectant mothers. Ibid., 234-236.
appeared in 1967 and 1968, respectively.\footnote{Edward L. Homze, \textit{Foreign Labor in Nazi Germany} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967); Hans Pfahlmann, \textit{Fremdarbeiter und Kriegsgefangene in der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft, 1939-1945} (Darmstadt: Wehr und Wissen, 1968). See also, Eva Seeber, \textit{Zwangsarbeiter in der faschistischen Kriegswirtschaft: die Deportation und Ausbeutung polnischer Bürger unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Lage der Arbeiter aus dem sogenannten Generalgouvernement, 1939-1945} (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1964).} These books took a structuralist approach by examining the Nazi bureaucracy and network of slave labor as a large, wide-ranging system, but neglected to consider decisions and inconsistencies that occurred on a local level. They were, nonetheless, pioneering studies that opened the field for future researchers by outlining Nazi policies toward foreign workers and providing the first broad estimates on the extent of the forced labor system. After the publication of these works, there remained a need for grass-roots investigations to capture the personal experiences of the millions of workers employed in the German war economy. This gap in literature further illustrates the importance of Herbert’s \textit{Fremdarbeiter}, and why this work is regarded as the starting point for the study of foreign forced labor.

In the meticulously researched \textit{Fremdarbeiter}, Herbert analyzes both the German bureaucratic processes and laborers’ everyday living and working conditions. Effectively showing how the Nazis’ forced labor system evolved on the macropolitical and macroeconomic level, Herbert insists that before 1939, there was no long-term plan for the massive use of foreign labor. Using case studies of Krupp Cast Steel Works and the Ruhr mines, Herbert also examines the conflict between the competing forces of racist ideology and economic pragmatism to show differences in the management and treatment of foreign workers. Ultimately, Herbert argues that instead of enforcing the racial
hierarchy among foreign workers, ordinary Germans tended towards indifference.\textsuperscript{12}

Although Herbert was not the first to write on foreign forced labor, the publication of this groundbreaking work drew scholarly attention and respectability to the topic.\textsuperscript{13}

It was not until after the publication of \textit{Fremdarbeiter} that the subject of forced labor generated significant interest among German academics, and the group of scholars still dominating the field today. Despite the popularity of Herbert’s work in German academic circles, it gained little attention from American scholars until its publication in English twelve years later. Herbert’s English-language version, \textit{Hitler’s Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany under the Third Reich}, was intended to provide information to former laborers applying for compensation.\textsuperscript{14} The tireless work of Herbert and one of his top successors in the field, Mark Spoerer, helped bring the compensation debate to its climax in the late 1990s.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{12} Herbert, \textit{Fremdarbeiter}, 358.


\textsuperscript{14} Herbert, \textit{Hitler’s Foreign Workers}.

several years of national and international negotiations, the “Remembrance, Responsibility, and Future Fund” was put into effect on August 12, 2000, providing long-overdue compensation payments to former laborers.  

During the compensation debate, German companies received pressure from international organizations to admit to employing foreign workers during World War Two, and make the information available to the public. As a result, many corporate studies were published, bringing German companies’ exploitation of foreign labor to light. Large-scale investigations into foreign forced labor at German companies revealed the astounding number that employed foreigners, and showed the extent to which foreign labor was intertwined with the German war economy. Companies such as Daimler-Benz, Volkswagen, BMW, IG Farben, and Krupp have all been the subject of recent studies on the use of foreign forced labor during the war. Of particular relevance to this thesis are

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16 After the war, all governments whose populations had been affected by the forced labor system compiled evidence for reparation claims; however, in the London Debt Settlement of 1953 the West German government postponed reparation claims. The Federal German Law on Compensation (BEG), adopted in 1953, 1956, and 1965, secured compensation for individuals who were persecuted by the Nazis for racial, political, ideological, or religious reasons, but excluded the largest groups of foreign victims, foreign civilian forced laborers and foreign concentration camp prisoners. The reparation issue for foreign laborers was not reopened until the Two-plus-Four agreement of 1990. On August 12, 2000 the law on the establishment of the foundation “Remembrance, Responsibility and Future” was passed by the German parliament. The fund was made up of voluntary payments from 6,500 German enterprises and the Federal German Government. It provided benefits to former laborers and other groups of victims. It also provided support for future research and education on forced labor. The compensation program was officially closed in a ceremony with President Horst Köhler and Chancellor Angela Merkel on June 12, 2007.

the studies on Volkswagen. Over the past twenty years, Volkswagen has become a pioneer in revealing the company’s employment of thousands of forced laborers during World War Two. Hans Mommsen and Manfred Grieger, Klaus-Jörg Siegfried, and the Volkswagen Corporate History Department have all published material on VW’s use of foreign labor. One particularly notable 1,000-page monograph published by Hans Mommsen and Manfred Grieger, *Das Volkswagenwerk und seine Arbeiter im Dritten Reich* (1996), was financed by Volkswagen.\(^{18}\) VW’s efforts to support historical studies on their past provides one example of how German companies are coming to terms with their roles during the Nazi era. Moreover, the numerous corporate studies that resulted from the compensation debate provide further evidence of companies’ extensive control over the treatment of their workers, and show the scope of foreign labor employment in German companies.

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The compensation debate also led to the publication of hundreds of local and regional histories, greatly expanding the field and confirming the massive presence of foreign workers alongside Germans from 1939 to 1945. These histories use Herbert’s findings about the Nazis’ vast system of foreign labor and apply them to the use of foreign labor in specific, discrete localities across Germany. For example, Herbert’s preliminary assumption was that the bureaucracies at the intermediate and lower levels had flexibility in the management of their foreign workforce, and it seems that most subsequent local and regional studies confirm this hypothesis. In other words, many everyday decisions regarding the use of foreign labor were decided by local lower-rank bureaucrats and managers.

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After Herbert’s *Hitler’s Foreign Workers* (1991), the most significant comprehensive study to emerge in the field was Mark Spoerer’s *Zwangsarbeit unter dem Hakenkreuz: Ausländische Zivilarbeiter, Kriegsgefangene und Häftlinge im Deutschen Reich und im besetzten Europa, 1939–1945* (2001).²¹ Spoerer’s work is one of the first publications to connect important developments in the field since *Fremdarbeiter*. It expands on Herbert’s conclusions about how the treatment of laborers differed depending on local-level management by discussing other aspects that contributed to the varied experiences of workers, especially toward the end of war: the changing war economy, location, the influence of the German Labor Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*, or DAF) and Nazi party functionaries, and the involvement of the Gestapo in a company’s operation. By introducing the regional differences in the living and working conditions of foreign laborers, Spoerer highlights the many factors that determined laborers’ experiences—none of which were the same.

The abundance of recent corporate, local, and regional studies reflects how much the vast expansion in this field since the 1990s has been intertwined with the compensation debate. Yet, while substantial progress has been made, there exists the need for further work in several areas.²² First, additional studies are needed to highlight commonalities and inconsistencies among local and regional studies and connect them to the broader themes in national studies. Second, more economic studies examining the

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²¹ Spoerer, *Zwangsarbeit*.
²² For historiographical overviews of the field, see Mark Spoerer, “Forced Labor Under the Nazi Regime: Recent Findings and an Agenda for Future Research,” in *Revisiting the National Socialist Legacy: Coming to Terms with Forced Labor, Expropriation, Compensation, and Restitution*, ed. Oliver Rathkolb, 73-81 (Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2002); Hilton and Delaney, “Forced Foreign Labourers”; Hayes, “Forced and Slave Labor.”
German war economy and its mobilization for “total war” would contribute to the growing understanding of the conflict between racial ideology and economic productivity, for it remains to be determined “when, how and why economic necessity superseded racial policy considerations during the war.”

Third, social histories and grass-roots approaches remain critical areas for future research. The voices of the victims themselves have been neglected, mostly due to survivors’ apprehension about sharing their experiences. Further study of former laborers will highlight the varied treatment of Western European and Eastern European workers at different stages of the war, and determine if living and working conditions improved because of a gradual emphasis on economic productivity rather than racial ideology.

Finally, the lack of social histories contributes to another gap in the study of foreign forced labor: the experiences of women. The historiography of female foreign labor has largely been intertwined with that of foreign forced labor, and as a result, women’s experiences are often mentioned in a work on the use of foreign labor in a

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region or an individual factory.\(^{25}\) Few existing studies consider the role of gender in the recruitment, deployment, and day-to-day life of foreign workers. Several works discuss women’s experiences in the context of relationships between Germans and foreign workers, but this remains understudied.\(^{26}\) Nonetheless, multiple historians have begun pioneering this sub-field, among them Gisela Schwarze (formerly Bock), Anna Rosmus, Sophie Hodorowicz-Knab, Raimond Reiter, and Bernhild Vögel.\(^{27}\)


An author who has made a significant contribution to the study of foreign women under National Socialism is Gisela Schwarze. Schwarze’s *Kinder, die nicht zählten. Ostarbeiterinnen und ihre Kinder im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (1997)\(^{28}\) discusses forced labor in the private economy, mining, construction, and other areas with a special emphasis on Eastern European women and their children. The monograph contains photographs, eyewitness accounts, archival documents, and lists of regional forced labor camps and companies that employed forced laborers. It also provides a general overview of foreign child-care facilities and a detailed analysis of Waltrop-Holthusen, the largest foreign child-care and abortion facility in the Third Reich.

Moreover, *Kinder, die nicht zählten* and another article by Schwarze, “Antinatalism, Maternity and Paternity in National Socialist Racism,”\(^{29}\) specifically address anti-natalist policies against female civilian workers from the Soviet Union and Poland. The legalization of abortion and the practice of forced sterilization on Polish and Soviet workers were intended, in part, to eliminate “inferior” races and prevent their propagation. Schwarze writes that, with the legalization of abortion in 1943, the ground was laid for the neglect of the unwanted children of female Polish and Soviet workers in foreign child-care facilities.\(^{30}\) Schwarze’s work connects the anti-natalist, racist policies


\(^{30}\) Schwarze, *Kinder*, 145. For records on the legalization of abortion for *Ostarbeiterinnen* and Polish civilian workers, see select documents from the National Archives Collection of World War II War Crimes Records, Nürnberg Organizations (NO) Series, RG 238, NACP: Abortions Carried Out on Eastern
toward Polish and Soviet civilian workers to Hitler’s long-term plan to weaken the biological strength of his enemies by controlling reproduction, birth rates, and population decline. Overall, Schwarze estimates that hundreds of thousands of forced abortions and sterilizations were carried out on female forced laborers, particularly on those from Eastern Europe. The secrecy surrounding forced abortions, as well as the destruction of most of the health records in 1945, are two reasons why abortions are seldom mentioned in the historiography of foreign forced labor. Schwarze’s work has been fundamental in developing researchers’ understanding of how the control of women’s bodies and reproductive processes became Nazi state policy.

One of the most comprehensive studies of female forced labor, *Wearing the Letter P: Polish Women as Forced Laborers in Nazi Germany, 1939-1945*, was published by Sophie Hodorowicz-Knab in 2016. This remarkably well-researched work combines German, Polish, and British, and American archival sources with personal accounts of former female Polish forced laborers. It remains one of the few works published in English that provides a broad overview of their experiences. Hodorowicz-Knab individualizes the collective experiences of female laborers by supplementing historical

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31 Schwarze, *Kinder*, 141.
analyses of forced roundups, transit camps, and laborers’ living and working conditions with former laborers’ personal testimonies and photographs. Her work also dedicates a chapter to pregnancy and childbirth among female Eastern European workers, including sexual assault, abortions, and foreign child-care facilities.

These pioneering works by Schwarze and Hodorowicz-Knab add the marginalized voices of women to the literature on foreign forced labor. They provide a glimpse into the gendered experiences of foreign women employed in Germany, particularly by highlighting methods of biological persecution. Despite recent developments, however, the study of female forced labor is still in its early stages. More studies are needed to connect women’s experiences to larger patterns in the use of foreign labor. The minimal research on female forced labor reflects a significant gap in the scholarship, and contributes to the inadequate understanding of another marginalized group of victims: the children born to Polish and Soviet forced laborers. The fate of the infants who were born in Germany and taken to foreign child-care facilities remains largely missing in the literature on foreign forced labor. Despite the astounding number of foreign child-care facilities, most remain unknown, even among experts in the field of Holocaust studies and modern German history.

Several monographs and articles published in the 1980s mark the start of investigation into foreign child-care facilities, but since then, few additional studies have emerged. In the context of the compensation debate of the 1990s these facilities slowly became a focus of research; however, the body of work remains nominal. Like discussions of women’s experiences, discussions of foreign child-care facilities are found
in wide-ranging works on foreign forced labor, and in works on the experiences of children during World War Two, most of them in German. Developments in the field have stalled since the 1990s because historians have generally introduced the topic of foreign child-care facilities briefly in a more general work about foreign forced labor, but have not explored the facilities further. They have tended to present the same information with minor variations, citing the same letters and decrees from Nazi officials and mentioning only one or two facilities out of an estimated 400 to 450. Few historians.


37 Foreign child-care facilities mentioned in the literature are Velpke, Volkswagen/Rühen, Waltrop-Holthusen, Braunschweig Entbindungsheim Broitzemer Straße 200, Spital am Pyhrn, Brunshausen,
make these facilities central enough to their work to provide insight into the countless unanswered questions.

Nevertheless, the absence of scholarly work focusing on foreign child-care facilities is not surprising. Significant factors have limited research on the subject: the absence of one supervising Nazi government agency; missing, false, or destroyed records; and the large variety and number of local institutions and authorities that established and managed the facilities. For example, Gisela Schwarze found only twenty-three Reich decrees issued between the summer of 1941 and the end of 1944 that concern the regulation of these facilities. Furthermore, Schwarze’s research on the Waltrop-Holthusen facility shows that the camp registry books and cemetery lists for Waltrop are incomplete and incorrect, and that more children died than were reported. Her research highlights the scarcity of and inconsistencies in the documentation on foreign child-care facilities—major aspects limiting scholarly research.

Due to the absence of records, it cannot be confirmed how many facilities existed or how many victims they claimed. In her 2004 article, Evelyn Zegenhagen cites a source from 1943 that confirms the existence of eighty-four, with thirty-one more in the planning stage. Raimond Reiter estimates that there were fifty-eight facilities in Lower

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39 Schwarze, Kinder, 155.
40 Ibid., 180.
41 Zegenhagen, “Facilities,” 68.
Saxony alone, at which 2,300 children died.\(^{42}\) Since the 1990s and early 2000s, estimates on the number of facilities have risen significantly. Bernhild Vögel estimates the number of facilities to be 400. Patricia Heberer-Rice, a historian at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), now estimates the number of facilities to be more than 450. Ongoing research for the USHMM’s forthcoming project, *The Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933-1945, Vol. V*, will provide new insight into the number of facilities and victims. Based on the existing literature, it is possible that anywhere from 50,000 to 100,000 children perished at between 400 and 450 foreign child-care facilities.\(^{43}\)

Besides missing and incomplete records, other significant factors have contributed to the lack of research on these facilities, including German resistance to acknowledging the crimes that were carried out in their communities. In the 1980s, when knowledge of foreign child-care facilities moved into the public eye for the first time, German officials and community members were forced, sometimes reluctantly, to confront the truth about


\(^{43}\) Jens-Christian Wagner estimates that 50,000 children died at *Ausländerkinder-Pflegestätten*. Jens-Christian Wagner, “‘Ausländerkinder-Pflegestätten’– Der Mord an Neugeborenen ausländischer Zwangsarbeiterinnen,” in *Jahresbericht 2017 Schwerpunktthema: Kindheit im Nationalsozialismus im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland*, ed. Jens-Christian Wagner, 34-37 (Celle: Stiftung niedersächsische Gedenkstätten, 2018), 37. Moreover, Bernhild Vögel’s website “Krieg Gegen Kinder” (http://www.birdstage.net/kgk/cgi-bin/pageview.cgi) lists over 400 places where maternity or children’s camps existed, or where there are traces such as baby graves or eyewitness accounts. She writes that “An estimated 100,000 children of Soviet and Polish forced laborers were killed between 1943 and 1945, either through abortion or calculated neglect after birth.” In *Wintergreen* (2004), Anna Rosmus estimates that there were 500,000 victims of foreign child-care facilities. She writes “Each district had its own infants’ home. Calculated on a low death rate such those as in Sallach and Barhof, the total would be about 500,000.” Without footnotes or a bibliography however, Rosmus’ estimate cannot be considered reliable.
the facilities in their towns. The discovery of these facilities led to negative press
coverage for the German communities where they were located.

For example, Gerd Haida, Michael Koziol, and Alfred Schmidt’s work documents
the controversy surrounding the former Gantenwald Entbindungsheim, or “maternity
home,” located near the town of Bühlerzell. Three editors from the Haller Tagblatt spoke
with local witnesses about the abandoned cemetery where twenty-five foreign infants are
buried, sparking a debate over whether the graves should be memorialized.\textsuperscript{44} This
controversy forced the town to confront its past, but at the same time angered some
townspeople who preferred to “let the grass grow” over the graves.\textsuperscript{45} The Haller
Tagblatt’s investigation unveiled the truth about the farmhouse once used as a maternity
home, and the fate of the infants buried in the Gantenwald forest. By 1988, the
community had taken over responsibility for the graves’ upkeep and erected a memorial
in the cemetery.

In another example, historian Anna Rosmus faced resistance from German
residents when investigating the foreign child-care facilities near her hometown of Passau
in Eastern Bavaria.\textsuperscript{46} Despite Rosmus’ personal connection to the area, she encountered
hostility when interviewing witnesses, conducting research in archives, and visiting the
former sites. She writes, “Sallach, a tiny village that once held one of these homes, does
not welcome strangers who ask what happened.”\textsuperscript{47} As evident from the examples of

\textsuperscript{44} Gerd E. Haida, Michael S. Koziol, and Alfred Schmidt, “Gantenwald: Eine Ausländerkinder-
Pflegestätte,” in \textit{Faschismus in Deutschland: Ursachen und Folgen, Verfolgung und Widerstand,
Ausländerfeindlichkeit und neonazistische Gefahren}, ed. Industriegewerkschaft Druck und Papier, 194-229
(Cologne: Bund-Verlag, 1985).
\textsuperscript{45} Haida, Koziol, and Schmidt, “Gantenwald,” 194-195.
\textsuperscript{46} Rosmus, “Involuntary Abortions;” Rosmus, \textit{Wintergreen}.
\textsuperscript{47} Rosmus, “Involuntary Abortions,” 84.
Bühlerzell and Passau, the lack of research on these facilities can, among other factors, be attributed to local communities’ desire for these facilities to remain undiscovered.

Although countless factors have limited scholarly research, two monographs from the 1980s provided pioneering studies on foreign child-care facilities: Roman Hrabar, Zofia Tokarz, and Jacek E. Wilczur’s *Kinder Im Krieg-Krieg Gegen Kinder. Die Geschichte Der Polnischen Kinder 1939-1945* (1981), and Bernhild Vögel’s “Entbindungsheim für Ostarbeitinnen,” Braunschweig, Broitzemer Straße 200 (1989). While *Kinder Im Krieg* discusses Polish children’s experiences during the war, Vögel’s monograph is dedicated entirely to foreign child-care facilities. Nonetheless, *Kinder im Krieg* emerged before Vögel’s work and was one of the first to discuss these facilities, including the Braunschweig Entbindungsheim, Broitzemer Straße 200, the Velpke Children’s Home, and the *Polenkinderlager* (Polish Children’s Camp) Laberweinting.

*Kinder im Krieg* is not only one of the original works on foreign child-care facilities; it is also one of the few that takes a clear stance on the question of intent versus indifference as causes of the children’s deaths. The authors assert that there was a “systematic and purposeful starvation of infants,” causing these institutions to become “centers of mass annihilation.” Other historians have made similar claims, including Eva Seeber, who writes that, “the fascists prepared the planned killing of Polish children.”

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48 Hrabar, Tokarz, and Wilczur, *Kinder*. For the English-language version, see *The Fate of Polish Children*.  
during the first few years of the war, and then established foreign child-care facilities to starve them to death.\textsuperscript{51} Furthermore, Richard Lukas introduces these facilities in the context of what he regards a genocide against the Polish nation, discussing how the facilities were among the many methods used to hamper normal biological propagation among Poles.\textsuperscript{52} The emphasis these historians place on the deliberate extermination of Polish and Soviet children because of their “race” shows the prevalence in the literature of the debate surrounding the questions of intent versus indifference, and enforcing racial ideology versus maintaining economic productivity. Scholars who assert that the children were deliberately killed stand in contrast to scholars who argue that officials were disinterested in the fate of the children, and instead were concerned solely with maintaining the mothers as workers.\textsuperscript{53}

Although the title of Vögel’s book, “Entbindungsheim für Ostarbeiterinnen,” \textit{Braunschweig, Broitzemer Straße 200}, suggests that it focuses on only one facility, it provides the most in-depth, thorough overview of foreign child-care facilities to date.\textsuperscript{54} Vögel provides relevant contextual information on the facilities, and then conducts a case study analysis of the Braunschweig \textit{Entbindungsheim}. She analyzes the Braunschweig facility against the background of foreign forced labor during World War Two, highlighting the issues of racial ideology versus economic productivity and intent versus indifference by connecting the high mortality rate among infants to the treatment of

\textsuperscript{51} Seeber, \textit{Zwangsarbeiter}, 165.
\textsuperscript{52} Lukas, \textit{Did the Children Cry?}, 21-40.
\textsuperscript{53} Early scholars who wrote on these facilities tended to highlight the Nazis’ racially motivated reasons for establishing these facilities. More recent publications, such as those by Patricia Heberer (2015) and Evelyn Zegenhagen (2004), indicate that economic motivations were more significant.
\textsuperscript{54} Vögel, \textit{Entbindungsheim}. This book was also published as an online PDF in 2005.
foreigners who were unable to work. In the later stages of the war, when the concern for
economic productivity was at an all-time high, laborers who could not work were sent to
“special facilities” and murdered. Vögel argues that since infants were among those
unable to work, they too were destined to die, but via a less calculated method.55

Vögel provides more insight into the conflict between intent and indifference as
causes of the deaths by challenging that the children’s deaths were the unintended
consequence of housing infants together in a confined space.56 She maintains that
authorities knew of the dangers because physicians helped develop the decrees on the
establishment of foreign child-care facilities.57 Thus, she rejects all claims that authorities
and physicians were unaware that these facilities would result in the infants’ deaths.
Furthermore, Vögel introduces the concept of a “Zwischenlösung,” or a “temporary
solution,” as the result of the debate between authorities over whether to intentionally kill
the children or raise them as a future labor force. Although confining the infants to these
facilities was intended to be a temporary measure, Vögel argues that when Nazi leaders
failed to decide the children’s fate, the infants were subjected to a fate somewhere
between extermination and child-rearing—the slow, agonizing death of starvation.58

It has been suggested by historians and the families of the infants who perished
that the infants in foreign child-care facilities did not die only of neglect, starvation, and

56 Testimony of Thilo Brehme (WO 235/267), Rühen Baby Farm Case, WO 235/263-272, RG-59.016M,
Judge Advocate General's Office: War Crimes Case Files, Second World War (WO 235), United States
Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.
57 Vögel, Entbindungsheim, 124.
58 Vögel’s concept of a “Zwischenlösung,” or “zwischen Vernichtung und Aufzucht” (between
extermination and child-rearing), inspired the title of this thesis. Ibid., 33.
infection; however, the actual causes of the children’s deaths, as well as whether they were intentionally killed, cannot be confirmed. Hans Holzhaider’s article on the Indersdorf Children’s Barrack (1987) explores the gray area surrounding the deaths by discussing the uncertainties surrounding the causes of the deaths at Indersdorf.\(^\text{59}\)

Holzhaider questions one suspicious cause of death listed frequently in the facility’s registry for the latter period of operation—Angeborene Lebensschwäche, or “innate life weakness”—which is not a medical diagnosis.\(^\text{60}\) He also introduces one theory for the high death rate at Indersdorf, which is that the barrack originated as a disease-infested barrack at Dachau, causing an epidemic among the infants after its transfer to Indersdorf. Holzhaider maintains that there is much more research to be done, and therefore, he cannot provide a concrete answer about the cause of the deaths. To this day, almost nothing has been proven about the cause of the deaths at any facility. There are many theories and speculations, but the countless missing sources and unanswered questions make it impossible to assert that all the children were starved, neglected, or intentionally killed by another method. The uncertainty surrounding the cause of the deaths remains one of the most significant gaps in scholarly research on the subject.\(^\text{61}\)

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60 Ibid., 121.
61 Evidence about the children’s cause of death at foreign child-care facilities is scant. The most likely cause of death was neglect and deliberate indifference to their condition. Nonetheless, there are testimonies from the Kelsterbach transit camp that infants were shot to death or died after medical experiments. Vögel, *Entbindungsheim*, 128; See also, Andrea Röpke and Volker Steinhoff, “Todeslager für Babys - US-Anwälte beschuldigen VW des Völkermordes,” *Das Erste*, May 6, 1999, http://daserste.ndr.de/panorama/archiv/1999/Todeslager-fuer-Babys-US-Anwaelte-beschuldigen-VW-des-Voelkermordes.erste7242.html. Moreover, a Pole employed at the Naujok factory stole her sick child from an educational institution (Erziehungsanstalt) to save his life. She went to a doctor at the Cellerstraße Hospital, where the doctor said that child had been given an injection, and as a result, he would die, Vögel, *Entbindungsheim*, 128. Lastly, Bozenna Gilbride mentions in her testimony that her aunt’s child died after its blood was drained for German troops. RG-50.233*0032, oral history interview with Bozenna Gilbride,
While Hrabar and Vögel’s publications pioneered research on foreign child-care facilities in the 1980s, Raimond Reiter’s Tötungsstätten für ausländische Kinder im Zweiten Weltkrieg: zum Spannungsverhältnis von kriegswirtschaftlichem Arbeitseinsatz und nationalsozialistischer Rassenpolitik in Niedersachsen, followed shortly after in 1993. Reiter’s work is a groundbreaking investigation of all the confirmed and presumed foreign child-care facilities in today’s Lower Saxony. This regional study provides a vital contribution to the field because, since approximately eighty percent of all “illegitimate” foreign births occurred in rural areas with a high concentration of female forced laborers working in agriculture, twenty-five percent of the foreign child-care facilities were in Lower Saxony. Using local and regional archives, Reiter discovered parallels and variations in the treatment of infants at different sized facilities. For example, Reiter estimates that at facilities serving large-scale industrial or agricultural areas, such as the VW and Velpke children’s homes, mortality among the infants neared

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC. Although these examples do not prove that children were intentionally killed at all or most foreign child-care facilities, research has established that some young children of Polish and Russian forced laborers born in captivity were sent to the “children’s euthanasia” wards in Lüneburg, Leipzig-Dösen, Eichberg, Schleswig, and Kaufbeuren, where they were killed. After inspecting the children’s medical records and death certificates from facilities in Stuttgart, physician Karl-Horst Marquart concludes that some of the forced laborers’ children died of starvation and neglect; however, he also found that highly implausible (i.e., fake) causes of death were entered into the record for nine of the children, and that the signatures of the physicians in the death records were faked—typical of “children’s euthanasia” in Stuttgart, and highly suggestive of active killing. For more information, see Karl-Horst Marquart, “Behandlung empfohlen” – NS-Medizinverbrechen an Kindern und Jugendlichen in Stuttgart (Stuttgart: Peter-Grohmann-Verlag, 2016).


63 Nicholas, Cruel World, 402.
ninety percent.64 Hundreds of children died at these facilities, whereas other facilities that served small-scale areas, such as Echem, Bardowick, and Hohnstorf, had fewer than ten victims.65 Although Reiter and the other historians introduced above, especially Schwarze and Vögel, have conducted noteworthy investigations into multiple foreign child-care facilities, these scholars’ publications mark only the beginning of research into the topic.

Out of the hundreds of facilities that have yet to be researched, the VW and Velpke homes have gained some notoriety because of two British war crimes trials convened by British Military Courts in Helmstedt and Braunschweig, Germany in 1946: the “Rühen Baby Farm Case” and the “Velpke Baby Home Case.”66 The availability of trial records makes it possible for scholars to research these two facilities, while for most other facilities, no documentation remains. Accordingly, this thesis draws primarily from the Rühen and Velpke trials. Chapters Two and Three will be based almost entirely on testimonies and evidence. The trial records provide an overview of the establishment and management of the homes, the treatment of the children, and perhaps most importantly, who was held accountable for the deaths.

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64 Reiter, Tötungsstätten, 201.
65 Ibid., 100-11.
The Rühen and Velpke trials were unique war crimes trials because the accused were not high-level Nazi officials or military leaders charged with crimes connected to the operations of war, but rather, civilians charged in the “killing by willful neglect” of Polish and Soviet nationals. Regulations from the Hague Convention of 1907 served as the legal basis for British war crimes trials. The British Royal Warrant, a special military decree of June 14, 1945, provided British Military Courts the jurisdiction to charge individuals with a war crime if they violated “the laws and usages of war” established at the convention in 1907. Specifically, under the Hague Regulations, it was forbidden in time of war to kill the innocent population of any country, or to deport foreign nationals from an occupied country to the occupying power’s territory. Moreover, Article 46 provided that “family honour and rights” and “individual lives” must be respected. Consequently, since the Nazi government took responsibility for foreign nationals and any children born to them by deporting civilians to Germany for labor, the accused in the Rühen and Velpke trials were obligated, under international law, to respect the laborers’ and their children’s family honor, rights, and lives. By taking on parental roles for the children and allowing them to die, they did the opposite.

This thesis will emphasize whether intent or indifference was the cause of the children’s deaths because of the relevance of this issue in the historiography, and because

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67 Brand, Trial of Heinrich Gerike, xxxi.
68 Ibid., xxx-xxxii.
69 Ibid., xxxv
of the charge of willful neglect in the Rühen and Velpke trials. The prosecution in the trials defined willful neglect as a “criminal” and “deliberate” neglect of the children with a “willful disregard of the consequences.”\footnote{Brand, \textit{Trial of Heinrich Gerike}, 8, 326.} Additionally, willful neglect was described as having a “higher” and “lower” form: premeditated neglect (the planned, deliberate omission of care with fatal results), and gross neglect (the causing of death by wicked/gross/reckless negligence).\footnote{Draper closing statement (WO 235/270), Rühen Baby Farm Case, WO 235/263-272, RG-59.016M, Judge Advocate General’s Office: War Crimes Case Files, Second World War (WO 235), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.} According to the prosecution, the former applied to a situation where the probable and intended consequence of a person’s neglect was death, while the latter applied to a person who took custody of a helpless infant and let it die by gross negligence. These two forms can also be understood as the difference between being convicted of murder or manslaughter.\footnote{Brand, \textit{Trial of Heinrich Gerike}, xxxiii-xxxiv, 326-337; Ibid.}

Despite these distinctions in the charge of willful neglect, both forms were criminal, and the prosecution contended that if either form was proven, it was within the charge. Furthermore, the court was not required to define the defendants’ actions as either murder or manslaughter to convict them of a war crime. These differences did not affect the verdict, but rather, the sentencing.\footnote{Brand, \textit{Trial of Heinrich Gerike}, xxxiv, xlv-xlvi, 326; Draper and judge advocate’s closing statements (WO 235/270), Rühen Baby Farm Case, WO 235/263-272, RG-59.016M, Judge Advocate General’s Office: War Crimes Case Files, Second World War (WO 235), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.} In both its forms, willful neglect was essentially a crime of “deliberate inaction.” While some of the defendants took steps to hasten the children’s deaths, most were tried because of their failure to act.\footnote{Brand, \textit{Trial of Heinrich Gerike}, xlii.} Yet, since both forms
implied that there was a degree of intent, or the “willful” omission of care, it was difficult to prove with direct evidence. Consequently, out of the eighteen accused, only seven were found guilty.\textsuperscript{76}

Ultimately, the categories that the prosecution provided are unsatisfactory for analyses of the VW and Velpke children’s homes. The legal terms and their descriptions are complex and difficult to understand, and they do not facilitate discussion about the defendants’ motives. Thus, this thesis will discuss the defendants’ crimes in the context of willful neglect, but rather than using the “high” and “low” forms of willful neglect, it will use the terms intent and indifference. An analysis of intent and indifference will examine who, among the responsible authorities and staff, intended to cause the children’s deaths, and who was recklessly negligent, or indifferent, toward their care.

The “Rühen Baby Farm Case” and the “Velpke Baby Home Case” provide the means to conduct case studies on the VW and Velpke children’s homes. Without the post-war investigations and trials on these facilities, the truth might have never been uncovered. Moreover, both trials’ records are accessible in British and American archives, and the Velpke trial has been the focus of a published work. George Brand’s edited volume on the trial provides a nearly complete account of its proceedings, as well as a comprehensive introduction by the publisher, in which the legal basis for the trial and

\textsuperscript{76} One defendant died during the trial proceedings, and ten defendants were acquitted of all charges. Kurt Schliemann was found unfit to stand trial, and so he never faced charges. WO 235/270, Rühen Baby Farm Case, WO 235/263-272, RG-59.016M, Judge Advocate General's Office: War Crimes Case Files, Second World War (WO 235), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC; Brand, \textit{Trial of Heinrich Gerike}, 108, 111, 339.
the convictions are set.\textsuperscript{77} This is a valuable primary source, but it has garnered little attention because of its publication as one volume of a British War Crimes Trial Series in 1950.\textsuperscript{78} Furthermore, because of its early date of publication, it lacks an analysis of the trial material in light of more recent scholarly work. Brand’s work made the Velpke trial accessible to the public, but no published source provides an account of the Rühen trial.

Even with ample documentation from the Rühen and Velpke trials, secondary literature dedicated solely to the Volkswagen and Velpke children’s homes is almost nonexistent.\textsuperscript{79} Although the two facilities are mentioned in sources on foreign forced labor and foreign child-care facilities, the information provided is sparse, repetitive, and vague. While works by Vögel, Reiter, Hodorowicz-Knab, Mommsen and Grieger, and Siegfried provide the most extensive overviews of one or both facilities,\textsuperscript{80} as a whole, the

\textsuperscript{77} Brand, \textit{Trial of Heinrich Gerike}.

\textsuperscript{78} Brand’s work is volume VII of the War Crimes Trial Series, a series that highlights the handling of international and English martial law after World War Two. The War Crimes Trial Series is part of the Notable British Trials Series (NBT), which consists of 85 volumes published between 1905 and 1959. The NBT series has become a complete library of historical and criminal trials between 1586 and 1953.


existing source base presents misleading and incomplete overviews of these facilities based on only parts of the trials, and only on the cases of the prosecution, leaving out substantial testimony and evidence.

In the literature on these two facilities, the VW Children’s Home appears more frequently because it is mentioned in publications on the Volkswagen factory. Works on the history of Volkswagen, such as those by Siegfried, Mommsen and Grieper, and the VW Corporate History Department, mention the children’s home, but their analyses do not assign enough responsibility for the children’s deaths to the VW factory administration, especially VW’s highest-level executives. Instead, their works focus on the negligence of the medical personnel, particularly Dr. Hans Körbel because of his connection to the Party. Furthermore, Siegfried writes that gastroenteritis was the cause of the deaths at VW’s home in Rühen, despite that remaining unproven in the trial. Stating that the deaths were caused by an epidemic further diminishes the VW administration’s involvement by ignoring the suspicions that the children died of a more intentional method of killing or neglect. Overall, the existing publications on Volkswagen dedicate only small sections to the children’s home, and do not provide an extensive overview of VW’s responsibility for the home at all levels of the administration.

Moreover, secondary works on the Volkswagen home emphasize the third and final location of VW’s foreign child-care facility (Rühen), and do not examine the other

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81 For works on VW that mention VW’s children’s home, see Siegfried, “Racial Discrimination,”; Siegfried, Rüstungsproduktion; Mommsen and Manfred, Das Volkswagenwerk; Siegfried, Das Leben; Corporate History Department, ed., Place of Remembrance.
82 For examples, see Corporate History Department, ed., Place of Remembrance; Siegfried, Rüstungsproduktion.
two locations in extensive detail (East Camp and Schachtweg). At the East Camp and Schachtweg facilities in Wolfsburg, the mortality rate was significantly lower. Examining all three facilities shows the gradual decline in the conditions and a gradual rise in the death rate, rather than a steady death rate of nearly 100 percent.  

In comparison to the literature on the Volkswagen Children’s Home, the Velpke Children’s Home has received nominal scholarly attention. The above-mentioned works by Vögel and Reiter are the only published secondary sources with substantial material on the Velpke home, although Vögel provides just one chapter on Velpke, and Reiter draws primarily from Vögel’s book. Moreover, the Velpke home is the subject of an unpublished master’s thesis, but this work focuses on the facility as an example of the Nazis’ racist extermination policies, and neglects to consider the economic aspects behind its establishment and use.

In sum, while there is a small body of secondary literature that mentions the VW and Velpke children’s homes using the trial records as sources, most works do not provide a neutral analysis of the trials through the eyes of both the accused and the accusers. When these facilities are mentioned, significant contextual information is missing, important testimonies and evidence from the trials are not included, and

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84 For examples, see Hodorowicz-Knab, Wearing; Lukas, *Did the Children Cry*?; Mommsen and Grieger, *Das Volkswagenwerk*; Corporate History Department, *Place of Remembrance*; Siegfried, *Das Leben*; Siegfried, *Rüstungsproduktion*; Russell, *Geissel der Menschheit*.
85 Vögel’s *Entbindungsheim* includes a chapter on the Velpke home because some of the children who died at Velpke were born in the Braunschweig *Entbindungsheim*, Broitzemer Strasse 200. Reiter’s *Tötungsstätten* uses the trial records to provide an overview of the home’s establishment, the defendants’ roles, and the conditions.

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responsibility for the deaths is often assigned to the few individuals who were convicted, instead of also those who were acquitted or never tried.

While some work has been done on the VW and Velpke children’s homes, the lack of scholarly research on these two facilities is due, in part, to the trials being largely forgotten in the wake of the Nuremberg Trials. During the immediate post-war period, international attention remained focused on convicting the highest-level authorities in Nazi Germany and procuring justice for Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Given the massive scope of National Socialist crimes, and the fact that the accused in the Rühen and Velpke trials were not top Nazi leaders, the deaths of several hundred non-Jewish Polish and Soviet children were overshadowed by the annihilation of one and a half million Jewish children. Another factor that caused these facilities to fade into history was the silence of the Polish and Soviet mothers whose children died. After the war, the women were repatriated back to a communist state where many were shamed into silence for bearing children on enemy soil, and often too traumatized to discuss their losses.\(^87\) Thus, even with sufficient primary source material from the Rühen and Velpke trials, scholarly research on the VW and Velpke homes, and on non-Jewish Polish and Soviet infants as victims of the Nazis, did not begin until forty years after the war. Both remain neglected topics to this day.

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This chapter has discussed three relevant themes in the historiography of foreign forced labor and foreign child-care facilities, revealing their importance to the study of the VW and Velpke children’s homes. The fundamental questions of upper-level versus lower-level authority, intentional mistreatment versus indifference, and maintaining economic productivity versus enforcing racial ideology have emerged frequently in the literature on foreign forced labor and foreign child-care facilities. They remain critical areas of future research in both fields, especially for local studies. Despite the importance of these issues, they have not yet been identified and examined together as a framework for case studies of foreign child-care facilities.

Consequently, this thesis will address the extensive gaps in literature on foreign child-care facilities by considering the principal findings of scholars in the field of foreign labor, whose work explored the three themes reiterated throughout this chapter, and applying those findings to an analysis of foreign child-care facilities. It will build upon the current body of knowledge by using two of the themes from the historiography to frame the case studies of the VW and Velpke children’s homes. Both approaches will provide original conclusions about the broader issues in the study of foreign forced labor and foreign child-care facilities.

Moreover, using the Rühen and Velpke trials, this work will introduce testimonies and evidence from both the prosecution and defense that have never been presented in a single source, showing that the facilities’ establishment, management, and operation must be understood through the perspectives and experiences of everyone involved. The defendants’ voices, the voices of the parents, and the voices of German employers,
residents, and VW employees, will add to scholars’ understanding of the circumstances at these facilities. While this work will identify the individuals responsible for the children’s deaths, it will also consider how the trials, and the charge of willful neglect, focused on convicting the local staff who cared for the children rather than higher-level Nazi authorities or top executives from VW. Countless other information will be presented that is not addressed extensively in other secondary sources: the VW factory administration’s responsibility, the roles of all the defendants and other individuals who were not tried for these crimes, the varied conditions at the three locations of VW’s children’s home, and suspicious factors that suggest the children may have been intentionally killed.

In addition to records from the Rühen and Velpke trials, this thesis will make use of other primary source material to provide a thorough overview of the facilities. First, select records from the National Archives in College Park, MD allow for an examination of central policies toward pregnancy and childbirth among foreign laborers, including the establishment and operation of foreign child-care facilities. Correspondence and decrees from upper-level Nazi authorities will reveal how and why the policies were developed, and the Rühen and Velpke trial records will show how they were implemented at the local level. Second, digital records from the International Tracing Service Archives (ITS) will provide information about the post-war search for Polish and Soviet children in Germany, as well as birth and death records for the children who passed through the homes. Records from the ITS provide a personal element to the stories of these children’s homes by giving names to the children who died there. Third, testimonies from former
forced laborers will add the first-hand accounts of Polish and Soviet civilians employed in Germany, and introduce their unique perspectives on the children’s homes.

An analysis of the historiography of foreign forced labor and foreign child-care facilities has revealed the necessity for case studies on the Volkswagen and Velpke children’s homes. Ultimately, this work will consider whether the deaths of the children at the VW and Velpke facilities was motivated by economic factors, whether it was an intentional attempt to exterminate the next generation of an “inferior race,” the product of indifference, or a combination of all three. Numerous questions remain. In terms of racial ideology and economic pragmatism, was one factor more significant than others in the establishment and use of the VW and Velpke children’s homes? Who was responsible for the children’s deaths? Were the children’s deaths intentional? And what do these two facilities tell us about the hundreds of other foreign child-care facilities across the Third Reich? The next chapter discusses the employment of Polish and Soviet civilian laborers and the establishment of foreign child-care facilities, laying the economic and ideological foundation for the chapters on the VW and Velpke children’s homes.
Chapter Two: Economic Productivity versus Nazi Racial Ideology

The Nazi invasions of Poland and the Soviet Union brought a massive influx of civilian laborers into the German Reich from the east, most of them forcibly deported from their homelands to confront the critical labor shortage in German agriculture and industry. While the war economy required the source of manpower, bringing Eastern Europeans who were regarded as Untermenschen, or subhumans, into the Altreich\textsuperscript{88} constituted an ideological concession for a regime that ardently feared “biological-racial” contamination.\textsuperscript{89} Poles, Jews, and most Soviet citizens were viewed as “racially inferior” to Western Europeans—those considered closest in racial proximity to the German “master race.” Thus, unlike the deployment of Western European laborers, the deployment of Eastern Europeans for labor was viewed as a “racial threat.”\textsuperscript{90} Despite the Nazis’ deep-rooted fears surrounding the presence of “racial enemies” on German soil, the urgent need for workers called for the mass utilization of Polish civilians and Ostarbeiter. By August 1944, of the almost eight million foreigners registered as workers in the Greater German Reich, over half were Polish and Soviet civilians.\textsuperscript{91}

Throughout the duration of the war, the Nazis’ use of foreign civilian labor from the east was defined by the two conflicting forces described above: the need for efficient economic production, and the commitment to Nazi racial ideology. Although in the long run the economic considerations outweighed the racial concerns, there was a constant explicit and implicit battle between maintaining productivity from foreign workers and

\textsuperscript{88} This term refers to Nazi Germany in its 1937 borders, before the annexation of Austria.
\textsuperscript{89} Herbert, \textit{Hitler’s Foreign Workers}, 1.
\textsuperscript{90} Siegfried, “Racial Discrimination,” 39.
\textsuperscript{91} Herbert, \textit{Hitler’s Foreign Workers}, 1.
enforcing the regime’s racial goals. To demonstrate this conflict, the first section of this chapter provides a broad overview of the policies that impacted the employment of Polish and Soviet civilian laborers, revealing the regime’s gradual transition from a focus on racial ideology to a focus on economic productivity. The latter part of the chapter examines the issue of pregnancy and childbirth among foreign laborers, emphasizing how both economic and racial factors influenced the treatment of the pregnant workers and their infants. Ultimately, exploring the conflict between economics and racial ideology in the employment of Eastern European civilian laborers and in the establishment and operation of foreign child-care facilities sheds light on why the fate of Polish and Soviet infants was largely determined by the tension between these two opposing forces.

**Polish and Soviet Civilian Labor**

Throughout the war, the deployment and treatment of Eastern European civilian laborers was defined by both economic and racial concerns; however, while racial factors were more important initially, from mid-1942 on, the regime began to shift away from subjugating “racially inferior” workers toward improving conditions to maximize their productivity. Nonetheless, despite the ever-increasing need for labor throughout 1943 and 1944, the conflict between racial ideology and economics persisted, albeit to a lesser extent, as many Germans could not separate themselves from the Nazis’ ideological tenets. A discussion of the changes in the treatment of Polish and Soviet laborers from 1939 to 1944—changes that paralleled the growing manpower shortage and the regime’s transition to “total war”—shows the regime’s eventual prioritization of economics, yet also reveals the contradictory policies that resulted in the continuation of the conflict.
Prior to 1939, there was not a strict racial policy for Polish laborers working in the Altreich.\textsuperscript{92} Moreover, even after the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, racial philosophy was compromised in favor of acquiring Polish labor for the 1939 harvest.\textsuperscript{93} In March 1940, however, the first legal measures based on “racial distinctions” were proclaimed with the Polen-Erlasse, or Polish decrees, which regulated the living and working conditions of Polish civilian workers.\textsuperscript{94} These decrees limited Polish laborers’ freedoms, segregated Poles from German society, and sought to prevent social relationships between Poles and Germans.

To control and monitor the movements of Polish laborers, all Poles received a labor permit that contained their fingerprints and photo, and they were required to wear badges with a “P” designating their nationality. As former forced laborer Waclaw J. Jędrzejczak recounted, “officially we were considered people of a lower class, almost slaves, obliged to wear a large, identifying, yellow, diamond-shaped badge with a purple 'P' on it.”\textsuperscript{95} Moreover, to isolate Polish workers from German society, Poles were banned from certain areas of Germany, forced to live in segregated housing and abide by a curfew, and restricted in their use of public conveyances. They were also prohibited from participating in German cultural, social, or church functions.\textsuperscript{96}

Lastly, to protect “German blood” against alleged contamination by foreigners, Germans and Polish laborers were forbidden from engaging in sexual relations with one

\begin{footnotes}
\item[92] Herbert, \textit{Hitler’s Foreign Workers}, 69.
\item[93] Homze, \textit{Foreign Labor}, 40.
\item[94] Ibid; Herbert, \textit{Hitler’s Foreign Workers}, 71.
\item[95] Wojciechowska, ed., \textit{Waiting to be Heard}, 116.
\item[96] Herbert, \textit{Hitler’s Foreign Workers}, 72; Homze, \textit{Foreign Labor}, 40-41.
\end{footnotes}
another.\textsuperscript{97} The penalty for Germans who committed \textit{Rassenschande}, or “race defilement,” was a warning or imprisonment, and the punishment for Poles was generally death.\textsuperscript{98} Initially, a Pole’s life was spared if the Main Race and Resettlement Office (\textit{Rasse-und Siedlungshauptamt}, or RuSHA) conducted a “racial examination” and determined that the Pole was suitable for “Germanization.”\textsuperscript{99} After mid-1943, however, the number of foreign workers executed for committing sexual offenses declined, and “racial examinations” became infrequent. Due to the labor shortage, foreign workers were sent to a concentration camp instead of being executed. By the end of 1944, the “racial exam” had been discontinued, and RuSHA’s focus had shifted from sexual offenses to pregnant foreign workers—an issue that will be discussed below.\textsuperscript{100} The gradual decline in the number of “racial examinations,” and the reduced severity of punishments, reflects the regime’s move away from enforcing racial hierarchy to preserving its labor force.

In addition to laws forbidding sexual relationships between Poles and Germans, contact between Polish workers was also restricted.\textsuperscript{101} A law stating that Polish men had to be twenty-eight years old and Polish women had to be twenty-five made it difficult for Polish laborers to marry. Other regulations, like the requirement that they have documents from Poland, made marriage impossible.\textsuperscript{102} Since most Polish, and later

\textsuperscript{97} Homze, \textit{Foreign Labor}, 40; Kundrus, “Forbidden Company,” 214.
\textsuperscript{98} Herbert, \textit{Hitler’s Foreign Workers}, 77; Kundrus, “Forbidden Company,” 214-215.
\textsuperscript{99} Hodorowicz-Knab, \textit{Wearing}, 174; Kundrus, “Forbidden Company,” 215. “Germanization” was the process of indoctrinating foreign nationals who had “Aryan” traits into becoming culturally German, as well as incorporating “racially desirable populations” into the Reich. It involved relocating “ethnic Germans” into German territory and kidnapping children from the occupied Eastern territories. For more information, see Heberer, \textit{Children}, 205-206, and Lukas, \textit{Did the Children Cry?}, 114.
\textsuperscript{100} Herbert, \textit{Hitler’s Foreign Workers}, 269.
\textsuperscript{101} Hodorowicz-Knab, \textit{Wearing}, 64.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 181-182.
Soviet, civilian laborers could not marry, pregnancies were declared “illegitimate,” which served as one justification for the later removal of the infants from their mothers’ guardianship. The Nazis’ laws against relations between Eastern European laborers and Germans, as well as their efforts to control laborers’ sexual contact and marital status, were intended to protect “German blood” and prevent reproduction among “racial enemies.” With their restrictions on Poles’ movements, freedoms, and social contact, the Polish decrees reinforced the Nazis’ racial hierarchy, confining Polish laborers to the lower rungs of society and excluding them from German life. The racially-motivated decrees defined much of their lives, and took precedence over their survival.

While the Polish decrees introduced regulations for Polish laborers employed in Germany, their living and working conditions varied depending on their place of employment, as well as how closely their employers followed the Nazis’ regulations regarding care, lodging, and feeding. Nonetheless, because of the Polish decrees and Germans’ widespread acceptance of the Nazis’ racial classifications, many Polish laborers lived and worked under difficult conditions. Agricultural workers often lived on German farms, where they were housed in cramped rooms, attics, and barns with primitive furnishings. Industrial workers were usually accommodated in residential camps, where they lived in barracks separated by nationality, or in existing buildings that lacked amenities. Many Polish workers were exposed to inadequate heating, overcrowding, filth, and vermin. The appalling living conditions, especially in situations

103 Schwarze, Kinder, 142.
where Poles lived alongside mice, bedbugs, and livestock, in spaces that were not intended to house humans, reflected their status as *Untermenschen*.  

Similarly, the working conditions of Polish laborers show how they were valued as workers, but not as humans deserving of fair treatment. There were no limits on their working hours, and most worked from dawn to dusk with improper clothing, minimal rest, and meager rations. The majority suffered from severe hunger. Furthermore, as German employers were given the right to use corporal punishment, Polish workers were subjected to physical abuse. Former forced laborer Wanda Larkowska described how, after her mother stole food from her employer, she was beaten so badly that she was semi-comatose for two weeks. Polish workers were powerless against the Nazis’ regulations and their employers’ treatment, and they often lived and worked in conditions that caused them physical and mental pain. For some, the trauma endured long after the war, as evident from the account of Katarzyna Morzydusza, a former Polish laborer at the Volkswagen factory: “I returned ill and exhausted. To this day I suffer from the consequences of the past years: years of annihilation, cold, and fear.”

While this overview provides only a glimpse of the experiences of Polish laborers, it illuminates how their treatment was determined by their “racial” status. In addition to the official decrees issued by the Nazi state, German employers were exposed to Nazi propaganda that reaffirmed Poles’ status as “racial enemies.” Leaflets and

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105 Ibid., 85-96, 103.
106 Wojciechowska, ed., *Waiting to be Heard*, 266.
107 Corporate History Department, *Place of Remembrance*, 151.
memoranda warned Germans to keep their distance from members of the “alien race” and not betray the German Volk.108 In a published proclamation, Germans were told, “The Pole can never be your comrade! …never forget that you belong to a master race.”109 The widespread belief in Nazi racial ideology contributed to the oppression of Polish workers, because many German employers enforced the Nazis’ restrictions.

From 1939 to 1941, when Polish civilians made up Germany’s largest source of foreign labor, racial ideology defined their treatment, as demonstrated by the Polish decrees and their living and working conditions. Because Germany’s position in the war remained favorable during these years, the regime was not forced to weaken its ideological stance. The conflict between racial ideology and economics existed before 1941, evident from Nazi leaders’ apprehension about risking the “racial threat” and employing Poles in the Altreich; however, the tension between the two forces increased significantly after the German attack on the Soviet Union and the mass deployment of Ostarbeiter.

Following the invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, the conflict between the need for economic productivity and the adherence to Nazi racial ideology intensified. Initially, the Party leadership was opposed to the employment of Soviet

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108 Leaflet Addressed to Germans Employing Polish Workers, Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, Vol. 8, Document R-148, in Hodorowicz-Knab, Wearing, 65; Memorandum Issued by District Agricultural Authorities in Gau Weser-Ems; Box 18, Document D-56; Collection of World War II War Crimes Records; Office of Chief of Counsel for War Crimes (OCCWC); RG 238; NACP, in Hodorowicz-Knab, Wearing, 87-88. Volk was the Nazi term for the Germans’ “racial” community.

civilians in Germany on “racial” and “security-policy” grounds.\textsuperscript{110} Furthermore, leaders believed that they would achieve a quick victory in the USSR, and that the use of Soviet labor would be unnecessary.\textsuperscript{111} After the failed \textit{Blitzkrieg}, however, the armaments industry had to prepare for a long war and expand its capacity. During the winter of 1941, it became clear that the use of Soviet labor was a necessity, and the recruitment of Soviet workers grew into a massive deportation program.\textsuperscript{112}

The treatment of Soviet civilian laborers from the fall of 1941 to mid-1942 reflects the regime’s continued focus on racial ideology. After their deportation to the Reich, \textit{Ostarbeiter} were subjected to the same racially-motivated restrictions as Polish workers. Like the Polish decrees, the \textit{Ostarbeiter-Erlasse}, or Eastern workers’ decrees, signed on February 20, 1942, included regulations demoting \textit{Ostarbeiter} to the lower rungs of society. Most Soviet laborers lived in closed, segregated residential camps enclosed by high fences or barbed wire. They wore badges marked with “OST,” and were prohibited from leaving the camps except for work.\textsuperscript{113} Furthermore, as for Poles, marriages were restricted.\textsuperscript{114} The Eastern workers’ decrees accomplished what the Polish decrees had achieved two years earlier: \textit{Ostarbeiter} faced discriminatory restrictions determined by their “racial status.”

In contrast to Poles, of whom the largest percentage were employed in German agriculture, \textit{Ostarbeiter} were used primarily in industry.\textsuperscript{115} Many Soviet laborers were

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{110} Herbert, “Forced Laborers,” 195.
\item \textsuperscript{111} Herbert, \textit{Hitler’s Foreign Workers}, 141; Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{112} Corporate History Department, \textit{Place of Remembrance}, 5.
\item \textsuperscript{113} Herbert, \textit{Hitler’s Foreign Workers}, 166-167; Herbert, “Forced Laborers,” 197.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Schwarze, “‘Any misunderstood leniency is to be avoided,’” 89.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Hodorowicz-Knab, \textit{Wearing}, 71; Herbert, “Forced Laborers,” 196.
\end{itemize}
employed in Nazi state armaments factories, where the living and working conditions of the various groups of foreigners were determined by a strict racial hierarchy. Soviet laborers held significantly worse positions than Western European laborers. They were assigned the heavy, dirty, or dangerous jobs, worked under strict surveillance ten to twelve hours per day, and were subjected to punishment if they disobeyed orders. To undermine solidarity between workers of different nationalities, Ostarbeiter were deployed in distinct work groups. Moreover, Soviet workers’ wages were at least forty percent lower than those of Germans and other foreign workers. While their situation varied depending on the factory and the camp, because of the discriminatory Eastern workers’ decrees and racially-biased treatment from employers, most Soviet laborers lived and worked under harsh conditions.\textsuperscript{116}

In addition to the general living and working conditions for Soviet and Polish civilian laborers, Nazi policy for the provision of food for Eastern European laborers provides a specific example of how an initial prioritization of racial ideology endangered workers’ lives and reduced their productivity. Edward Homze argues that three phases of Nazi “food policy” reflect the gradual erosion of Nazi racial philosophy throughout the war. During the first phase, which he defines as the beginning of the war until the spring of 1942, racial considerations were important, and the “\textit{Untermensch} policy” was applied, reflecting Polish and Soviet laborers’ inferior status.\textsuperscript{117} Eastern European workers received inadequate rations that resulted in high mortality rates and low output,

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\item \textsuperscript{116} Herbert, \textit{Hitler's Foreign Workers}, 166-167; Herbert, “Forced Laborers,” 197-198.
\item \textsuperscript{117} Homze, \textit{Foreign Labor}, 271.
\end{itemize}
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especially in the first half of 1942.\textsuperscript{118} For example, many Soviet civilian workers at the Volkswagen factory died from exhaustion and hunger; by contrast, none of the Dutch or French workers died.\textsuperscript{119} Furthermore, in July 1942, the Security Service (\textit{Sicherheitsdienst}, or SD) acknowledged the problems that had arisen in the deployment of \textit{Ostarbeiter} because of “inadequate food, housing and clothing, [and] totally insufficient medical treatment.”\textsuperscript{120} Throughout 1942, reports from various factories stressed that the treatment of \textit{Ostarbeiter}, especially the insufficient rations, would lead to their total mental and physical collapse.\textsuperscript{121} Because of their low status on the racial hierarchy and the availability of replacement workers, the lives of Soviet workers were of little value to the regime; therefore, minimal efforts were made to keep them alive.

An analysis of Polish and Soviet civilian labor deployment from 1939 to mid-1942 reveals that the regime’s focus on racial ideology remained central. As Herbert contends, the racist hierarchy was visibly manifested everywhere.\textsuperscript{122} Prior to the spring of 1942, the foreign labor program was not essential to Germany’s war effort; thus, protecting the German “master race” took precedence over the proper treatment of foreign workers. Yet, from mid to late-1942, as Germany’s position in the war declined, German losses increased, and more German workers were conscripted to fight in the army, the German economy became dependent on foreign labor. As a result, racial

\textsuperscript{118} Herbert, “Labour and Extermination,” 180.
\textsuperscript{119} Siegfried, “Racial Discrimination,” 42.
\textsuperscript{120} Report from the SD, \textit{Meldungen aus dem Reich}, July 20, 1942, Bundesarchiv Koblenz R 58/172, fol. 169, in Herbert, \textit{Hitler’s Foreign Workers}, 173.
\textsuperscript{121} Herbert, \textit{Hitler’s Foreign Workers}, 172.
\textsuperscript{122} Herbert, \textit{A History}, 150.
considerations became less important and the regime began to shift its focus toward ensuring maximum productivity from the foreign labor force. Thus, the value of foreign workers rose, and the position of Eastern European laborers started to improve.\textsuperscript{123}

The shift to an emphasis on economics began in March 1942 after the appointment of Fritz Sauckel to the new position of Plenipotentiary General for Labor Mobilization (Generalbevollmächtigter für den Arbeitseinsatz).\textsuperscript{124} After Sauckel realized that the weak physical condition of Ostarbeiter made them inefficient workers, he started in April 1942 a program to improve their diet, treatment, and housing.\textsuperscript{125} He wanted all foreign workers to be fed properly, the barbed wire fences around barracks removed, and wages increased.\textsuperscript{126} Furthermore, from 1942 until the summer of 1944, what Homze refers to as the second phase of Nazi food policy, many discriminatory feeding policies were removed due to malnourishment among the workers.\textsuperscript{127} Specifically, on October 6, 1942, the Reich Ministry of Food and Agriculture (Reichsministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft) passed a decree that stated that full rations should be distributed to Ostarbeiter.\textsuperscript{128} The initiation of efforts to improve the living and working conditions of Soviet and Polish civilian laborers stood in opposition to the Untermensch philosophy.\textsuperscript{129} With the failure of Blitzkrieg, the appointment of Sauckel, and the massive deployment of Ostarbeiter, the shift from a focus on racial ideology to economic production began.

\textsuperscript{123} Homze, \textit{Foreign Labor}, 99, 107.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 106.
\textsuperscript{125} Herbert, \textit{Hitler’s Foreign Workers}, 180.
\textsuperscript{126} Homze, \textit{Foreign Labor}, 122.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 271-272.
\textsuperscript{128} Herbert, \textit{Hitler’s Foreign Workers}, 183.
\textsuperscript{129} Homze, \textit{Foreign Labor}, 122.
Despite Sauckel’s initiative to improve the conditions for Eastern European workers, the foreign labor program was marked by disorganization and inconsistency. Sauckel clashed with Albert Speer, the Reich Minister of Armaments and War Production (Reichsminister für Bewaffnung und Munition), about methods to increase production, as well as with Party officials who did not want to bend the regime’s strict ideological stance toward “inferior races.”

Thus, by late 1942, only minimal improvements had been made in the quality of life for Eastern European laborers in the Reich. Since the changes emerged slowly and came into effect unevenly, there were no significant differences in the treatment of Eastern European laborers until the tide of the war turned in early 1943. As Herbert writes, at the end of 1942, the employment of foreign workers was marked by “profound contradictions.” The failure of Blitzkrieg in the USSR and the mass employment of Ostarbeiter had made the German war economy dependent on foreign labor; therefore, leaders like Sauckel recognized that the largest group of laborers, Eastern European civilians, needed to become more productive. Yet, for a regime that considered Poles and Soviets “inferior races” that were unworthy of life, the erosion of the racial hierarchy was a slow process. As Homze writes, “years of Nazi indoctrination were not so easily reversed.”

Nonetheless, Germany’s defeat at the Battle of Stalingrad in February 1943 was a turning point in the war and in the use of foreign labor, signaling another shift away from a focus on racial ideology toward a focus on economic production. As Herbert writes,

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130 Homze, Foreign Labor, 107.
132 Herbert, Hitler’s Foreign Workers, 255; Homze, Foreign Labor, 307.
after Stalingrad, the question was no longer when Germany would win the war, but whether they could avoid losing it.\textsuperscript{133} With a new sense of desperation, Germany’s economy was converted into a “total war” economy, and production took priority over all else—including racial ideology.\textsuperscript{134} The declaration of “total war” meant that increasing the number and productivity of foreign workers, particularly Soviet civilians, became a matter of urgency for the continuation of the war effort. It became evident that without a massive, efficient foreign labor force to replace casualties from the front and maintain production levels, German agriculture and the armaments industry would collapse.\textsuperscript{135}

With Germany’s war economy on the line, the regime no longer viewed foreign laborers as an expendable source of manpower; rather, the economic and political survival of the Third Reich depended on them. There was a new urgency among Nazi leaders to make significant changes that would increase workers’ productivity, especially those from the Soviet Union. Sauckel ordered the elimination of all factors impeding workers’ performance, and started a campaign to improve their productivity. It included better treatment, improved living and working conditions, and programs to train and enhance workers’ skills.\textsuperscript{136} A leaflet distributed in May 1943 covered the “general principles for the treatment of foreign workers employed in the Reich.” The regulations outlined in the leaflet remained the regime’s policy until the end of 1944, a policy that no longer emphasized “racial distinctions.” It stated that “every person, even a primitive human being, has a finely-honed sense of justice. For that reason, any thoughtless

\textsuperscript{133} Herbert, \textit{Hitler’s Foreign Workers}, 256.
\textsuperscript{134} Homze, \textit{Foreign Labor}, 144.
\textsuperscript{135} Herbert, “Labour and Extermination,” 127.
\textsuperscript{136} Herbert, \textit{Hitler’s Foreign Workers}, 288; Herbert, “Forced Laborers,” 198.
treatment must have a devastating effect. Consequently, it is imperative that injustices, insults, harassment, maltreatment, etc. be avoided…one cannot expect top productivity from workers who are called beasts, barbarians, and sub-humans.”

It also included updated regulations for workers’ living and working conditions. Camp accommodations were advanced, and the prison-like enclosures and fences were removed. Moreover, laborers received proper clothing and increased rations, as well as medical care and access to leisure activities.

The regime’s new policy toward foreign laborers as outlined in the leaflet indicates that a compromise was reached between authorities focused on racial ideology, like SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler and RuSHA officials, and authorities responsible for economic efficiency, like Sauckel and Speer. For the employment of foreigners in the Reich, it had become necessary to make major ideological concessions for the benefit of the war economy. The change in policy was also significant because all authorities involved in the employment of foreigners agreed on the regulations; therefore, improvements were monitored and applied on a mass scale. Moreover, the regulations did not distinguish between Eastern and Western Europeans. All foreign laborers were entitled to the improvements. The leaflet introduced an official policy that no longer determined the treatment of laborers based on their “racial status.” Instead of assigning a

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137 Leaflet disseminated on May 5, 1943 as Circular 70/43 by the Reich Chancellery (for example: Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf RW 37; HStAG Reg. D Düss. 45357 et al.; Dec. 205 PS, IMT, vol. 25, pp. 298ff, etc.) in Herbert, Hitler’s Foreign Workers, 264.
138 Herbert, Hitler’s Foreign Workers, 264.
139 Ibid., 263-264.
value to workers lives based on their position on the Nazis’ racial hierarchy, their lives were considered valuable if they contributed to the German war effort.

The third phase of Nazi food policy as outlined by Homze shows the final step in the regime’s transition from feeding laborers based on their “racial status” to increasing their rations to maximize their efficiency. From the summer of 1944 until the end of the war, Germans tried a selective feeding policy. Employers had full authority over their workers, and they were encouraged to use food rations to reward or punish workers based on production.\textsuperscript{140} Rather than rations based on workers’ nationalities, their rations were determined by their labor output. Moreover, on August 21, 1944, new regulations went into effect: both Ostarbeiter and Soviet POWs were fed “the amounts valid for other prisoners of war,” which included more meat, sugar, fat, and cheese.\textsuperscript{141} The improvements in Nazi food policy provide one example of how, one by one, restrictions on Eastern Europeans’ daily life were reduced or removed to improve their productivity.\textsuperscript{142}

As Germany’s position in the war weakened throughout 1943 and 1944, the “total war” economy created a new hierarchy—one not based on race, but on the ability to work. Shortly before the end of the war, national differentiations, including whether a foreign worker was considered “racially inferior,” were abandoned. There were only two types of foreigners: able-bodied workers and those unfit for work.\textsuperscript{143}

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\textsuperscript{140} Homze, \textit{Foreign Labor}, 271-276.
\textsuperscript{141} Conference, Hotel Esplanade, July 31, 1944, Generalstaatsanwalt bei dem Kammergericht Berlin I Js 4/64, Doc. C 31, fols. 32ff, in Herbert, \textit{Hitler’s Foreign Workers}, 293.
\textsuperscript{142} Herbert, \textit{Hitler’s Foreign Workers}, 293.
\textsuperscript{143} Vögel, \textit{Entbindungsheim}, 119.
7, 1944, representatives of various NSDAP ministries met to decide the fate of non-working foreigners.\textsuperscript{144} It was decided that “special care facilities” would be set up for the “harmless” non-working foreigners, including children. According to Vögel, these facilities were intended to cause their deaths without the evidence of systematic murder. The incapacitated workers who were considered “dangerous,” such as those with tuberculosis or mental illness, would be taken to killing facilities. The decisions reached at this meeting signaled the transition from the deaths of foreign workers due to illness and malnutrition to the systematic annihilation of those who were unable to work. Three weeks after this meeting, the first transports of Polish and Soviet civilian workers infected with tuberculosis were sent to the euthanasia center in Hadamar.\textsuperscript{145}

Despite the eventual prioritization of economics, the conflict between racial ideology and economics remained unresolved, and contradictory policies were maintained. While Germany’s defeat at Stalingrad brought significant changes in the treatment of Eastern European laborers, the discriminatory regulations remained in effect, the system of penalties against laborers was made harsher, sick workers were killed at extermination centers, and children were allowed to die rather than raised as a future

\textsuperscript{144} Bundesarchiv, R 2/11995, summary of the results of the meeting on July 7, 1944 by Dr. Letsch, in Vögel, \textit{Entbindungsheim}, 113.

labor force.\footnote{Herbert, “Labour and Extermination,” 180; Vögel, \textit{Entbindungshaus}, 113-115; Based on his extensive research in Russian archives, Pavel Polian estimates that approximately 50,000 \textit{Ostarbeiter} had perished in Germany by mid-1944. Pavel Polian, “Die Deportation der Ostarbeiter im Zweiten Weltkrieg,” in \textit{Ausweisung und Deportation. Formen der Zwangs migration in der Geschichte}, eds. Andreas Gestrich, Gerhard Hirschfeld, and Holger Sonnabend, 115-140 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1995).} Furthermore, while Sauckel was calling for the maximum utilization of foreign labor, millions of Soviet POWs were dying in open camps in the USSR, and millions of Jews were being exterminated in killing centers in Poland.\footnote{Homze, \textit{Foreign Labor}, 307. For more information on the connection between the foreign labor program and the extermination of the Jews, see Herbert, “Labour and Extermination,” 192-194, and Herbert, “Forced Laborers,” 202-203. For a study on the conflict between racial ideology and economics in extermination and concentration camps, see Jens-Christian Wagner, “Work and Extermination in the Concentration Camps,” in \textit{Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany: The New Histories}, eds. Jane Caplan and Nikolaus Wachsmann, 127-143 (New York/London: Routledge, 2010).} For a regime founded on racial ideology, abandoning “racial characteristics” as the measure of an individual’s value proved extremely difficult. The racial hierarchy could not be dismantled, even as the war economy weakened and the regime faced military defeat. Herbert describes the enduring conflict between racial ideology and economics as a combination of “relative concessions” and “ideological stubbornness.” The result was “ineffectiveness.”\footnote{Herbert, \textit{Hitler’s Foreign Workers}, 295.}

In sum, as Germany’s position in the war weakened, economic concerns came to outweigh racial concerns. Yet, this analysis also reveals inherent and lasting contradictory policies, suggesting that the conflict between these two forces was ever-present, and cannot be viewed strictly in black-and-white. The existence of foreign childcare facilities illustrates these contradictions, providing an example of the continuous, unresolved conflict between racial ideology and economic production. An analysis of
these facilities will show how the conflict proved disastrous for foreign children who were neither economically beneficial as workers, or “racially valuable” as humans.

**Ausländerkinder-Pflegestätten**

On August 11, 1943, Ernst Hilgenfeldt, head of the National Socialist People’s Welfare (Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt, or NSV), wrote to Himmler about his visit to a foreign child-care facility in Spital am Pyhrn, Austria, in Gau Oberdonau:

During the inspection I ascertained that all the infants were undernourished…I was informed that there are different opinions regarding the upbringing of these infants. Some believe that the children of Eastern workers should die, others, that they should be brought up. As no unanimous decision has been reached yet, and as I was told, “one has to ‘save face’ towards the Eastern workers,” the infants are given insufficient food rations, by which, they will die within a few months. From my point of view, the way we handle this matter is impossible. There exists only one way or the other. Either one does not wish to keep the children alive—then one should not let them starve to death slowly [. . .] there are ways to do this without torture and pain. Or, one intends to raise these children to utilize them later as a labor force. In this case, they must be fed in such a manner so that they will be fully usable as workers.

On September 14, 1943, Himmler responded to Hilgenfeldt’s question of “either/or,” namely, whether the intent behind foreign child-care facilities was to cause the children’s deaths or raise them as a future labor force. In a letter to August Eigruber, the Gauleiter of Oberdonau, Himmler wrote: “I ask you to take another look at this

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149 Districts or provinces, the highest territorial and organizational units of the Nazi Party under the Third Reich. Karen Doerr and Robert Michael, Nazi-Deutsch/Nazi German: An English Lexicon of the Language of the Third Reich (Westport, Conn: Greenwood, 2002), 176; For more information on the Spital am Pyhrn foreign child-care facility, see Hauch, “Ostarbeiterinnen.”

150 Letter by Erich Hilgenfeldt of the Department of Social Welfare of the NSDAP to the Reichsführer SS, re: Treatment of Babies of Foreign Workers, Berlin, August 11, 1943, File No. 4665, Box 83; National Archives Collection of World War II War Crimes Records; Nürnberg Organizations (NO) Series; RG 238; NACP.

151 Heads of Regional Administrative Districts, Supreme territorial or regional Nazi Party authority. The Nazi Party divided Germany into geographical units called Gaue, headed by a Gauleiter. Superior to an
question, because in my opinion it is not acceptable that we merely ‘save face’ for the mothers of these children, and let the children die from insufficient food. If we see the question in a positive sense because we built these homes, then we must also ensure that the children can be raised.”

Although Himmler’s response indicates that his decision was to raise the children rather than allow them to die, this private correspondence was limited to the Party’s top inner circle, and appeared to have no effect on the general situation at locally-controlled foreign child-care facilities across the Reich. Furthermore, it is not known whether Himmler revised his decision later in the war, when the economic situation had further deteriorated. Foreign child-care facilities continued to be established in primitive, makeshift form, the appalling conditions and cruel treatment persisted, and the infants continued to perish at alarmingly high rates. In practice, the “question” of the children’s fate remained unanswered.

Hilgenfeldt’s question of “either/or,” as well as his observations about the illogical and senseless treatment of the children, shows the centrality of the conflict between racial ideology and economics in the establishment and operation of foreign child-care facilities. Because neither racial nor economic motivations took precedence over the other, and no centralized, long-term plan determined the children’s fate, the facilities were marked by temporary solutions, inconsistencies, and disorganization, and

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Ortsgruppenleiter and Kreisleiter. In 1939, there were more than forty Gaue. Michael and Doerr, Nazi-Deutsch, 176.

152 Letter from Heinrich Himmler to August Eigruber, September 14, 1943, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Zehlendorf NS 19/3596, in Schwarze, Kinder, 143.

153 Schwarze, Kinder, 143.
the fate of the children was left in the gray area between a solution that prioritized racial ideology and a solution that prioritized economic productivity.

The decision to establish foreign child-care facilities paralleled changes in the employment of female Polish and Soviet civilian workers, as well as the policies surrounding pregnancy and childbirth. Throughout the war, as the regime became more dependent on foreign labor, the mobilization of female laborers increased, particularly from the East. By late 1944, thirty-four percent of Polish civilian laborers and fifty percent of Soviet civilian laborers were women, most between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five. Despite the Nazis’ attempts to regulate female laborers’ sexual relationships, violent assaults and intimate relationships occurred, resulting in pregnancies.

Like discussions over the use of Eastern European civilian labor, discussions surrounding the problem of pregnancy and childbirth among foreign workers centered around the potential impact on economic production and on the Nazis’ racial hierarchy. Authorities were not only confronted with the economic burden of pregnancy and childbirth interrupting the production process, but with a racial problem, since Polish and Soviet civilians were the largest groups of female workers, and thus, the majority of pregnancies would produce “racially undesirable” offspring.

155 Hodorowicz-Knab, Wearing, 174-177.
As expected, top Nazi authorities had conflicting preferences for a solution to the problem of pregnancy and childbirth among foreign workers. Sauckel’s Office for Labor Mobilization favored a solution that emphasized economic efficiency, that is, losing as little time as possible for delivery and ensuring that the women could return to work immediately after birth without being burdened by their infants. By contrast, Himmler’s Reich Security Main Office (Reichssicherheitshauptamt, or RSHA) prioritized racial concerns, such as examining the mothers and infants for their “racial qualities.” Sauckel and Himmler’s priorities conflicted with one another throughout the war, contributing to the uncertainty surrounding the children’s fate.\textsuperscript{157}

Before the establishment of foreign child-care facilities, the policy toward pregnancies among foreign workers reflected Germany’s economic situation. Until 1942, Germany’s war economy was sufficiently stable so that losing female workers to pregnancy was not a pressing issue. The policy also reflected the demographics of foreign laborers before the mass utilization of Ostarbeiter, as the number of female foreigners employed in Germany was still relatively low. Therefore, the number of pregnancies was insignificant and manageable.

During the first years of the war, women who became pregnant while working as forced laborers were repatriated to their home countries to give birth. The basic rules concerning pregnant laborers were established in a decree issued by the Reich Labor Service (Reichsarbeitsdienst) in August 1941. It ordered that participating agencies and work installations report female laborers for repatriation as soon as their pregnancy

\textsuperscript{157} Zegenhagen, “Facilities,” 66.
became known. This was to avoid unnecessary costs in medical care and maintenance by their employers.\textsuperscript{158} Yet, like many central decrees, there was room for flexibility at the local level. The decree stated that an exception could be made if the employer assumed responsibility for housing the mother and child. More commonly, however, pregnant workers were repatriated as soon as their pregnancy was discovered by authorities.\textsuperscript{159}

After the influx of \textit{Ostarbeiterinnen} beginning in 1942, the number of pregnancies increased significantly. Initially, pregnancy was primarily an economic concern, as the loss of workers to pregnancy became problematic for German authorities and employers. Labor offices and police authorities suspected that women became pregnant to escape from Germany. As one report noted: “[pregnant] women are released from work and allowed to return home, since they are soon due to give birth. The frequency of such cases makes it reasonable to conclude that their condition is intentional.”\textsuperscript{160} Moreover, authorities complained that sending pregnant workers home was inefficient due to the cost of transport. In addition, industrial managers reported that it interrupted the production process because new laborers had to be found as replacements.\textsuperscript{161} The combination of these economic concerns, which were heightened due to the growing manpower shortage, initiated discussions about changing the policy of repatriating pregnant workers, and the problem of foreign children born in Germany. Authorities deemed it necessary to find a solution to both issues by the end of 1942.\textsuperscript{162}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Heberer, Children, 62; Fried, \textit{The Exploitation of Foreign Labour}, 234.
\item Fried, \textit{The Exploitation of Foreign Labour}, 234.
\item Suggestion by an office in the Warthegau, n.p., n.d. (1942); quoted in \textit{Documenta occupationis}, IX, Doc. No. 137, in Herbert, \textit{Hitler’s Foreign Workers}, 270.
\item Zegenhagen, “Facilities,” 65.
\item Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Conversations about a solution for the increasing number of pregnancies and births among foreign workers had already begun in mid-1942. On July 15, *Gauleiter* Eigruber wrote to Himmler about pregnancies among the foreign workers: “I have thousands of female workers [who] are becoming pregnant and bringing children in the world.” He added, “On one hand, I do not want to lose the workforce, but on the other hand, it is unacceptable for these children to be reared in a German household or in a camp.” Eigruber suggested to Himmler that they take the children away from the mothers and place them in homes.\(^{163}\) He understood that because of the manpower shortage, it was necessary to use foreign women for labor; however, his worries about their children being raised alongside German children reflects his ideological stance toward interactions between “racially inferior” foreigners and Germans.

Furthermore, while Eigruber’s letter shows the conflict between the two forces, it confirms that the initial question of how to treat the *children* originated among Nazi authorities at the central level, and emphasized racial ideology. Raising foreign children on German soil posed a threat to the Nazis’ racial hierarchy and the German “master race.” Authorities feared that if Germans cared for foreign babies along with their own, a German family might “fall into a relationship of psychological attachment with the infant of alien blood.” Furthermore, it was viewed as a “infiltration problem” if foreign children influenced German children’s behavior or vocabulary.\(^{164}\)

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\(^{164}\) Community Work, Gau-East Hannover, March 24, 1944; M894/16 Doc. No. 5312; RG 238; NACP, in Nicholas, *Cruel World*, 402.
In a letter of October 9, 1942, Himmler agreed with Eigruber's suggestion about establishing homes for foreign children so that mothers could be retained as workers. He added that “racial examinations” of the mother, father, and child should be conducted to find exceptional cases where there is “good blood,” and in those cases, the mother and child should remain in Germany for “Germanization.” Similarly, children born to German women and foreign men should be allowed to remain with their mothers. Finally, Himmler informed Eigruber that the Führer had commissioned Hilgenfeldt to establish the homes.165

Himmler’s response provides another example of how early decisions regarding the fate of foreign children born in Germany centered around racial ideology. He expanded upon Eigruber’s suggestion to place foreign children in homes by adding that the treatment of the children should vary depending on the “racial descent” of the parents. Yet, although Himmler prioritized racial concerns, he agreed that if both parents were foreign and not of “good blood,” then the focus should be on keeping the mother as a worker. Himmler’s approval, and the appointment of Hilgenfeldt as the responsible authority, initiated the establishment of foreign child-care facilities.166 Despite its lack of detailed orders, Himmler’s letter was viewed by subordinate Party officials as the start of a “trial period” for establishing foreign children’s homes.167 Shortly thereafter, the

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165 Letter Addressed to Gauleiter Eigruber Signed by Heinrich Himmler, re: Treatment of Children of Alien Origin, Berlin, October 9, 1942, File No. 5007, Box 43; National Archives Collection of World War II War Crimes Records; Nürnberg Organizations (NO) Series; RG 238; NACP.
166 Ibid.
167 Letter by Erich Hilgenfeldt of the Department of Social Welfare of the NSDAP to the Reichsführer SS, re: Treatment of Babies of Foreign Workers, Berlin, August 11, 1943, File No. 4665, Box 83; National Archives Collection of World War II War Crimes Records; Nürnberg Organizations (NO) Series; RG 238; NACP.
erection of two homes in Gau Oberdonau began, including the facility in Spital am Pyhrn introduced above which, according to Himmler, would allow local authorities to put these ideas into practice and gain experience.168

The correspondence between Eigruber and Himmler shows that both officials sought an immediate solution to the growing problem of pregnancies and childbirth among foreign laborers. As the issue had recently begun to cause widespread concern, their ideas developed out of an urgency to find a temporary, rather than long-term solution. Furthermore, their correspondence reveals that the solution to the problem began with upper-level Nazi authorities, and stemmed from both the need to ensure economic productivity and the desire to uphold the racial hierarchy. The economic priorities centered around keeping foreign mothers as workers regardless of their children’s “racial value”; the racial priorities determined how the treatment of the children would vary depending on their “racial purity.”

After the decision to establish foreign children’s homes was confirmed in private correspondence between Eigruber and Himmler, a decree from Sauckel proclaimed the regime’s official solution to the problem of pregnancies among foreign workers. It was distributed on December 12, 1942 to the presidents of the Reich Association of Health Insurance Funds (Reichsverband der Landkrankenkasse) and addressed the issue of repatriation, which had become impractical due to costs and difficult transport conditions. Sauckel stated that he had been working with authorities to find a “uniform arrangement” for the problem of pregnancies, and that the question of “work commitments” was of

“first importance.” As the negotiations had not concluded, he introduced his decree as a “temporary arrangement,” set to run until March 31, 1943.\footnote{Exhibit 1 (WO 235/271), Rühlen Baby Farm Case, WO 235/263-272, RG-59.016M, Judge Advocate General’s Office: War Crimes Case Files, Second World War (WO 235), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.} The primary components of the decree were as follows:

1) Pregnant Ostarbeiterinnen should no longer be repatriated back to their home countries.
2) Pregnant women of other nationalities must request to be repatriated.
3) The Land Labor Exchange Officers, in cooperation with the Public Health Offices of the Party, the state, and the factories, are responsible for establishing facilities for delivery in the simplest, but properly hygienic manner.
4) Facilities for the care of small children are to be provided in the simplest form. The children should not be cared for by German institutions, housed with German children, or educated with Germans. They should be cared for by female members of the same nationality. The only exceptions are children from workers of Germanic descent who may be cared for in German institutions. The children of Polish women of good race are to be transferred to the special NSV institutions for children of good race.\footnote{Ibid.}

By stating that his biggest concern was pregnant foreign laborers’ “work commitments,” Sauckel confirmed his prioritization of economic productivity; however, his decree was also racially motivated because it distinguished between foreign laborers and children of various nationalities and “racial qualities.” Although the decree did not specify the nationality of the pregnant women and children who would be placed in maternity and child-care facilities, it became clear in 1943 that they were meant for laborers and children from Poland and the Soviet Union.\footnote{Heberer, Children, 63.} Sauckel’s decree outlined the separate policies for pregnancies among Eastern and Western Europeans, as well as the distinct treatment of their children based on their “racial descent.” Furthermore, the order

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\footnote{Ibid.}

\footnote{Heberer, Children, 63.}
to establish facilities in the “simplest form” reflected the Nazis’ beliefs that Eastern European children’s lives were not valuable; therefore, minimal resources were to be used for their delivery and care. While there was a clear economic motive behind Sauckel’s decree, it reveals how an order intended to address economic issues included racial motives as well. Sauckel’s centralized protocol for establishing foreign maternity hospitals and child-care facilities turned Eigruber and Himmler’s racially-biased ideas into state policy, and laid the basic administrative foundation for their establishment.\textsuperscript{172}

In another decree distributed on March 20, 1943, Sauckel’s “temporary arrangement” was extended beyond March 31, 1943.\textsuperscript{173} Moreover, on July 27 Ernst Kaltenbrunner, chief of the RSHA, issued a decree that forbade repatriation among all pregnant foreign workers and reaffirmed Sauckel’s orders regarding the existence of foreign maternity and child-care facilities, including the racially motivated components.\textsuperscript{174} Thus, Sauckel’s “temporary” solution endured for the duration of the war, becoming the regime’s permanent solution for the problem of pregnancy and childbirth among foreign workers.\textsuperscript{175}

After the distribution of Sauckel’s original decree in December 1942, upper-level officials continued to discuss the racial criteria behind the establishment of foreign child-

\textsuperscript{172} Exhibit 1 (WO 235/271), Rühen Baby Farm Case, WO 235/263-272, RG-59.016M, Judge Advocate General’s Office: War Crimes Case Files, Second World War (WO 235), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.
\textsuperscript{173} Heberer, \textit{Children}, 62.
\textsuperscript{174} Memorandum Signed by Ernst Kaltenbrunner on Treatment of Pregnant Foreign Women Workers and Children Born to Foreign Workers in the Reich, Berlin, July 27, 1943, File No. 1383, Box 29; National Archives Collection of World War II War Crimes Records; Nürnberg Organizations (NO) Series; RG 238; NACP.
\textsuperscript{175} Heberer, \textit{Children}, 62.
care facilities. In a secret memo from Heinrich Müller, chief of Section IV D of the RSHA, to Himmler on December 23, 1942, Müller expanded on the racial distinctions introduced in Sauckel’s decree, and outlined a policy for accommodating foreign children according to their “racial descent,” i.e., German, Germanic (Germanischen), or enemy/ alien (Fremdvölkischen). According to these classifications, a foreign child could either be taken to a home for “good-raced” (gut-rassischen) children or a home for “bad-raced” (schlecht-rassichen) children.177

First, he recommended that all foreign workers who became pregnant by a German man undergo a “racial examination” by the RuSHA. Next, if examinations of both parents proved that the child would be “good-raced,” the child would be sent after birth to an NSV institution, i.e. a home for “good-raced” children, where it would be educated as a German and, eventually, adopted by a German family. The mother would then be re-allocated to labor.178 Alternatively, if the “racial examinations” of the parents determined that the child would be “bad-raced,” it would be taken to a foreign children’s collection center (Kindersammelstätte) to prevent it from growing up with German children. For pregnancies between two foreigners, of whom at least one was of an

176 “Germanic races” were citizens from Scandinavia, the Netherlands, and Flanders. Most other foreigners were divided into Axis and non-Axis aliens. See also, Spoerer and Fleischhacker, “Forced Laborers.”
177 Memorandum by Heinrich Müller to Heinrich Himmler, re: Treatment of Pregnant Foreign Women Workers and Children Born to Them, Berlin, December 23, 1942, File No. 2447, Box 47; National Archives Collection of WWII War Crimes Records; Nürnberg Organizations (NO) Series, RG 238, NACP.
178 Ibid. For example, investigators from the District 1 Child Welfare Branch reported that Polish women were forced to give their newborn babies to the Labor Office, which then placed the children in different orphanages and with German families. Authorities used to say that mothers could not perform their duties toward the children and work. Report on German Practices Regarding the Disposition of Infants of Women Workers in the Braunschweig Area, July 1, 1946, 3.3.1.1/82264484/ITS Digital Archive, accessed at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on August 16, 2017. For more information on child search teams in post-war occupied Germany, see footnote #372.
“enemy/alien race,” no “racial examinations” were necessary. The child would be sent directly to the collection center and the mother returned to work. There was no consent necessary to take the children of Polish and Soviet workers, but Western European workers’ children could only be taken with the mothers’ permission.179

Müller’s memo laid the ideological foundation for foreign child-care facilities: the fate of children born to foreign laborers would depend solely on their “racial characteristics.” Before birth, a foreign child’s future would be determined by its position on the Nazis’ racial hierarchy—and among foreign forced laborers in Germany, Eastern Europeans stood near the bottom. While foreign children deemed “good-raced” would be raised as Germans, the children deemed “bad-raced,” or infants of Eastern European descent, would be taken to collection centers, where many would die.180

Himmler approved of Müller’s proposal in a letter dated December 31, 1942. He considered it proper, however, to introduce a “grandiose sounding designation” for the foreign children’s collection centers. Henceforth, they were referred to as Ausländerkinder-Pflegestätten, confirmed in the decree issued by Kaltenbrunner in July 1943.181 The meaning behind Himmler’s suggestion cannot be confirmed. As Patricia Heberer writes, however, the “Nazi authorities were consistent manipulators of the

179 Memorandum by Heinrich Müller to Heinrich Himmler, re: Treatment of Pregnant Foreign Women Workers and Children Born to Them, Berlin, December 23, 1942, File No. 2447, Box 47; National Archives Collection of WWII War Crimes Records; Nürnberg Organizations (NO) Series, RG 238, NACP.

180 Ibid.

181 Answer to Heinrich Müller Written by Order by August Meine, Berlin, December 31, 1942, File No. 2447, Box 47; National Archives Collection of World War II War Crimes Records; Nürnberg Organizations (NO) Series; RG 238; NACP; Memorandum Signed by Ernst Kaltenbrunner on Treatment of Pregnant Foreign Workers and Children Born to Foreign Workers in the Reich, Berlin, July 27, 1943, File No. 1383, Box 29; National Archives Collection of World War II War Crimes Records; Nürnberg Organizations (NO) Series; RG 238; NACP.
German language.” Therefore, the notion that *Ausländerkinder-Pflegestätten* were child-care facilities was “pure metaphor.”¹⁸² Since it had already been decided that the facilities would be erected in the “simplest form,” assigning them a complex and allegedly sophisticated name was likely an attempt to camouflage their primitive nature, and to conceal the fact that they would not be proper nurseries. As Bernhild Vögel writes, by the end of 1942, a “temporary solution” that left the children’s fate somewhere between extermination and child-rearing had already been put into effect.¹⁸³

Early solutions to the problem of pregnancy and childbirth among foreign workers were motivated by both economic and racial concerns: economic motivations prioritized reducing the burden on the mothers and maintaining them as workers, but the birth of foreign children presented authorities with a “racial threat.” Therefore, decisions and policies concerning the children were initiated at the central level and emphasized Nazi racial ideology, separating foreign children from German children, conducting “racial examinations” to determine the “racial value” of the expected child, and accommodating foreign children in separate homes depending on their “racial descent.” Aside from discussions surrounding the use of the mothers for labor, central authorities did not prioritize economic issues regarding the actual establishment and operation of the facilities. As a result, questions of financing, management, and child-care remained unanswered. The decision to establish foreign child-care facilities was decided upon as an immediate solution that would unburden Polish and Soviet mothers for labor and prevent

¹⁸² Heberer, *Children*, 63.
“racially inferior” children from being raised with German children. The fate of the children after being taken to the facilities was not in question.

After the ideological groundwork for dealing with pregnant foreign laborers and their children was laid, the first foreign maternity hospitals and child-care facilities were opened in early 1943.184 While central authorities were heavily involved in determining policy for pregnancy and childbirth among foreign laborers, it seems that in most cases, the actual establishment, management, and operation of foreign child-care facilities fell to local authorities, indicating a decentralization of authority and control.

Sauckel’s December 12, 1942 decree stated that labor and health offices—both in the states and private firms—should open facilities to care for the mothers and infants; however, there was no further information as to how the facilities were supposed to be equipped, where they should be established, who would bear the costs, or who was responsible for their management.185 Kaltenbrunner’s July 1943 decree stated that the DAF was responsible for the facilities in the industrial regions of Germany, and the Reich Agricultural Organization (Reichsnährstand)186 for those in the countryside.187 Yet, Kaltenbrunner assigned these organizations supervisory roles, and they were not involved in the facilities’ day to day operation.188 The absence of detailed orders and decrees from

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186 Nazi state agricultural union. Michael and Doerr, Nazi-Deutsch, 256.
187 Memorandum Signed by Ernst Kaltenbrunner on Treatment of Pregnant Foreign Women Workers and Children Born to Foreign Workers in the Reich, Berlin, July 27, 1943, File No. 1383, Box 29; National Archives Collection of World War II War Crimes Records; Nürnberg Organizations (NO) Series; RG 238; NACP.
188 Ibid; Vögel, Entbindungsheim, 59.
central authorities reinforces the notion that these facilities were viewed as an immediate, emergency measure—a measure left to local authorities to put into practice.\textsuperscript{189}

The lack of direction or support from central authorities amplified the problems at the local level. Without guidance on how to establish the facilities, local authorities complained about the “failure of the Berlin authorities to issue orders without first laying down the conditions for their implementation.”\textsuperscript{190} Furthermore, without central supervision and financing, many factories and local communities were unwilling or unable to invest in suitable foreign child-care facilities. Due to this reluctance, more temporary solutions were put in place, such as the opening of inadequate, makeshift facilities that did not have proper amenities or sufficient personnel.\textsuperscript{191} Additionally, as local authorities disagreed over which agencies held responsibility for funding and management, food and other provisions were often in short supply, leading to appalling conditions and high death rates.\textsuperscript{192} While the racial policies of central authorities minimized Polish and Soviet children’s chance of survival before birth, local officials’ inadequate management of the facilities endangered the children’s lives after birth.

Although responsibility for foreign child-care facilities fell to local authorities, Nazi food policy toward foreign children provides an example of a system that was dictated by central authority, but put into practice differently at a local level. Centralized decrees about rations for foreign children were insufficient to begin with, and the vague

\textsuperscript{189} Vögel, \textit{Entbindungsheim}, 39.
\textsuperscript{191} Zegenhagen, “Facilities,” 66.
\textsuperscript{192} Heberer, \textit{Children}, 63.
decrees meant that ultimately, the feeding of Polish and Soviet children was at the discretion of local authorities.  

On October 6, 1942, a decree issued by the Reich Ministry of Food and Agriculture stated that Eastern European children housed in labor camps with their parent/s could receive half the food provided to workers, and infants up to three years old could receive a half liter of whole milk. Nonetheless, the wording of the decree—“can” and not “must” receive—left room for flexibility at the local-level. Accordingly, local authorities made their own decisions about how much food the children received. 

Furthermore, after the establishment of foreign child-care facilities, Sauckel provided more information about infant feeding in his decree issued on March 20, 1943. He confirmed that Eastern European infants should receive a half liter of whole milk for up to three years, and that foreign mothers should be given the opportunity to breastfeed; however, unlike other foreign women, Eastern Europeans were not given the chance to breastfeed, and many were unable to do so because of malnutrition. Moreover, the original October 1942 decree, which stated that infants could receive half the food that adults received, was largely ignored by local authorities, and Eastern European children received only a half-liter of milk and little other types of food. Hilgenfeldt understood the implications behind the wording of both decrees when he visited the facility in Spital am Pyhrn in August 1943 and found all the children suffering from malnourishment. This

194 Schwarze, *Kinder*, 15
196 Ibid; Schwarze, “‘Any misunderstood leniency is to be avoided,”’ 90.
prompted his question about whether the intent was to cause the children’s deaths or raise them as a labor force.\textsuperscript{198}

On January 6, 1944, six months after Hilgenfeldt expressed his concerns to Himmler about the inadequate rations at Spital am Pyhrn, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture issued a new decree that increased the rations for children at foreign child-care facilities.\textsuperscript{199} Although central authorities intervened, implementation of the ration increase depended, in the end, on local authorities. In 1944, with supply shortages, Allied bombings, and German evacuees causing economic crises in localities across the Altreich, feeding foreign infants was a low priority. Reflected in the increased mortality rates at the Volkswagen and Velpke children’s homes in the summer of 1944, this decree likely did little to improve the plight of infants at foreign child-care facilities.\textsuperscript{200}

Overall, the issue of pregnancy and childbirth among foreign workers was defined by conflicting goals of racial cleansing and the exploitation of forced labor. Yet, unlike Eastern European laborers, the infants at foreign child-care facilities did not benefit from the regime’s gradual prioritization of economics over racial ideology. As non-workers, their viability was not in question, but rather that of their parents. The infants’ fate was peripheral to the larger issues surrounding the use of Polish and Soviet labor, and the tensions that influenced the establishment and operation of foreign child-care facilities

\textsuperscript{198} Letter by Erich Hilgenfeldt of the Department of Social Welfare of the NSDAP to the Reichsführer SS, re: Treatment of Babies of Foreign Workers, Berlin, August 11, 1943, File No. 4665, Box 83; National Archives Collection of World War II War Crimes Records; Nürnberg Organizations (NO) Series; RG 238; NACP; Vögel, \textit{Entbindungsheim}, 33.
\textsuperscript{199} Vögel, \textit{Entbindungsheim}, 33.
therefore remained unresolved. For example, removing children from their mothers’ care ensured that the mothers remained productive workers without the burden of a child. At the same time, however, establishing facilities for the children’s care demanded money, supplies, and personnel. The children served no immediate use for the Reich, yet they could have been raised as a future labor force. The maturation of “racial enemies” posed a future threat to the Reich; however, a noticeable plan to deliberately cause the infants’ deaths would have caused panic and resistance among the parents. These unsolved conflicts surrounding the establishment and operation of foreign child-care facilities reflect the interplay between economics and racial ideology. Both priorities—in conflict with one another—led to the creation of the facilities, and the death of thousands of infants.

This overview of the policies determining the establishment and operation of foreign child-care facilities has not only demonstrated the tension between racial ideology and economics, but also the conflicting priorities of central and local authorities. Central authorities initiated the establishment of foreign child-care facilities, and discussions about the facilities’ purpose and the fate of the “bad-raced” children centered around racial ideology. Yet, because local authorities were more concerned with the deteriorating economic situation in their communities rather than adhering to the Party’s ideological tenets, the inadequate management and operation of the facilities resulted from the lack of funding, personnel, and central supervision, as well as local officials’ indifference toward the children’s fate. As Vögel writes, the facilities were a temporary solution from the beginning, and they became more and more like facilities for children.
who were never supposed to come into the world. Ultimately, the disregard for the children’s lives because of their “racial inferiority” and the need to maintain the mothers as workers meant that there was no urgency among central or local authorities to find an acceptable, long-term solution for the care of children at foreign child-care facilities.

The next two chapters build on the conclusions reached here and investigate the role of local authorities at foreign child-care facilities by analyzing the Volkswagen and Velpke children’s homes. While examinations of these two facilities will not focus explicitly on the conflict between racial ideology and economics, the establishment, management, and treatment of the children at the VW and Velpke homes must be understood in the context of the conclusions offered here. Accordingly, the issues emphasized in the subsequent chapters—the question of the responsible authorities and the intent behind the children’s deaths—are best viewed against the backdrop of the conflict between racial ideology and economic productivity.

201 Vögel, Entbindungsheim, 39.
Chapter Three: The Volkswagen Children’s Home

On June 4, 1945, Clifford Byrum, a Captain in the United States Army Medical Corps, accompanied First Lieutenant George Haney of the U.S Army War Crimes Branch to the town of Rühen, located fifteen kilometers north of Wolfsburg. As a trained medical professional, Byrum was ordered to assist Haney with an investigation into the deaths of Polish and Soviet infants at the Rühen Children’s Home. When they arrived, Byrum observed as Haney questioned Hildegard Lammer, a former member of the German nursing staff, who described the negligence of the head doctor, Hans Körbel, and head nurse, Ella Schmidt. Then they interviewed Tonya, a Soviet assistant who attended to the youngest babies. She stated that, without exception, all the newborn infants who were taken from their mothers died. During the interrogation of Hermann Effe, the undertaker of Rühen, Effe admitted to burying 300 to 350 babies in a nearby cemetery over a period of nine months.\(^\text{202}\)

Next, the investigative team toured the barracks of the former children’s home, a facility that Byrum noted would not have met medical standards for a nursery. There they examined death certificates that listed “feebleness” and “too weak to live” as causes of the deaths—neither considered proper medical diagnoses. Then, they proceeded to the cemetery, where several infants’ corpses were exhumed from mass graves. Partially

\(^{202}\) Sworn statement of Clifford Byrum (WO 235/272), Rühen Baby Farm Case, WO 235/263-272, RG-59.016M, Judge Advocate General's Office: War Crimes Case Files, Second World War (WO 235), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC. Since this chapter is largely based on records from the Rühen Baby Farm Case, subsequent citations of trial records accessed at the USHMM Archives will include only the name and file number.
decomposed bodies with bloated abdomens and wasted muscular tissue revealed clear signs of malnutrition.203

After assisting Lieutenant Haney with the investigation, Captain Byrum provided investigators with a sworn statement that concluded with the following observation:

It is my considered medical opinion that there was marked medical neglect which could easily have been the cause of many of the deaths. The sanitary conditions, time interval of the babies’ formulas, the nursing care, isolation, medical supervision and control were below the most minimum standards of the medical profession. However even with the evidence of extreme neglect and malnutrition, it is extremely doubtful that this would result in a 100% death rate. This fact leads me to suspect the possibility of a systematic method of causing the deaths of these children.204

Byrum’s sworn statement about the Rühen home provides insight into the investigation that initiated the search for justice for the Polish and Soviet children who perished at the Volkswagen Children’s Home, an institution that was operated in two subsequent facilities before Rühen. His observations introduce several important questions that will be examined throughout this chapter: Who oversaw VW’s children’s home? What could have caused a nearly 100 percent death rate? Were the children neglected or systematically killed?

After this investigation, ten individuals were arrested for their role in causing the children’s deaths through willful neglect: Georg Tyrolt, Hans Körbel, Ella Schmidt, Kathe Pisters, Georg Severin, Hermann Effe, Ewald Kuhlmann, Hans Mayr, Liesel Bachor, and Willi Ohl.205 While ten individuals were charged for these crimes, this

204 Ibid.
205 Draper opening statement, WO 235/263.
This chapter tells the story of the Volkswagen Children’s Home framed around two issues introduced in chapter one: the question of whether local-level or upper-level officials managed and operated the home, and the question of whether the neglect of the children stemmed from intent to cause them harm or indifference toward their fate. The conclusions reached in the examinations of these two issues in the chapters on VW and Velpke will reveal whether racial or economic concerns motivated the facilities’ development and operation. First, background information on the establishment of the Volkswagen factory, its use of foreign labor during the war, and the three different facilities that housed its children’s home will set the foundation for the thematic analysis.

**Historical Background**

In November 1933, the DAF established the Strength Through Joy (*Kraft durch Freude*, or KdF) program to provide a range of benefits and amenities to the German working class.\(^{206}\) In June 1934, as part of the KdF program, Adolf Hitler commissioned automotive engineer Ferdinand Porsche to build an affordable car for the German middle class known as the *Volkswagen*, or “people’s car.”\(^{207}\) In May 1937, when the German automobile industry was unable to meet Hitler's demand that the people’s car be sold at 1,000 Reichsmarks or less, the project was taken over by the DAF.\(^{208}\) On May 26, 1938,

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\(^{207}\) Corporate History Department, ed., *Place of Remembrance*, 11.

\(^{208}\) Mommsen and Grieger, *Das Volkswagenwerk*, 126-128.
construction of the new Volkswagen factory (Volkswagenwerk GmbH), and a “model” town to house its workers, began near the town of Fallersleben in Kreis\textsuperscript{209} Gifhorn. It was called the Stadt des KdF-Wagens, or the “Town of the Strength Through Joy Car,” which became present-day Wolfsburg.\textsuperscript{210}

The factory opened on July 1, 1938, but before the people’s car could be mass-produced, Germany declared war. The new company soon began producing armaments to stay in business.\textsuperscript{211} Like many other German munitions manufacturers, VW began participating in the conscription and deportation of civilians from countries under German occupation, employing almost 20,000 men and women throughout the duration of the war.\textsuperscript{212} Without a permanent German labor force, the factory became dependent on foreign labor.\textsuperscript{213} In the years 1943 and 1944, foreign laborers accounted for more than two-thirds of the total workforce and as much as eighty percent of all production workers at VW, compared to thirty percent in other German armaments factories.\textsuperscript{214}

The factory employed foreign forced laborers from western and Eastern Europe; however, Eastern Europeans constituted the largest group. The factory employed around 1,500 Poles, mostly women under fifteen years of age, and 4,000 to 5,000 Ostarbeiter, primarily women between the ages of sixteen and twenty.\textsuperscript{215} This influx of young female

\textsuperscript{209} These districts (Kreise) were Nazi Party administrative areas that had borders that were congruent with national administrative districts. Doerr and Michael, \textit{Nazi-Deutsch}, 247.
\textsuperscript{210} Siegfried, “Racial Discrimination,” 37.
\textsuperscript{211} Ibid., 38.
\textsuperscript{212} Ibid., 38; Corporate History Department, ed., \textit{Place of Remembrance}, 157.
\textsuperscript{213} Siegfried, “Racial Discrimination,” 45.
\textsuperscript{214} Hans Mommsen, introduction to \textit{Place of Remembrance}, ed., Corporate History Department, 3.
\textsuperscript{215} Siegfried, “Racial Discrimination,” 39.
laborers resulted in pregnancies and births among foreign workers, and the compulsory housing of their infants in Volkswagen’s factory-run children’s home.

VW’s children’s home was operated in three facilities over the course of the war. First, it was opened in the Ostlager, or Eastern European workers’ camp, on the grounds of the factory in Wolfsburg (February 1943 to October 1943). Second, it was moved to a facility on Schachtweg (present day Seilerstraße), a street in the Gemeinschaftslager, or communal camp, also on the factory grounds in Wolfsburg (October 1943 to June 1944). Finally, it was transferred to a facility in the nearby village of Rühen (June 1944 to April 1945).

In February 1943, Volkswagen established its first maternity hospital and children’s home in the Ostlager.\textsuperscript{216} The makeshift maternity hospital, opened in a wooden barrack in the western part of the Ostlager, was operated in the same facility until April 1945. During this time, 500 children were delivered.\textsuperscript{217} The East Camp Children’s Home was opened in the eastern part of the Ostlager, and consisted of a barrack divided into four rooms: one for pregnant women awaiting delivery, two for nurses caring for babies, and one for breastfeeding women.\textsuperscript{218} By August 1943, forty-five children were accommodated in VW’s children’s home, half of whom were malnourished.\textsuperscript{219} When the home was expanded to include children from Kreis Gifhorn, the number of children increased significantly, and the facility became overcrowded. Because of the worsening

\textsuperscript{216} Reiter, \textit{Tötungsstätten}, 145.
\textsuperscript{217} Sworn statement of Willi Ohl, WO 235/272.
\textsuperscript{218} Testimony of Christoph Bar, WO 235/263; Siegfried, \textit{Das Leben}, 236.
\textsuperscript{219} Testimony of Ella Schmidt, WO 235/268.
conditions, the decision was made to re-locate the home. While it operated at the East Camp facility, ten children died of malnutrition.\textsuperscript{220}

In October 1943, eighty children were transferred from the East Camp facility to the Schachtweg facility.\textsuperscript{221} The move failed to improve the conditions, as the number of children soon increased to 120.\textsuperscript{222} From December 1943 through January 1944, the children were plagued by outbreaks of pneumonia and other lung disorders. In April 1944, outbreaks of scabies, boils, and rashes spread among the children.\textsuperscript{223} In May 1944, the number of children reached 155.\textsuperscript{224} Between thirty-two and fifty-six children died at the Schachtweg facility before Volkswagen moved its children’s home to the third and final location.\textsuperscript{225}

On June 14, 1944, Volkswagen re-located its children’s home to a third facility, VW’s former POW camp in the nearby town of Rühen.\textsuperscript{226} Four barracks were used for the Rühen Children’s Home: one for the administration, two as a nursery for the mothers and children, and one for storage.\textsuperscript{227} Of the nursery’s two barracks, the first housed children over three months of age and the second housed children up to three months of

\textsuperscript{220} Siegfried, \textit{Das Leben}, 237-238.
\textsuperscript{221} Testimony of Georg Müller, WO 235/264; Siegfried, \textit{Das Leben}, 238.
\textsuperscript{222} Mommsen and Grieger, \textit{Das Volkswagenwerk}, 763.
\textsuperscript{223} Hodorowicz-Knab, \textit{Wearing}, 202.
\textsuperscript{224} Reiter, \textit{Tötungsstätten}, 149.
\textsuperscript{225} Estimates vary on the number of deaths at the Schachtweg facility. Testimonies indicated that from October 1943 to the beginning of June 1944, four to six children died per month, meaning that there were 32 to 48 deaths. The defense stated that 120 children were being accommodated during this time, and argued that the death rate was 30%, which amounts to around 36 deaths. In comparison to the U.S. Army Command list used during the trial, which shows that 56 children died in the Schachtweg facility, that number is likely too low. Reiter, \textit{Tötungsstätten}, 149, 159.
\textsuperscript{226} Siegfried, \textit{Das Leben}, 241.
\textsuperscript{227} Reiter, \textit{Tötungsstätten}, 151.
age.\textsuperscript{228} Ninety to 100 children were accommodated in the barrack for children under three months.\textsuperscript{229} According to a report from October 1944 to the Plenipotentiary General for Labor Mobilization, both barracks were occupied by 150 or more children.\textsuperscript{230} Between June 14, 1944 and April 12, 1945, the mortality rate of the barrack for children under three months was nearly 100 percent. The barrack for children older than three months had a significantly lower mortality rate, likely because the children were no longer dependent on breast-milk, and not as susceptible to disease.\textsuperscript{231}

The Volkswagen Children’s Home was closed when American forces liberated Rühen on April 12, 1945.\textsuperscript{232} From the opening of the East Camp facility in February 1943 until the closure of the Rühen facility in April 1945, between 300 to 400 children died at VW’s children’s home, approximately 250 to 300 of whom died in the time that it was operated in Rühen.\textsuperscript{233} In June 1945, during the U.S Army’s investigation into the children’s deaths, the children’s graves were exhumed by American troops, among them Captain Clifford Byrum.\textsuperscript{234}

\textsuperscript{228} Hodorowicz-Knab, \textit{Wearing}, 202-204.
\textsuperscript{229} Testimony of Elfriede Meyer, WO 235/265.
\textsuperscript{230} Reiter, \textit{Tötungsstätten}, 151.
\textsuperscript{231} Hodorowicz-Knab, \textit{Wearing}, 202-204.
\textsuperscript{232} Reiter, \textit{Tötungsstätten}, 145.
\textsuperscript{233} The exact number of deaths at the three facilities cannot be determined. According to the U.S. Army Command list used in the trial, 365 children died; however, the list only documents the deaths of children from June 1943 to March 1945. Another discrepancy appears in documents from a 1985/1986 discussion with Ferdinand Porsche, who claimed that 40 children from the U.S. Army Command’s List were still alive, 20 were never at the Rühen facility, and six were listed twice, indicating that 299 children died. Based on the incomplete U.S. Army list of 365 deaths, and subtracting the 40 children who were allegedly still alive, a low estimate for the distribution of deaths at the three facilities is as follows: East Camp, approximately ten; Schachtweg, approximately 56; and Rühen, approximately 250-260. The actual number of deaths at the Rühen facility was likely 300 or more, placing the total number of deaths somewhere between 365 and 400. Reiter, \textit{Tötungsstätten}, 158-159.
\textsuperscript{234} Sworn statement of Byrum, WO 235/272.
The three locations of the Volkswagen Children’s Home contribute to the complexity of this story, for the circumstances, conditions, and death rate varied at each of the three facilities. As the children’s home was expanded and re-located, the situation for the children deteriorated and the deaths increased. From the “best home in Germany of its kind” to a virtual extermination center for infants, the gradually worsening conditions should be understood in the context of the two issues examined below: local-level versus upper-level management, and intent versus indifference as causes of the children’s deaths.

**Local-level versus Upper-level Management**

The trial records revealed that executives and personnel at the factory in Wolfsburg oversaw VW’s children’s home and held responsibility for the children’s deaths. The formation of the East Camp facility was initiated by upper-level Nazi officials, but beyond that, the actual establishment, management, and daily operation of all three facilities fell under the local control of the factory. Within VW, departmental shifts and fluctuating responsibilities among officials contributed to the declining conditions, as defendants claimed during the trial that it was not their responsibility, and that an official superior to them, or an official in a different department, should have acted. VW’s factory doctor and a German nursing staff were put in charge of the children’s care, and eventually left to oversee the administration while other officials gradually became less involved. Although this caused responsibility for the deaths to be

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235 Testimony of Grünhage, WO 235/263.
placed primarily on the medical personnel, other officials had a higher level of authority, and subsequently, more power to bring about change.

Moreover, VW’s status as a munitions producer for the Nazi state, and its executives’ close relationship with upper-level Nazi officials, demonstrates that VW was a dominant force within the Third Reich. Despite the factory’s size and economic influence, the factory administration failed to ensure the children’s survival. Ultimately, the children fell victim to VW’s vast bureaucratic system and its prioritization of production. During the final stages of the war, the lives of foreign children meant little to executives who oversaw the operations of this massive state armaments manufacturer.

While VW founded its own children’s home in the Ostlager, the idea originated with an upper-level Nazi official. As discussed in chapter two, the protocol for establishing foreign child-care facilities was introduced in a Reich-wide decree from Fritz Sauckel on December 15, 1942. On February 20, 1943, Sauckel’s decree was distributed via circular by the Reich Association of Health Insurance Funds to the County Health Insurance Fund of Kreis Gifhorn (Landkrankenkasse des Kreises Gifhorn, or LKK Gifhorn), and then sent to VW executives in Wolfsburg.\(^{236}\) Sauckel’s decree not only initiated the creation of foreign child-care facilities across the Third Reich, but also led to the establishment of VW’s children’s home.\(^{237}\)

For several months after the opening of the East Camp facility in February 1943, it was solely a factory institution that had been established by VW to accommodate the children of the factory’s Eastern European workforce. Months after it opened, however,

\(^{236}\) Exhibit 1, WO 235/271.
\(^{237}\) Testimony of Grünhage, WO 235/263.
upper-level Nazi officials became involved once more. Following the distribution of
Sauckel’s decree, Otto Telschow, the Gauleiter of Ost-Hannover Braunschweig, ordered
Ernst Lütge, the Kreisleiter238 of Gifhorn, to establish a foreign child-care facility in his
Kreis.239 After a tour of the East Camp facility in April or May 1943, Lütge asked the
Chief Executive of VW, Anton Piëch, if the firm would house the children born to other,
i.e., non-VW, Polish and Soviet civilian workers across the Kreis. Piëch agreed, making
VW responsible for the management of the Kreis’ foreign child-care facility in the
summer of 1943.240 This agreement transformed VW’s facility into a central institution of
the Kreis, intertwining the interests of the Party with the operation of the factory-run
facility.241 It also signaled a shift from upper-level involvement in the facility’s
establishment through Sauckel’s decree and Gauleiter Telschow’s order, to local-level
control over its usage and purpose.

Raimond Reiter writes that responsibility for the children’s home rested on three
levels: the NSDAP (Gau and Kreis officials) and affiliated National Socialist associations
(epecially the DAF), state authorities (Landrat,242 Arbeitsamt243 and the Health
Insurance Fund), and the VW factory administration.244 While documentation from the

238 District Leader. Party official superior to an Ortsgruppenleiter but subordinate to a Gauleiter. Michael
and Doerr, Nazi-Deutsch, 247. Nazi Germany had a dual system of local administration. The local system
of control was built around the traditional civil administration of the Landrat and mayor, while the Nazi
Party administration was divided into various Gaue, each led by a Gauleiter who controlled an area like
Ost-Hannover. Below him, the Kreisleiter controlled a Kreis such as Gifhorn, and finally, the
Ortsgruppenleiter had authority over towns like Rühen. Authorities with positions in the Party
administration had significantly more influence than officials from the civil administration.
239 Questions to Dr. Anton Piëch, WO 235/274.
240 Testimonies of Kuhlmann (WO 236/269), Tyrolt (WO 235/266), Grünhage, and Rolf Praetorius (WO
235/263).
241 Siegfried, Das Leben, 237.
242 A chief administrative officer distinct from the Nazi Party District Administrator, or Kreisleiter.
243 Labor Office. The local labor office of the Nazi Party. Michael and Doerr, Nazi-Deutsch, 68.
244 Reiter, Tötungsstätten, 151-52.
trial confirmed that the Party and state authorities shared responsibility for the indirect operation of the children’s home, Reiter’s conclusions diminish the primary role of the factory in the home’s day-to-day management. Nonetheless, the involvement of the Party and state authorities contributed to the circumstances at the home.

As a state armaments producer for the Third Reich, the factory operated under orders from the NSDAP regarding the use of foreign labor; therefore, there was a degree of centralized and local Party control over the children’s home. As discussed above, Party officials like Sauckel, Gauleiter Telschow, and Kreisleiter Lütge initiated either the establishment of VW’s children’s home or its transition into the Kreis’ home. Moreover, although their involvement was the reason that Eastern European children from across the Kreis were taken from their mothers and sent to VW’s home, Party officials did not maintain responsibility for the home’s management after the agreement between Lütge and Piëch. Several witnesses and defendants testified that Kreisleiter Lütge issued and enforced orders to have children taken to the home, and had the authority to close it; however, Lütge did not make any decisions regarding the facility’s location, administration, supplies, or staff.\textsuperscript{245} After the war, Piëch told war crimes investigators that Lütge had promised VW support for the children’s home, but was unable to keep his promise because he did not receive any support from Gauleiter Telschow.\textsuperscript{246}

Accordingly, Piëch’s statement also suggests that Gauleiter Telschow had only limited direct involvement in the home’s operation. Trial testimonies revealed that

\textsuperscript{245} Testimonies of Körbel (WO 235/267), Antonius Holling (WO 235/267), and Tyrolt (WO 235/266).

\textsuperscript{246} Questions to Piëch, WO 235/274.
Telschow ordered mothers to return to work shortly after giving birth, and prohibited children from being released from the home.\textsuperscript{247} Moreover, Piëch stated that Telschow had the authority to close the home, but he refused to do so. Instead, he told Piëch to focus on production.\textsuperscript{248} The \textit{Kreisleiter} and \textit{Gauleiter} may have intended to be involved in the facility’s management, but as the war drew their priorities elsewhere, they issued and enforced orders regarding the admittance of children and the postpartum period for mothers, but left responsibility for the home to VW. The trial records revealed that after Volkswagen took on responsibility for the \textit{Kreis’} foreign child-care facility, the VW administration was in complete control of its operation.

While it is possible that the NSDAP, including upper-level Party officials and associations like the DAF, was more involved than the documentation suggests, extensive evidence of this did not emerge during the trial.\textsuperscript{249} The Rühen trial centered around the individuals directly responsible for causing the children’s deaths rather than upper-level Party officials who issued orders. Due to the trial’s narrow focus, and because only three of the ten defendants were members of the Party, any connections to the NSDAP—especially top Nazi officials—were of limited relevance to the prosecution.\textsuperscript{250}

Because the trial focused on the Volkswagen officials and staff charged for the crimes, any mention of state authorities’ involvement was brief; however, the trial

\textsuperscript{247} Questions to Piëch, WO 235/274; Testimony of Tyrolt, WO 235/266.
\textsuperscript{248} Questions to Piëch, WO 235/274.
\textsuperscript{249} For example, the involvement of the DAF was mentioned during Bar’s testimony when he stated that the DAF intervened in the Welfare Department’s management of the factory’s communal workers’ camps. While the DAF may have influenced how the Welfare Department managed the children’s home, such as how much food, clothing, and other supplies were distributed to the home, more extensive evidence did not emerge during the trial. Testimony of Bar, WO 235/263.
\textsuperscript{250} Judge advocate, WO 235/268. Severin, Tyrolt, and Körbel were members of the Party.
records showed that the Gifhorn Labor Office, the Landrat, and the LKK Gifhorn contributed indirectly to the operation of the children’s home. For example, testimonies confirmed that the Labor Office sent nurses to work at the home, issued orders about how long mothers could stay in the maternity hospital and children’s home after giving birth, and enforced the length of the postpartum period by ordering mothers to return to work.\footnote{Testimonies of Liesel Bachor (WO 235/268), Bar (WO 235/263), Tyrolt (WO 235/266), Körbel (WO 235/267), and Grünhage (WO 235/263).} Although the Labor Office had no authority over operations at the home, its rigid control over the Kreis’ female labor force was detrimental to newborns. With Germany’s war economy at stake, the Labor Office ensured that work came first.

In addition to the Labor Office, the Landrat’s office also contributed indirectly to the operation of the children’s home. Testimonies reveal that Landrat Behrenz\footnote{The trial records do not include the first name of Landrat Behrenz.} was informed about the high death rate, and had the authority to admit and discharge children from the home. Yet, he enforced the Kreisleiter’s orders to take children to the home, and refused to provide VW support, or shut it down.\footnote{Testimonies of Grünhage (WO 235/263), Bar (WO 235/263), Tyrolt (WO 235/266), and Körbel (WO 235/267).} Moreover, the Landrat’s office also worked closely with the LKK Gifhorn, as evidence from the trial includes records that were sent from the Landrat’s office to the LKK Gifhorn about expenses from the home associated with the children’s care, burials, and maintenance.\footnote{Exhibits 2, 3, and 4, WO 235/271.} The LKK Gifhorn received these records from the Landrat’s office, collected money from farmers who employed the parents and had subtracted the amount from their wages, and then paid VW
for the cost of the home’s upkeep.\textsuperscript{255} Thus, as Reiter concludes, state authorities, including the Labor Office, Landrat, and LKK Gifhorn, share some responsibility for the continued operation of the home.\textsuperscript{256}

The involvement of the Party and state authorities shows that officials from outside of Volkswagen endangered the children’s lives without having direct responsibility over either the management of the home or the children’s care. Party and state authorities worked closely with the VW factory administration, and the involvement of all three contributed to the dire situation at the home. Nonetheless, despite the indirect involvement of other authorities, VW officials and staff oversaw the facility and the children’s care, and consequently, hold the most responsibility for the children’s deaths. While it is important to note the involvement of authorities from outside of VW, the subsequent section will provide further evidence of VW’s principle control over the home by emphasizing the responsibilities of VW officials and staff.

From February 1943 to April 1945, the children’s home remained under Volkswagen’s authority, despite shifts in the supervising department, and in the employees responsible for overseeing the home. At each of the three facilities, the amount of direct supervision from VW officials gradually decreased, and the role of the medical personnel increased. Eventually, the home in Rühen was left under the sole supervision of Körbel and the German nursing staff. Unraveling the intricacies of VW’s bureaucracy will show that VW was in control of the children’s home at all three

\textsuperscript{255} Testimony of Grünhage, WO 235/263.  
\textsuperscript{256} Reiter, \textit{Tötungsstätten}, 151-52.
facilities, and will demonstrate who, among VW officials and staff, oversaw its management and operation.

The decision to open the East Camp maternity hospital and children’s home was made by the Chief Executive of Volkswagen, Anton Piëch. Trial testimonies confirm that Piëch assigned the creation and organization of the facilities to Georg Tyrolt, the personnel director in charge of the factory employees and the social welfare of the workers. The creation of these facilities was ordered as part of a project to reorganize the Ostlager to improve the living conditions for the Eastern European workforce.

After Tyrolt was put in charge of the facilities’ establishment, he ordered Ewald Kuhlmann, commandant of the Ostlager, to assist him with the project.

While Tyrolt and Kuhlmann were responsible for establishing the maternity hospital and East Camp Children’s Home, Piëch assigned medical supervision and administrative duties to the factory doctor, Dr. Hans Körbel. Körbel placed the maternity hospital under the direction of another factory doctor, Willie Ohl. Since Sauckel’s December 1942 decree stated that Eastern European children should be cared for by members of the same nationality, Körbel and Ohl put Soviet workers in charge of the medical duties. In August 1943, however, due to the worsening conditions after the influx of children from the Kreis, factory management ordered Körbel to take over direct

257 Testimonies of Tyrolt (WO 235/266) and Praetorius (WO 235/263).
258 Testimony of Tyrolt, WO 235/266.
259 Testimony of Kuhlmann, WO 235/269.
260 Testimony of Praetorius, WO 235/263.
262 Exhibit 1, WO 235/271; Testimony of Körbel, WO 235/267.
supervision of the children’s home. Körbel replaced the Soviet doctor and hired Ella Schmidt as head nurse. After August 1943, rather than Soviet laborers, a trained German nursing staff employed by Volkswagen cared for the children at the home, showing VW’s departure from Sauckel’s instructions. At the first children’s home in the Ostlager, when the death rate was low, the establishment and management was chiefly the task of Tyrolt and Kuhlmann, and the administration and children’s care was the responsibility of Körbel and the Soviet workers or German nurses under his orders.

In the fall of 1943, when the children’s home was relocated to the Schachtweg facility, two shifts occurred in the home’s management that reduced the level of supervision from VW authorities and increased the responsibility of the medical personnel. First, after the home became the Kreis’ facility and was moved out of the Ostlager, neither Tyrolt nor Kuhlmann considered themselves responsible. Tyrolt testified that Körbel was put in charge; therefore, Tyrolt considered it his duty as manager of the Finance Branch of Social Services to supply Körbel with the equipment and food to run the home properly, but not to manage its day-to-day operation.

A second shift in the fall of 1943 increased the divide between VW officials and the medical personnel. Social Services’ institutions, including the children’s home, were placed under the management of factory official Heinz Behrs. Under Behrs was

264 Testimony of Praetorius, WO 235/263. Social Services is also referred to in the trial records as the Welfare Department and Welfare Services. The names are used interchangeably by witnesses.
265 Testimonies of Tyrolt (WO 235/266) and Kuhlmann (WO 235/269).
266 Testimony of Tyrolt (WO 235/266).
267 Exhibit 11, WO 235/271. Documents from evidence state that this change officially went into effect on January 1, 1944.
Horn, the Chief of the Health Services Department, a sub-department of Social Services that was responsible for VW’s health institutions. A letter from December 1943 stated that Health Services was under obligation to supervise the maternity institutions and infant centers. It also specified that the conduct of Health Services and the treatment of the patients was “exclusively the responsibility of the [factory] doctor.” These developments demonstrate that there were three levels to the home’s management at Schachtweg: Behrs was the senior official in charge of Social Services, Horn supervised the home, and Körbel oversaw the children’s care.

The shift in management from Tyrolt and Kuhlmann at the East Camp facility to Horn and Körbel at the Schachtweg facility reveals the emergence of a separation between VW officials from other departments and officials from the Health Services Department. After the move to Schachtweg, the children’s home was viewed as the responsibility of Health Services, and more specifically, the responsibility of Körbel. As a result, other officials became negligent in their supervision of the home, and more detached from its daily operation.

Yet, a brief intervention from Tyrolt and Behrs at the Schachtweg facility shows how, at the second location of VW’s home, officials from outside of Health Services still carried out inspections of the home. Although both officials failed to monitor the conditions or supervise the staff for the duration of the home’s operation in the Schachtweg facility, after Tyrolt visited on June 13, 1944 and saw the unsanitary

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268 The trial records do not include the first name of Horn.
269 Exhibits 13 and 14, WO 235/271.
270 Exhibit 14, WO 235/271.
conditions and sick children, he made a managerial decision that temporarily improved the situation. Tyrolt called a meeting with Behrs and Körbel, and they decided to separate the children and move the healthy to the facility in Rühen. This reveals two additional points about the management of the Schachtweg facility. Because it was under the direct control of Horn and Körbel, higher officials from outside of Health Services no longer supervised its operation regularly; however, Tyrolt and Behrs still took control when they observed issues with its management.271

When the facility was moved to Rühen, however, the new location, as well as two more management changes, further reduced VW executives’ involvement and increased the responsibility of the medical personnel. Rühen was located fifteen kilometers from Wolfsburg, which added a physical separation between the children’s home and the VW administration at the central factory.272 Moreover, Social Services was renamed the Wirtschaftsbetriebe, or the Economic Management Department, and became entirely independent from the central factory with its own accounting department, administration, and director.273 This split officially excluded other VW executives and departments from any direct supervision over the home, and left Behrs and Horn as the only senior authorities with immediate responsibility.

After the formation of the Wirtschaftsbetriebe, the home in Rühen was viewed by officials at the central factory as a separate institution that was not under the management of other VW departments. As a result, officials from outside of the Wirtschaftsbetriebe

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271 Testimony of Tyrolt, WO 235/266.
273 Testimonies of Tyrolt (WO 235/266), Annamarie Loeffler (WO 236/266), and Praetorius (WO 235/263).
adhered to VW’s chain of command and focused on their own duties. For example, Tyrolt visited the Rühen facility twice, but he testified that he did not intervene to improve the conditions because complaints should have been made to Behrs.274 Similarly, after Kuhlmann was promoted to commandant of all VW’s workers’ camps, he supervised Georg Severin, the camp leader (Lagerführer) of VW’s complex in Rühen. Kuhlmann specifically told Severin that it was not Severin’s duty to supervise the home because another department head was responsible.275 Kuhlmann’s explanation for why he did not consider either himself or Severin responsible for the home likely reveals the attitude of other VW officials who held positions of authority but failed to intervene: “[we] weren’t supposed to meddle with matters that were matters of another department.”276 Because the Rühen facility fell under the control of the Wirtschaftsbetriebe, officials from other departments did not feel obligated to assist with its administration.

A final shift in the home’s management widened the gap between VW officials and the medical personnel to such an extent that Körbel and the nursing staff became solely responsible for the facility in Rühen. In October 1944, Director Behrs appointed Ella Schmidt, the head nurse, as departmental head of the home, which eliminated Horn as the intermediary between the nursing staff and Behrs, and left Schmidt in charge of the administration.277 Schmidt was instructed by Behrs to report directly to him, and to send

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274 Testimony of Tyrolt, WO 235/266.
275 Testimonies of Kuhlmann (WO 235/268) and Severin (WO 235/269).
276 Testimony of Kuhlmann, WO 235/269.
277 Exhibit 13 (WO 235/271), and the testimonies of Cecile Marie Schomers (WO 235/269) and Schmidt (WO 235/268). Documents from evidence indicate that October 1, 1944 may have been the official date...
him monthly reports about the number of deaths; however, Behrs would not visit Rühen when she asked for his help, and he never made use of her reports.\textsuperscript{278} Instead of using his direct authority over the home to supervise the staff or improve the conditions, Behrs left the medical personnel to handle all aspects of the facility’s operation. These final administrative changes demonstrate how, after the home was moved to Rühen, the medical personnel were the children’s last—and only—hope for survival.

As this analysis has shown, the management of VW’s children’s home underwent significant changes at each of the three facilities. The departmental and managerial shifts, including who supervised the home and when, allowed VW officials and staff to claim that it was not their responsibility. Eventually, responsibility for the home shifted exclusively to Körbel and the nursing staff, without support or supervision from other officials. As Tyrolt testified, “Körbel could only carry out the duties which he was assigned if he was assisted by all departments of the [factory].”\textsuperscript{279} Despite Tyrolt admitting this during the trial, while the home was in operation, there was no priority or urgency to assist the medical personnel, as other officials were focused on their own duties. Instead of improving the conditions at the home or taking control of its management, VW officials gradually distanced themselves from its operation.

Nonetheless, the reduced involvement of VW executives in the day-to-day management of the home does not mean that they were not aware of the conditions, or lacked the authority to make changes. The trial records revealed that executives from

\footnotesize{that the formation of the \textit{Wirtschaftsbetriebe} went into effect, but trial testimonies provide conflicting information. It is also unclear as to why this shift took place.\textsuperscript{278} Testimony and sworn statement of Schmidt, WO 235/268 and WO 235/273.\textsuperscript{279} Testimony of Tyrolt, WO 235/266.}
VW’s highest levels of management visited the home and heard about the high mortality rate, but did nothing to intervene. For example, after the Chief of the Financial Department, Rolf Praetorius, visited the Rühen facility in February 1945, he expressed his dissatisfaction with the conditions to Tyrolt, who told Praetorius that “it was all known to him” and he had “no direct influence on the matter,” but would “see to it that a change took place.”

This encounter shows that even without official responsibility, Tyrolt was aware of the dire situation at Rühen, and assured Praetorius that he could bring about change. Nurse Kathe Pisters’ testimony also revealed the extent of Tyrolt’s authority when she stated, “it would have been possible to check the death rate and put an end to the unbearable conditions if Tyrolt had done something.”

After Tyrolt intervened to move the healthy children out of the Schachtweg facility, however, he did not make any further efforts to save the children’s lives.

Even executives higher in VW’s chain of command, including the factory director and president of VW, failed to monitor the situation closely enough or put a stop to the children’s deaths. Director Hans Mayr admitted in his sworn statement that he was “responsible for all incidents which [took] place in the plant,” confirming both his authority and responsibility for the circumstances at the home.

Severin also confirmed that Mayr visited the home in Rühen “once or twice,” proving that Mayr saw the conditions himself. Yet, even with Mayr’s knowledge of the dire situation, he did not

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280 Testimony of Praetorius, WO 235/263.
281 Testimony of Pisters, WO 235/268.
282 Testimony of Tyrolt, WO 235/266.
use his authority to improve the conditions, order his subordinates to supervise the medical staff, or shut it down.

Furthermore, in January 1945, President Ferdinand Porsche asked Körbel why so many children were dying, but he failed to investigate the situation further.\textsuperscript{285} It is highly unlikely that January 1945 was the first time Porsche heard about the high mortality rate, especially since he visited the Schachtweg facility one year earlier.\textsuperscript{286} Yet, even if this was the first time Porsche was informed of the death rate, this conversation confirms his awareness that hundreds of children had already died. Instead of using his authority to close the facility, Porsche allowed it to remain open for another three months.\textsuperscript{287} The examples of Tyroli, Mayr, and Porsche show that by the time the home was moved to Rühen, it had become an insignificant concern for VW executives, who were both physically and mentally far removed from the home and viewed it as the responsibility of the medical staff. The highest-level factory officials knew about the appalling conditions and death rate, and had the authority to make significant changes, but did not.

Furthermore, since Volkswagen was a wealthy and powerful armaments producer for the Nazi state, its executives had the authority not only to make changes in the factory, but also to negotiate with upper-level Nazi authorities to bring about change at a central level. Although, to a certain extent, the factory had to adhere to the NSDAP’s laws regarding the treatment of Eastern European laborers, VW officials’ successful efforts to secure better rations for Soviet POWs and the infants of Soviet civilian workers

\textsuperscript{285} Testimony of Körbel, WO 235/267.
\textsuperscript{286} Testimony of Schmidt, WO 235/268.
\textsuperscript{287} Testimony of Körbel, WO 235/267.
show that the factory was not powerless against the NSDAP’s influence. Rather, VW officials like Körbel, Porsche, and Tyrolt intervened selectively to make improvements for the Eastern Europeans under the factory’s control: for Soviet POWs because they were essential workers, and for the children at the home because VW did not want to feed non-workers with its own rations. After VW officials’ early advocacy for the foreign children under their care, they made no further efforts to use their authority with upper-level Party officials to save the children’s lives.288

The actions of Körbel and Porsche on behalf of Soviet POWs show that before the children’s home was established, the factory took initiative to improve conditions for Eastern European workers. In late 1941 or early 1942, after Körbel informed Porsche that Soviet POWs were dying in large numbers due to nutritional deficiencies, Porsche went directly to Hitler with Körbel’s concerns. As a result, rations for Soviet POWs were increased throughout the Third Reich.289 Porsche’s early efforts to improve the conditions for Soviet POWs stand in stark contrast to his failure to improve the conditions for the Polish and Soviet infants at the children’s home. Klaus-Jörg Siegfried provides an explanation for Porsche’s callous neglect of the infants at the home:

Industrialists such as Porsche progressively lost their moral dimension the more hopeless the war appeared and the more brutally the regime practiced its policies of extermination during the phase of ‘total war.’ The cumulative desensitization that accompanied this process saw a progressive loss of scruple regarding the employment of forced labor and concentration camp prisoners, and the ruthless exploitation of their labor, until only purely economic and technocratic aims counted. This may explain why, for example, Porsche intervened to improve rations of half-starved Soviet prisoners of war, while doing nothing to prevent the mass demise of the children born to forced workers in the Volkswagen factory.290

288 Testimonies of Körbel (WO 235/267) and Tyrolt (WO 235/266).
This prioritization of the factory’s foreign labor force is also what motivated VW executives to negotiate with upper-level Nazi authorities about increasing the rations for the Eastern European children at the children’s home. Sauckel’s March 20, 1943 regulations stipulated that the infants of Polish and Soviet civilian workers should receive less food than German children and children of other foreign workers.\textsuperscript{291} When VW opened its home, however, the factory did not follow the official rationing law and provided Eastern European children with extra allocations.\textsuperscript{292} After the home was expanded to include children from the Kreis, VW was no longer willing to take rations from its own labor force to feed non-workers.\textsuperscript{293}

Subsequently, in July or August 1943, Körbel and Tyrolt took photos of the malnourished children who had been brought to the home by agricultural workers across the Kreis to demonstrate to authorities at the Reich Ministry of Food and Agriculture that the rations were inadequate.\textsuperscript{294} Because of their efforts, on January 6, 1944, rations for Eastern European children at foreign child-care facilities were increased throughout the Third Reich.\textsuperscript{295} These two examples of VW officials initiating ration increases for the Eastern Europeans under the factory’s control show that VW had the platform and authority to initiate Reich-wide changes with central officials. Although VW was initially effective in improving the treatment of Eastern Europeans, officials did not take any

\textsuperscript{291} Testimony of Bar, WO 235/263. For more information on ration laws for the feeding of Eastern European children, see Vögel, Entbindungsheim, 33-35; Schwarze, Kinder, 153.
\textsuperscript{292} Closing statement of Draper (WO 235/270), and the testimonies of Karl Arend and Georg Twelke (WO 235/266).
\textsuperscript{293} Testimony of Tyrolt, WO 235/266.
\textsuperscript{294} Testimonies of Tyrolt (WO 235/266) and Körbel (WO 235/267).
\textsuperscript{295} Testimony of Schomers, WO 235/269. For more information, see Vögel, Entbindungsheim, 33-35; Schwarze, Kinder, 153-154.
further action on behalf of the children at home. Without an economic benefit, factory officials would not intervene to save the lives of non-working infants.

The factory’s power and its executives’ influence with the top officials of the Nazi state suggest that it could have operated an acceptable children’s home using its own extensive supplies and its negotiating capabilities with Nazi officials in Berlin. As prosecutor Major G.I.D. Draper stated during the trial, the factory had everything behind it. VW had wealth, it was in a good position with the Party, it was in a KdF town affiliated with the DAF, and Porsche was a close friend of Hitler.296 With significant resources and connections at VW’s disposable, the children’s deaths appear not the result of limited funds or options, but of the prioritization of labor and production.

This analysis of VW’s power and influence, as well as the factory administration’s authority over the supervision and operation of the home, shows that VW had complete control over the conditions at its children’s home. Despite the supervisory and departmental changes in the factory administration, VW was responsible for overseeing all three facilities, with minor outside or central-level involvement. While upper-level officials influenced the establishment of the children’s home and its transition into the Kreis’ foreign child-care facility, local factory officials and staff established the home, controlled its management, and supervised the children’s care. The numerous shifts in VW’s bureaucracy, which resulted in the diminished involvement of VW officials, provides one explanation as to why the children’s home seemed to get lost in the factory hierarchy. Behind the administrative changes, the lack of intervention from

296 Draper closing statement, WO 235/270.
senior executives, and assertions from officials and staff that they were not responsible, was an indifference toward the children’s fate.

**Intent versus Indifference**

Both intent and indifference should be understood in the context of the charge of willful neglect; the defendants in the Rühen trial were all accused of deliberately neglecting the children by taking custody of them and allowing them to die. Nonetheless, as introduced in chapter one, the responsible officials and staff exhibited “high” and “low” forms of willful neglect: neglect motivated by the intent to cause the children harm, and neglect motivated by indifference toward their fate.\(^{297}\) The question of intent asks who intended for the children to die and acted, or failed to act, in ways to ensure that result. The question of indifference asks whose neglect stemmed from apathy toward the children’s situation. It asks who may not have intended for the children to die, yet consciously failed to prevent or stop their deaths.

Although the involvement of individuals responsible for the Volkswagen Children’s Home cannot be strictly categorized as the result of intent or indifference, trial records revealed that the neglect exhibited by the authorities and personnel responsible for VW’s home was the result of gradually worsening indifference. At each of the three facilities, the conditions for the children deteriorated from acceptable to appalling, and the indifference of the responsible authorities increased. While VW’s efforts initially seemed well-intentioned and the company provided adequate accommodations and supplies at the East Camp facility, within months, there were signs of indifference toward

\(^{297}\) Draper closing statement, WO 235/270.
the children’s lives. While the home was in the Schachtweg facility, the indifference exhibited by VW officials and staff worsened. VW officials improperly managed the home, and the medical staff neglected the children’s care—both were causes for the increase in deaths. Nonetheless, there were efforts to keep the children alive.

When the home was moved to the facility in Rühen, officials and staff simply stopped trying to save the children’s lives. They accepted that the children would die, and allowed the deaths to continue. While the evidence does not suggest that the defendants intended to cause the children’s deaths, it is possible that when the home was moved to Rühen, the decision had been made by other factory or Party officials who were not charged for these crimes. Overall, the involvement of the individuals responsible for VW’s children’s home can be characterized by their inaction. Rather than acting and making decisions that would cause the children’s deaths, they failed to prevent the deaths, and became increasingly indifferent toward the children’s fate.

The previous section addressing upper-level versus lower-level management introduced four defendants—Tyrolt, Kuhlmann, Severin, and Mayr—who were charged because they knew about the dire situation at the home and could have done something to remedy it, but did not.298 In addition to these four defendants, the last section introduced multiple other VW officials who failed to properly manage the home, but were not directly responsible for the children’s care. The conclusions reached above must be understood as evidence of both VW’s local control over the home and evidence of the widespread indifference on the part of the factory administration. Yet, because the Rühen

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298 Judge advocate, WO 235/267.
trial focused on identifying the individuals who caused the children’s deaths, emphasis was placed on the roles of the medical personnel—Körbel, Schmidt, Pisters, and Bachor—because the children’s lives were placed in their hands. Accordingly, the remainder of this chapter also highlights the negligence of the medical personnel, but it begins by discussing how VW officials’ disregard for the children’s lives contributed to the worsening conditions, and concludes by examining the suspicions surrounding the children’s deaths.

The trial records suggest that when VW first opened its East Camp facility in February 1943, officials established, furnished, and supplied the home with the intention of caring for the children. It was fully stocked and clean, and had a reputation as the “best home in Germany of its kind.” During the Kreisleiter’s visit in April or May 1943, it made an “excellent impression” on both him and Grünhage, the manager of the LKK Gifhorn. Rolf Praetorius, Chief of VW’s Financial Department, called it “exemplary,” and Christoph Bar, Chief of the Personnel Department, testified that it was supplied in an “excellent way.” Eugenia Wirl, a Polish laborer employed at the home, also testified that the facility appeared clean and that the children were satisfied. According to trial testimony, there were no shortages of food from VW’s communal kitchen, and Social Services supplied a substantial amount of clothing and linen.

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299 Ohl was found not guilty before giving his testimony because of Körbel’s statements that Ohl had nothing to do with the children’s home. WO 235/267.
300 Testimony of Grünhage, WO 235/263.
301 Ibid.
302 Testimony of Praetorius, WO 235/263.
303 Testimony of Bar, WO 235/263.
304 Testimony of Wirl, WO 235/264.
efforts to provide adequate resources to the home during its first few months of operation indicate that, at first, officials were not indifferent toward the fate of the children.

While VW authorities’ intentions in early 1943 seemed to be to provide for the children born in the factory, VW’s arrangement with Kreisleiter Lütge signaled a shift to indifference toward the children’s fate. The decision by Anton Piëch, Chief Executive of VW, to accommodate children from the entire Kreis shows a blatant lack of forethought for the children’s well-being. The decision was made without taking the possible consequences into consideration, and without negotiating with the Kreisleiter VW’s level of responsibility.\textsuperscript{306} Lütge did not order VW to take responsibility for the Kreis’ facility; trial testimony proved that he asked Piëch for this arrangement.\textsuperscript{307} Piëch could have refused, or VW could have decided at any time to close its facility, but it continued to manage the Kreis’ facility throughout the duration of the war.

VW’s decision to operate the Kreis’ facility initiated the decline in the conditions at the home, as the factory undertook responsibility for more children than it could adequately accommodate. Even Körbel warned Piëch of the dangers of taking in so many children, yet Piëch failed to heed his warning.\textsuperscript{308} Piëch did not consider how many children could or would be taken in, even though it was estimated that the facility had the capacity to house only thirty children.\textsuperscript{309} Instead of carefully planning how VW would responsibly care for the children, Piëch simply agreed to the Kreisleiter’s request.\textsuperscript{310}

\textsuperscript{306} Draper closing statement, WO 235/270
\textsuperscript{307} Testimonies of Tyroli (WO 235/266) and Praetorius (WO 235/263).
\textsuperscript{308} Testimony of Körbel, WO 235/267.
\textsuperscript{309} Draper closing statement (WO 235/270), and testimony of Bar (WO 235/263).
\textsuperscript{310} Draper closing statement, WO 235/270.
Despite Piëch’s reckless decision, VW officials continued to try to ensure the children’s survival and operate a suitable children’s home. This is evident in the authorities’ efforts to improve the conditions at the East Camp facility, such as the factory management’s order to Körbel to resume his duties as head doctor at the home and hire a German nursing staff, as well as Körbel and Tyrolt’s effort to increase the rations for Eastern European children. Furthermore, when the East Camp facility became overcrowded, officials intervened to move the home to a new, larger facility.\textsuperscript{311}

When the home was moved to the Schachtweg facility in October 1943, conditions worsened rapidly. While overcrowding and the lack of supervision from officials like Behrs and Horn contributed to the decline in the conditions, trial testimonies confirmed that the outbreaks of pneumonia and skin infections were the result of medical negligence from the medical personnel. Under Körbel, Schmidt, and then nurse Kathe Pisters’ supervision, sanitary practices were ignored, and the children did not receive proper treatment or care. As head doctor, Körbel failed to monitor his staff or treat the children. He came to Schachtweg every other day, but only walked from bed to bed, and did not examine the sick children.\textsuperscript{312} When Pisters took over as head nurse after Schmidt fell ill, an outbreak of boils spread among the children. Pisters was blamed for the conditions at Schachtweg because, as German nurse Kathe Wilms alleged, Pisters did not do all that she could have for the children.\textsuperscript{313}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[311] Testimonies of Tyrolt (WO 235/266) and Körbel (WO 235/267).
\item[312] Testimony of Wirl, WO 235/264.
\item[313] Testimony of Pisters, WO 235/268.
\end{footnotes}
Several other testimonies reveal the negligence of the medical personnel. Else Raedecker, a nurse at the hospital in Wolfsburg, called the home “primitive” because of the uncleanliness, and Charlotte Bass, another nurse from Wolfsburg, saw sick and healthy children bathed in the same water, and nurses giving the bottles to the babies improperly, causing them to choke on the liquid.\textsuperscript{314} Moreover, German nurse Hildegard Lammer observed that not every child had his or her own pacifier, and the bandaging was done by the foreign staff, who had no training.\textsuperscript{315} During Tyrolt’s visit to the Schachtweg facility on June 13 1944, he blamed Körbel for the appalling conditions. He called the home a “scandal and disgrace,” and scolded Körbel for neglecting simple medical protocol. He also reprimanded Pisters, who had no reasonable explanation for the boil outbreak. Despite Körbel and Pisters’ medical background, Tyrolt was the one who decided to separate the healthy children and move the home to the facility in Rühen.\textsuperscript{316}

Although the negligence of the medical personnel shows their indifference toward the children’s well-being, staff and officials still attempted to keep the children alive. This is evident from Bass’ testimony that fifty children were sent from the Schachtweg facility to the hospital in Wolfsburg, and from the actions of Tyrolt, who intervened to move the healthy children to Rühen.\textsuperscript{317} Overall, while some VW officials and staff tried to prevent the children from dying and manage the children’s home properly at the East Camp and Schachtweg facilities, their indifference progressively worsened. Piëch’s decision to expand the facility, combined with the lack of supervision from VW officials

\textsuperscript{314} Testimonies of Else Raedecker (WO 235/267) and Charlotte Bass (WO 235/265).
\textsuperscript{315} Testimony of Hildegard Lammer, WO 235/265.
\textsuperscript{316} Testimony of Tyrolt, WO 235/266.
\textsuperscript{317} Testimonies of Bass (WO 235/265) and Tyrolt (WO 235/266).
and neglect from the medical personnel, simultaneously led to the decline in the conditions from February 1943 to June 1944.

The conditions drastically deteriorated and the neglect reached its worst and most shocking level when the children’s home was in Rühen. The high death rate and frequency of deaths suggest that from June 1944 to April 1945, the VW administration became entirely indifferent about the circumstances at the home. As discussed above, VW officials failed to intervene at the Rühen home, and left its operation solely to the medical personnel. An analysis of the medical personnel will show that, like other officials from the administration, Körbel and the nurses stopped trying to ensure the children’s survival, and instead, accepted that the children would die.

As head doctor, Körbel was the focal point of the prosecution’s case for willful neglect. Four arguments were presented against him: he only visited the Rühen facility once a week, hardly examined a child, never tried to acquire a children’s specialist, and did not recommend closing the home to his superiors.318 According to testimony, Körbel visited Rühen once a week for thirty minutes, in comparison to every other day at Schachtweg. Moreover, he never examined the infants. He walked through the rooms, talked to the nurses, and then left.319 Nurses Hildegard Lammer and Liesel Bachor both stated they were shocked at Körbel’s short and infrequent visits, and the little he did when he came.320 Not only did he fail to examine the children; he never tried to ascertain

318 Draper closing statement, WO 235/270.
319 Sworn statements of Byrum, Bachor, and Frederick J. Dann (WO 235/272), and testimonies of Wirl (WO 235/264), Lammer (WO 235/265), and Meyer (WO 235/265).
320 Testimonies of Lammer and Meyer (WO 235/265), and sworn statements of Bachor, Byrum, and Dann (WO 235/272).
the cause of the deaths. He wrote “feebleness of life” on the death certificates, a term that he later admitted in the trial was not a scientific diagnosis. Rather than consult another doctor to determine the actual cause of death, he continued to use a self-invented term.\textsuperscript{321}

In fact, Körbel failed to ask for assistance from other doctors either to determine the cause of the deaths or to help treat the children while they were still alive. Willi Ohl, the doctor in charge of VW’s maternity hospital, volunteered to help Körbel at the Rühen home, but Körbel refused his offer.\textsuperscript{322} Moreover, there were four children’s specialists in the area and Körbel never asked any for assistance.\textsuperscript{323} Körbel later admitted that he should have called a specialist for children. His justification for this gross oversight was that all the doctors in Germany were overworked. Yet, Dr. Thilo Brehme, head of the children’s hospital (\textit{Kinderheilanstalt}) in Braunschweig, testified that if Körbel had come to him and said that hundreds of children were dying, he would have offered to help.\textsuperscript{324}

In addition to Körbel’s growing indifference, the nurses’ efforts to care for the children decreased. Nurse Pisters admitted to investigators that so many infants died because there was inadequate hygiene and care.\textsuperscript{325} Only one room separated the sick children from the healthy, and the children went long periods without being bathed or having their diapers changed. The babies were not fed from 7:00 p.m. to 4:30 a.m., and were supervised by one untrained assistant while the nurses slept.\textsuperscript{326} The huts dropped

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\textsuperscript{321} Testimony of Körbel, WO 235/267.
\textsuperscript{322} Sworn statement of Ohl, WO 235/272
\textsuperscript{323} Testimonies of Körbel and Paul Brasche, WO 235/267.
\textsuperscript{324} Testimony of Thilo Brehme, WO 235/267.
\textsuperscript{325} Sworn statement of Pisters, WO 235/273.
\textsuperscript{326} Sworn statement of Hannah Kanarek (WO 235/264), sworn statements of Dann and Byrum (WO 235/272), and testimony of Wirn (WO 235/264).
\end{flushleft}
below freezing at night, and the children’s legs turned blue from the cold.\textsuperscript{327} “Millions” of bugs came out of the walls and swarmed the floors, beds, and the children.\textsuperscript{328} The conditions at the Rühen facility reveal that Körbel and the nurses’ negligence created an atmosphere where diseases spread easily due to improper sanitation and isolation, and where children were exposed to temperature fluctuations, vermin, and filth.

The nurses not only failed to provide suitable care to the children, but by the time the facility was moved to Rühen, they accepted that the children would die and stopped trying to save their lives. When nurse Lammer complained about the conditions, Pisters told her, “one cannot do anything about it,” and when staff lamented the deaths, Schmidt often remarked that she “[could] not change it.”\textsuperscript{329} After becoming seemingly resigned to the deaths, Pisters told staff that it did not matter whether they fed the children or not, and that it was a waste of food. When a child was too ill to take a bottle, Pisters advised the staff to stop feeding the child and leave it to die.\textsuperscript{330} In January 1945, Schmidt was overheard callously referring to the deaths of 320 children as “the result” when discussing the number of deaths in 1944.\textsuperscript{331} During a post-war interview, Sara Frankel, a Polish Jew who worked in the Rühen home under a false identity, struggled to understand the nurses’ indifference.

Why did nobody provide for the children? There were two German nurses with the children, and another nurse, a German. They weren't young nurses any longer, these two. They had to see that children were dying, that children were lying among lice and vermin…Children with scabies from their little heads right down

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{327} Testimony of Meyer, WO 235/265.
\item \textsuperscript{328} Testimonies of Wirl (WO 235/264) and Meyer (WO 235/265).
\item \textsuperscript{329} Testimonies of Lammer and Meyer (WO 235/265).
\item \textsuperscript{330} Testimonies of Wirl (WO 235/264) and Lammer (WO 235/265).
\item \textsuperscript{331} Testimony of Meyer, WO 235/265.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
to their toes. And children like these were bathed, two, three children, four children, all of them in the same bathtub, without it being cleaned, all in the same water. And it spread like the plague.\footnote{Corporate History Department, \textit{Place of Remembrance}, 54.}

It is not surprising that after death, the children’s corpses were treated with cruel insensitivity. The bodies were wrapped in tissue, stacked, and stored in an empty room for up to five days. When Hermann Effe, the Rühen undertaker, came to collect the bodies, he placed them in cardboard boxes and transported them to the Rühen cemetery, where they were buried in mass, unmarked graves. In many cases, the mother was not notified that her child had died.\footnote{Testimony of Effe (WO 235/269), and sworn statements of Byrum and Dann (WO 235/272).}

Testimonies and evidence from the trial combine to form a shocking picture of the conditions at Rühen, leading to questions about the reasons behind the medical personnel’s neglect. It is possible that the source of their indifference was their racial prejudice against Eastern Europeans. If they did not care whether Polish and Soviet children lived or died, then they would not have taken measures to ensure their survival. There is, however, no direct evidence revealing the ideological beliefs of any of the defendants. Racial ideology may have influenced their way of thinking, but it was expressed only through circumstantial evidence, such as comments purportedly made to others. For example, Körbel allegedly remarked that Soviet children were not worth a great deal of effort, and Pisters was overheard saying, “we will take care that not so many Russian and Polish children grow up.”\footnote{Testimony of Körbel (WO 235/267), sworn statement of Dann (WO 235/272), and testimony of Meyer (WO 235/265).} While these two comments are indications of
their views of Eastern European children, without direct evidence, it cannot be confirmed that Körbel and the nurses’ indifference was ideologically motivated.

Moreover, the medical personnel’s explanations for the deaths show how their beliefs in racial ideology appeared more frequently as racist preconceptions rather than actions or statements. Despite their roles in causing the children’s deaths, they blamed everything but their own neglect: the lack of mother’s milk, artificial formula, the children being born weak, and the mothers not wanting their children. Their explanations for the deaths hint at their racial biases. For example, Schmidt concluded that two babies died from skin sores because of the mixing of Polish and French parents. Furthermore, Körbel and the nurses believed that Eastern Europeans as a “race” could not be raised on artificial formula. They were convinced that the children were dying because of the changeover from mother’s milk to formula, and concluded in a report to factory officials that this was the cause of the deaths. Even after a child whom Schmidt fed with formula survived, Körbel and the nurses remained insistent that Eastern European children could not live off artificial feeding. Moreover, they also thought that the children were dying because the mothers preferred to be in Wolfsburg rather than remain in Rühen and breastfeed their children, placing the blame on the mothers themselves. Körbel testified that the mothers “bound their breasts” so that they would

335 Draper closing statement, WO 235/270.
336 Testimony of Schmidt, WO 235/268.
337 This was proven in the trial to be false. Testimony of Brehme (WO 235/267), and sworn statement of Alexei Mussalvich Dzitrev (WO 235/272).
338 Exhibit 29, WO 235/272.
339 Ibid., and testimonies of Körbel (WO 235/267), Schmidt, and Bachor (WO 235/268).
not have to feed their children, and that the Soviet mothers lacked motherly instincts.\textsuperscript{341} Körbel and the nurses, as well as other witnesses and defendants, convinced themselves that part of the reason the infants died was because they were unwanted.\textsuperscript{342}

These racially-minded explanations for the deaths suggest that Körbel and the nurses did little to try to determine the real cause, or find ways to prevent the children from dying. Instead, they recommended in a report to factory officials that abortions be performed on female Polish and Soviet workers so that VW would not be confronted with the problem of caring for their children. Rather than suggesting that officials close the home, they blamed the deaths on artificial formula and the mothers, and advocated preventing the birth of more children.\textsuperscript{343} Despite their countless explanations, their indifference toward the children’s lives, likely to some extent motivated by an inherent belief in racial ideology, caused the home to become a near death sentence for the infants who entered.

The trial records proved that the defendants on trial for these crimes exhibited gradually worsening indifference toward the children’s survival; however, it is possible that by the time the home was moved to Rühen, other VW executives or Party officials had decided that the children were not meant to live, and either deliberately put them in a situation they would not survive, or intentionally caused their deaths. While the trial records did not confirm that either the defendants or other officials intended for the

\textsuperscript{341} Testimony of Körbel, WO 235/267.
\textsuperscript{343} Exhibit 29, WO 235/272. Trial testimony and evidence includes details about the legalization of abortion for Soviet and Polish forced laborers, and a list of abortions performed on Soviet and Polish workers at the VW factory. Testimony of Grünhage, WO 235/263; Exhibits 5, 6, and 7, WO 235/271.
children to die, four issues intensified post-war speculations about the deaths: the high mortality rate, the regular intervals of transports to the home, the attempts to maintain secrecy, and the suspicious deaths. These give credence to the possibility that the deaths were deliberate, and suggest that, by the time the home was moved to Rühen, the children were not dying due to neglect, but because there was a plan to cause their deaths.

First, in the early days of the children’s home, the death rate was neither suspicious nor alarming, particularly for infants during wartime. In the East Camp facility, the mortality rate was less than ten percent, and at the Schachtweg facility, it rose to around thirty percent; however, after the children’s home was relocated to Rühen, the death rate rose to nearly 100 percent. As Byrum concluded after the U.S. Army’s investigation, it seemed incomprehensible that close to 100 percent of the infants would die due to neglect, leading him to suspect that there was a systemic method of causing the deaths. Another captain in the U.S. Medical Corps, Frederick Dann, similarly concluded that there were factors surrounding the deaths that could not be explained by neglect, and that improper diet and epidemic diarrhea would not cause an almost 100 percent mortality rate. He recommended further investigation to determine if the deaths were the result of premeditated murder using drugs. Of the hundreds of infants sent from the maternity hospital in Wolfsburg to the facility in Rühen, three survived.

344 Reiter, Tötungsstätten, 145-159.
345 Sworn statement of Byrum, WO 235/272.
347 Testimonies of Lammer (WO 235/265) and Bacher (WO 235/268) indicate that only two infants who were born in the maternity hospital and then transferred to the home in Rühen survived until liberation; however, it is possible that more children survived after being stolen from the home by their mothers. One such survivor was Waldemar Krassmann. For more information on Krassmann’s story of survival, see Röpke and Steinhoff, “Todeslager für Babys.”
Second, despite the nearly 100 percent death rate, regular transports of newborns were sent from VW’s maternity hospital to the Rühen Children’s Home every ten to fourteen days.\textsuperscript{348} The babies arrived, and within weeks, they were dead. Then, a new transport of babies arrived to take the place of those who died.\textsuperscript{349} The deaths over ten months were equivalent in number to the numbers in transports. The steady process of transports and death led to questions about how all the children would have been accommodated if the new arrivals had not died before the next transport.\textsuperscript{350} Officials continued to send babies to the Rühen facility, even though it was clear that they had no chance of survival. This suggests that those in charge knew that they would never need more space in the home because they had planned for the children to die.

Third, witnesses’ descriptions of their attempts to alert authorities about the conditions at the home or visit their children suggest that officials and staff tried to conceal the deaths and maintain secrecy. For example, nurse Hildegard Lammer, who was not charged, complained about the home to VW authorities on several occasions. Each time, she was told not to say anything and to mind her own business, or warned that she would be sent to a concentration camp if she persisted in her complaints.\textsuperscript{351}

Moreover, there were also attempts to keep the mothers from visiting their children too frequently. At first, mothers remained with their newborns in Wolfsburg for anywhere from three to eight weeks, where they breast-fed their babies. Later, infants

\textsuperscript{348} Testimony of Schmidt, WO 235/268.  
\textsuperscript{349} Testimony of Wirl, WO 235/264.  
\textsuperscript{350} Draper closing statement, WO 235/270.  
\textsuperscript{351} Testimonies of Meyer (WO 235/265) and Lammer (WO 235/265).
were taken from the maternity hospital eight to fourteen days after birth, and when the children’s home was moved to the remote town of Rühen, it became almost inaccessible to the mothers. 352 Mothers were only allowed to visit once a month, and they had to find their own way there. 353 Furthermore, when Polish laborer Czesława Szczepaniak tried to visit her baby more than once a month, she was chased out by the nurses. 354 Similarly, when Polish laborer Zofia Musiał visited her child the day before its death, nurse Pisters chased her out of the room. 355 Charlotte Bass, a nurse at the hospital in Wolfsburg, was of the opinion that the home was moved far away intentionally so that people could not see what was happening, and so the mothers could not stay and care for their children. 356

Not only were efforts made to prevent people from talking about the Rühen facility and to limit mothers from visiting; the information relating to the children’s home was considered top secret. VW’s crimes might never have been discovered if Gustav Grünhage, the manager of the LKK Gifhorn, had not disobeyed orders to destroy the records from the children’s home days before liberation. In his testimony, he stated that after he saw the list of the children’s deaths, he came to believe that the children did not die a normal death. Because of his suspicions, he did not comply with the order to destroy the documents, and burned blank papers instead. 357

352 Testimonies of Müller (WO 235/264), Wirl (WO 235/264), and Bar (WO 235/263).
353 Testimonies of Wirl (WO 235/264), Czesława Szczepaniak (WO 235/266), Schmidt (WO 235/268), and Bachor (WO 235/268).
354 Testimony of Szczepaniak, WO 235/266.
355 Testimony of Zofia Musiał, WO 235/266.
357 Testimony of Grünhage, WO 235/263. For the letter from the Landrat’s office referring to the order to destroy confidential documents, see Exhibit 4, WO 235/271.
Fourth, in August 1944, the number of deaths at the Rühen facility increased significantly. While the causes of the deaths at the East Camp and Schachtweg facilities matched the diagnoses (malnutrition and then pneumonia and skin infections), beginning in August 1944, the children died in significantly larger numbers at the Rühen home, and no one seemed to know why. The children allegedly died from an outbreak of summer diarrhea in June and July 1944, but in August, a new, unknown sickness emerged, which according to the German medical personnel, is what led to the deaths of sixty to seventy children in the month of August alone. Furthermore, Grünhage testified that, beginning in August 1944, the average age of the children who died decreased. In August, the deaths became so frequent, and appeared so similar, that nurse Lammer called it the “standard history of all who came from Wolfsburg to Rühen.” She explained how the symptoms and duration of the sickness were always the same: three days after a new transport arrived, the children began vomiting. Then, they continued to lose weight until they died one to two weeks later. Every child who arrived suffered from the same symptoms and died within weeks. Körbel and the nurses remained convinced that these symptoms were due to the lack of mother’s milk until a new, and equally questionable, theory was introduced during the trial by Dr. Thilo Brehme, a member of the Nazi Party and head of the children’s hospital in Braunschweig.

358 Schmidt testified that when she took over at the East Camp facility, the children were suffering from malnourishment due to the low ration scale for Eastern European children. She also mentioned the outbreak of pneumonia at the Schachtweg facility. Brehme confirmed during his testimony that the mortality at Schachtweg was caused by septic infection of the skin from boils. Testimonies of Brehme (WO 235/267) and Schmidt (WO 235/268).
360 Testimony of Grünhage, WO 235/263.
361 Testimony of Lammer, WO 235/265.
During his testimony, Brehme described a new disease called “cross infection,” which he defined as the sum of all the dangers suffered by children being brought up in large numbers near one another. He concluded that the cause of the deaths at the Rühen facility beginning in August 1944 was an epidemic of gastroenteritis caused by “cross-infection.” For Brehme, the Rühen Children’s Home was a tragedy that could not have been prevented because no one could have known about this new epidemic.363

Upon further questioning, however, Brehme’s reliability as an objective witness was called into question. Brehme insisted that the only solution to the deaths would have been to close the home; however, when the judge advocate364 asked him about his visit to a different foreign child-care facility, the Braunschweig Entbindungsheim, Broitzemer Straße 200, Brehme was forced to admit that he did not shut it down, despite evidence of “cross-infection,” and his expertise as a children’s specialist. Furthermore, through his position as a Gau consultant for the NSDAP’s Central Office for Public Health (Hauptamt für Volksgesundheit),365 Brehme was responsible for NSDAP health and population policy.366 His failure to recommend the closing of the Braunschweig facility, as well as his affiliation with the NSDAP, diminishes his trustworthiness as a witness.

Moreover, when the president of the court, himself a physician, asked Brehme detailed questions about “cross-infection,” Brehme acknowledged that it was not possible

364 Judge Advocates advise the court on points of law and sum up the case. They typically served with British War Crime Courts, but if no Judge Advocate was appointed to serve with a Court, then a Legal Member could fulfill a similar role; however, the Legal Member, unlike a Judge Advocate, was a member of the Court and had the right to vote. Brand, Trial of Heinrich Gerike, xxvii.
365 This was the public health service of the Nazi state, under the leadership of the Reich Health Leader (Reichsgesundheitsführer) Dr. Leonardo Conti. This office was responsible for evaluating individuals on their supposed hereditary and racial value and “cleansing” the state of alleged genetic and racial enemies.
to determine whether the deaths at the Rühen facility had been caused by a gastrointestinal infection, or whether the vomiting and diarrhea were symptoms of another infection. Thus, Brehme’s theory of “cross-infection” remained unproven—as did his insistence that there was no way to prevent it—and the cause of the deaths was not confirmed.\textsuperscript{367}

Further speculation about the deaths of the children in the Rühen home is evident in the testimonies of three Polish mothers. Musiał testified that when she brought her eleven-day-old child to the facility, a doctor determined that it was healthy and allowed it to be admitted. When she visited the next day, the baby was short of breath and pale. It died the following day. When prosecutor Draper asked Musiał about the death, she stated that she did not think her baby died a natural death because its face and body were blue. When questioned further, she said that she believed it was poisoned. Musiał also reiterated a conversation between her and witness Fehlhaber,\textsuperscript{368} the wife of the farmer she worked for and the \textit{Ortsfrauenschaftsleiter} (local women's Party leader). When Musiał told Fehlhaber that she thought the children were being poisoned, Fehlhaber called in the \textit{Kreisbauernschaftsleiterin} (female leader of the District Agricultural Association), to whom she repeated Musiał’s statement. The \textit{Kreisbauernschaftsleiterin} told Musiał that if she ever repeated her claim she would be handed over to the Gestapo.\textsuperscript{369}

Furthermore, in April 1945, with the end of the war days away, Polish laborers Czesława Kwiatkowska and Czesława Szczepaniak made desperate attempts to save their

\textsuperscript{368} The trial records do not include the first name of Fehlhaber.
\textsuperscript{369} Testimony of Musial, WO 235/266.
children. After Kwiatkowska was forced to take her healthy six-week-old baby to the home in Rühen, she noticed a change in its health the same evening. The baby was frightened, and its hair was standing on end. Kwiatkowska returned every day to feed her baby, but by the third day, she could see it was close to death. She stole her baby through a window, hoping to bury it on her own. Kwiatkowska stayed up all night with the child as it suffered what she described as a long, “violent” death. After crying all night, her baby finally died with its eyes wide open and froth at the mouth. When the judge advocate asked about the body, Kwiatkowska described large blue spots all over, and a pin point on one of the legs, which she said looked like a needle injection mark. Like Musial, she believed that the children were poisoned.\textsuperscript{370}

Czesława Szczepaniak’s healthy seven-week-old baby was taken to the home in Rühen in mid-December 1944, and its health began to decline. Two days before the home was liberated by American troops, its health suddenly worsened, and Ukrainian assistants urged Szczepaniak to steal her baby. They handed her the child through a window, but it was too weak to survive. Blue and barely breathing, it died the next day. Szczepaniak similarly described a pin prick on her child’s leg.\textsuperscript{371}

These mothers’ testimonies highlight several similarities surrounding their children’s deaths. All three of the children arrived at the home after August 1944. Two of the three children died unexpectedly after being brought to the home in good health. All three had abnormal marks and symptoms, and their bodies were discolored. Lastly, two of the mothers stated that their children had been poisoned, and the third saw an injection

\textsuperscript{370} Testimony of Kwiatkowska, WO 235/266.
\textsuperscript{371} Testimony of Szczepaniak, WO 235/266.
mark. In addition to these mothers’ suspicions that the children were poisoned, a UNRRA Child Search Team\textsuperscript{372} searching for Polish and Soviet children in the U.S. zone of occupation in early post-war Germany reported a similar finding about VW’s home in Rühen. The report stated that “many [children] died owing to injections received.”\textsuperscript{373} The source of this information is unknown. While it cannot be confirmed that the children were murdered by lethal injection, there is much suspicion surrounding the causes of death at the Rühen home, especially from August 1944 until the end of the war.

Despite the high mortality rate, regular intervals of transports, attempts to maintain secrecy, and lack of clarity surrounding the deaths at Rühen, not enough direct evidence was uncovered during the post-war investigation to prove that the defendants intentionally caused the children’s deaths. As a result, the charge was not murder, but willful neglect. Since the prosecution narrowed its focus to willful neglect and only indicted ten individuals, it remains possible that officials who were not charged for these crimes deliberately caused the deaths; however, as this was not the focus of the trial, evidence that the children did not die of neglect is purely circumstantial.

From February 1943 to April 1945, the indifference from the VW officials and staff who were responsible for the Volkswagen Children’s Home gradually worsened. At the first two locations, there were attempts to keep the children alive, but at the same time.

\textsuperscript{372} The Child Search Branch was established as a separate department within the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) in 1945 and continued as a separate unit within the IRO (International Refugee Organization). In 1950, it was integrated into the International Tracing Service and remains in place today. The records include correspondence sent and received in the context of the search for missing Jewish and non-Jewish children and the identification of and care for so-called unaccompanied children. Suzanne Brown-Fleming, \textit{Nazi Persecution and Postwar Repercussions: The International Tracing Service Archive and Holocaust Research} (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 23.

\textsuperscript{373} Report on Death of 300 children at Rühen/Helmstedt, May 1, 1947, 3.3.1.1/82264506/ITS Digital Archive, accessed at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on August 16, 2017.
time, VW officials progressively distanced themselves from the home, and the medical personnel neglected the children’s care. By the time the home was moved to Rühen, everyone involved knew that the children would die, but failed to act. VW officials enforced orders to take the children from their mothers, failed to supervise the staff and manage the home properly, and did not close the home, despite having control over its operation. Moreover, the medical personnel neglected sanitary measures, did not provide adequate care, and made little effort to improve the conditions. Even though the trial does not prove that the defendants intended to cause the children’s deaths, all consciously failed to intervene, and remained indifferent to the children’s fate.

Ultimately, because the Rühen trial focused on those who directly caused the children’s deaths, only three individuals from the medical personnel were convicted. Körbel and Schmidt were sentenced to death for their positions as head doctor and head nurse, and Bachor was sentenced to five years imprisonment for supervising the barrack for children under three months. The other defendants—Tyrold, Kuhlmann, Severin, Mayr, Effe, Ohl, and Pisters—were acquitted. None of VW’s executives were held accountable for the deaths. The search for justice continued more than fifty years later when a class-action suit was filed against VW by former forced laborers; however, the

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374 Körbel’s sentence was confirmed on March 6, 1947 and he was executed on March 7, 1947. Schmidt’s sentence was commuted to life imprisonment on April 21, 1947, reduced to 21 years on February 3, 1950, and then reduced again to 15 years on September 14, 1953. She was released on June 10, 1955 after serving just nine years of her sentence. She was later hired by VW as a social worker. Synopsis of case, WO 235/275; Gabler, “Volkswagen’s Nazi-Era Blood Crimes.”

375 For example, in addition to the VW officials acquitted in the Rühen trial, Ferdinand Porsche and Anton Piëch were held by the Allies for nearly two years after the German surrender, but were never charged with war crimes.
suit never went to trial.\footnote{Several articles were published about VW’s children’s home when the suit gained public attention. See “Volkswagen's Wartime Travesty,” \textit{CBS News}, November 18, 1998, \url{https://www.cbsnews.com/news/volkswagens-wartime-travesty-18-11-1998}; Röpke and Steinhoff, “Todeslager für Babys”; Gabler, “Volkswagen’s Nazi-Era Blood Crimes.”} It was resolved as part of a larger agreement that was paid for by the German government without Volkswagen’s involvement. This ensured that the stories of the parents and their children, as well as VW’s crimes, remained buried.\footnote{Gabler, “Volkswagen’s Nazi-Era Blood Crimes.”}

An examination of the Volkswagen Children’s Home reveals that the reasons for the gradually deteriorating conditions are connected to the questions of local-level versus upper-level management, and intent versus indifference. First, the evidence shows that local staff and officials employed by the factory in Wolfsburg were in control of VW’s children’s home. Despite initial influence from central Nazi authorities, the VW factory was responsible for the establishment, management, and operation of all three facilities. Within VW, departmental shifts, changes in individuals’ responsibilities, and widespread indifference caused VW officials to become gradually less involved in the management of the home. Eventually, the administration and children’s care were left solely to the medical staff, with minimal supervision, support, or intervention from VW executives.

Second, the evidence concerning the question of the children’s deaths revealed that the deaths were the result of indifference that worsened with time. While initial efforts were made to provide for the children and ensure their survival, eventually, VW officials and staff showed such indifference toward the children’s lives that they consciously allowed them to die. In the next chapter, the same two issues—local-level versus upper-level management, and intent versus indifference—will provide the
framework for an analysis of the Velpke Children’s Home, located only fifteen kilometers from Rühen.

In the end, the intricacy of the VW factory’s bureaucracy, the indifference of its staff, and VW’s prioritization of foreign labor simultaneously contributed to the neglect and abandonment of the infants at the Volkswagen Children’s Home. As a munitions manufacturer for the Nazi state, VW remained focused on production, and the Polish and Soviet children forcibly taken from their mothers and sent to its children’s home paid the price. The parents of these children were slaves to the Nazis’ forced labor program, valued only for their ability to work, while their children became its victims.

Years after his experience as a forced laborer at the Volkswagen factory, Julian Banas reflected on the parents’ pain, and the tragedy of the Rühen Children’s Home:

Not far from Wolfsburg there was a children’s home for infants in which the mothers had to leave their children and be sent back to work…unfortunately the children survived for only a few months there, no child longer than six months; after that they died ‘for various reasons’. I knew some people who were a few years older than I was; they loved each other and wanted to marry after the war. They also had a child whom they visited every Sunday, but only for five months – there was great despair.\(^{378}\)

\(^{378}\) Banas et al., *Abfahrt ins Ungewisse*, 46.
Chapter Four: The Velpke Children’s Home

Just outside the village of Velpke, twenty kilometers north of Helmstedt, three rusted, corrugated iron barracks stood alone in a field next to an abandoned quarry. On May 1, 1944, a children’s home was opened in the barrack furthest from the road. A sign on its entrance read: “Entrance to this Children’s Home of Foreign Children is Forbidden.” The barrack had no running water, heat, or electricity. Temperatures reached bitter lows during the winter and unbearable highs during the summer. Water was carried by pail from two kilometers away, and the children were fed by light from the flame of the stoves. As many as twenty-five infants, most under two weeks old, laid in wooden boxes covered with tattered blankets, either crying or staring blankly at their bottles. The infants’ sunken faces, wide eyes, and swollen bellies looked disproportionately large compared to their thin arms and legs. They wore ragged diapers soiled with diarrhea, and the stench of urine and feces permeated the air.

Throughout the summer, infants were taken to the home and within weeks, they exhibited the same symptoms: vomiting, diarrhea, and eventually, death. The death rate reached its peak in June and July.\(^{379}\) On one day in June, five children died. In the period from June 4 to June 10, fourteen children died.\(^{380}\) In the smaller barrack next to the children’s home, the emaciated, discolored bodies of dead infants laid wrapped in sheets, awaiting burial. After several days, they were transported by cart and buried in small cardboard or wooden boxes in unmarked graves behind a local cemetery. By mid-

\(^{379}\) Mortality figures: May-7; June-22; July-17; August-11; September-4; October-11; November-10; December-1. Brand, *Trial of Heinrich Gerike*, 265.
\(^{380}\) Ibid., 322.
December 1944, ninety-one of the Polish and Soviet children admitted to the Velpke Children’s Home were dead. All suffered a fate like the one described above.

The story of the Velpke Children’s Home is simpler and shorter than that of the Volkswagen Children’s Home, yet it is an equally tragic one. The facility existed for only eight months during the last full year of the war, coinciding with the time that the VW home was in Rühen. The Velpke home did not have the resources and staff of a powerful German armaments factory at its disposal and, unlike VW’s East Camp facility, it was never known as a model facility that set an example for others of its kind. Rather, it was opened hastily and carelessly at a time when the political and economic situation in the Reich was on the verge of collapse. Moreover, it does not provide another example of a children’s home where the conditions deteriorated gradually, but an example of one where there was immediate and constant suffering and death.

This chapter will be framed by the same two questions posed in the last chapter—the question of whether local-level or upper-level authorities were responsible for the facility’s management, and the question of whether the children’s deaths were the result of intent or indifference. The findings from the preceding analysis of these two issues for

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381 Rudolf Meyer, the Velpke registrar, testified that 84 deaths were registered at the children’s home and 90 children were buried in the cemetery. Ibid., 18; A Child Search Team (for more information on the Child Search Team, see footnote #372) visited the Velpke cemetery after the war and discovered 91 children’s graves. 86 of the bodies were identified by name and five remain unknown. Orphanage Velpke, May 1, 1947, 3.3.1.1/82264478/ITS Digital Archive, accessed at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on August 16, 2017; It is not certain how many children passed through the home. Prosecutor Draper stated that 96 infants died and there were 14 survivors when the home was closed (Brand, Trial of Heinrich Gerike, 6), but since only 91 graves were discovered, it is possible that those five children also survived, bringing the total number of survivors to 19. This number, however, does not include the children who were stolen from the home by their mothers. It can be assumed that anywhere from 110-120 children were admitted to the home.

382 The above summary is based on a synthesis of witness testimonies from Brand, Trial of Heinrich Gerike. This chapter is based largely on the testimonies included in Brand’s edited volume.
the VW Children’s Home will facilitate the study of the Velpke Children’s Home by drawing attention to the similarities and differences between the management and the intent behind the deaths at both facilities. Following this chapter, the conclusions reached in the analyses of the Volkswagen and Velpke children’s homes will provide answers about the extent to which economics and racial ideology motivated the facilities’ establishment and operation.

As introduced above, the subsequent examination of the Velpke Children’s Home will not have the complex layers and intricacies that the analysis of the Volkswagen Children’s Home was comprised of. Due to the limited source base on Velpke, this chapter will not make extensive use of secondary literature. The only voices that have revealed what happened at the home in Velpke are the voices of the witnesses and defendants from the Velpke trial. Consequently, this chapter will be based almost exclusively on the trial records. It will tell the story of the Velpke Children’s Home by highlighting the roles and responsibilities of the Party officials, Volksdeutsche, German physicians, and Velpke mayor who were accused of these crimes, revealing their involvement in the deaths of ninety-one children.

**Local-level versus Upper-level Management**

Like the Volkswagen Children’s Home, the Velpke Children’s Home was controlled and operated by local officials and staff. While an upper-level Party official ordered the establishment of the home, this decision was made after local Party officials

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383 A person of German ethnic origin without German citizenship or not living in Germany. They were considered Germans of foreign nationality. Michael and Doerr, *Nazi-Deutsch*, 422.
drew attention to the problem of foreign childbirth in Kreis Helmstedt. Moreover, after
the initial involvement of an upper-level official, Kreis officials from Helmstedt
established the home and remained in complete control throughout its existence. The
management and day-to-day operation fell to local Party officials, the supervisor of the
home, and two attending physicians.

The Velpke Children’s Home was a local Party initiative from its inception, and
grew out of an idea originating with Otto Buchheister, the Kreisbauernführer (District
Agricultural Leader) of the Helmstedt Kreisbauernschaft (District Agricultural
Organization). As outlined in Ernst Kaltenbrunner’s July 1943 decree, Agricultural
Organizations were responsible for establishing foreign child-care facilities in
agricultural areas across the Reich, and this was no different in Kreis Helmstedt. In
early 1944, Buchheister asked Kreisleiter Heinrich Gerike to find a solution for the high
number of births among female Polish and Soviet civilian laborers in the Kreis. These
births became more problematic when, beginning in January 1944, the Braunschweig
Entbindungsheim, Broitzemer Straße 200 stopped admitting children whose mothers did
not work in Kreis Braunschweig. As a result, the 200 “illegitimate” children who had
been born to Polish and Soviet agricultural workers in Kreis Helmstedt were being cared

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384 Regional agricultural organization as part of the state agricultural union, called the Reichsnährstand, or Reich Agricultural Organization. Ibid., 256.
385 Kaltenbrunner’s decree stated that the Reichsnährstand was responsible, of which the Kreise Agricultural Organizations fell under. See Memorandum Signed by Ernst Kaltenbrunner on Treatment of Pregnant Foreign Women Workers and Children Born to Foreign Workers in the Reich, Berlin, July 27, 1943, File No. 1383, Box 29; National Archives Collection of World War II War Crimes Records; Nürnberg Organizations (NO) Series; RG 238; NACP.
386 Brand, Trial of Heinrich Gerike, 127.
387 Vögel, Entbindungsheim, 62.
for by their mothers on farms. This threatened the foreign laborers’ work output and overburdened German farmers’ wives.388

Thus, when Buchheister approached Kreisleiter Gerike about the problem of foreign births, their initial conversations centered around the desire to maintain productivity and ensure that the Kreis’ population was fed. After several unsuccessful attempts to find a solution, Gerike went to his superior, the Gauleiter of Südhannover-Braunschweig, Hartmann Lauterbacher, who ordered the following:389

You will set up a camp or a home or something in which you will place the children that are born of these Polish women working on the farms; the question of the consent of the parents to the separation from their children and the children being delivered to that home will not be in point, but I leave it to you, Gerike, to work out the details and the method to how it is done. Go, make a home, a camp or something, but see to it that the children are away from the mothers and that the work goes on unhindered.390

Protecting Germany’s war economy was a significant motivator for Buchheister, the Kreisleiter, and the Gauleiter, whose priority was preventing a labor and food shortage in Kreis Helmstedt. Buchheister and other farmers in the Helmstedt Agricultural Organization alerted Gerike about the emerging economic issues in the Kreis, and as a result, Gauleiter Lauterbacher ordered Gerike to open a home so that foreign women could be returned to farms shortly after giving birth, without the added responsibility of caring for a child. It was decided upon as an immediate solution to the urgent problems

389 Brand, Trial of Heinrich Gerike, 126-128.
390 Ibid., 319.
threatening food production in the *Kreis*, as not to negatively impact Germany’s war effort.

After *Gauleiter* Lauterbacher told *Kreisleiter* Gerike to set up a home, the trial records did not include any additional directives from upper-level Party officials. Gerike received this initial vague order from the *Gauleiter*, but ultimately, was given a “free hand” to make his own decisions about the home’s establishment. 391 In his trial testimony, Gerike emphasized his own decision-making rather than Lauterbacher’s: “I did not get any order or instructions from anybody […] I myself was responsible for dealing with the problem of the children of foreign workers, and I took various steps.” 392 Without further orders from the *Gauleiter, Kreisleiter* Gerike had complete authority over the home’s establishment, management, and operation. Under his control, the children’s home, appropriately referred to as a “Nazi Home” by the prosecution, became a local Party institution of *Kreis* Helmstedt. 393

Upon receiving Lauterbacher’s order, Gerike and Buchheister made the first decisions about the home’s establishment. Buchheister informed Gerike that the most pregnancies occurred in the Velpke area; therefore, Velpke was chosen as the location for the children’s home. 394 They both agreed that the introduction of children into the home would be managed by the Helmstedt Agricultural Organization, as it had information on where foreign workers were located, and who among them were pregnant. 395 For the

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391 Ibid., 94.
392 Ibid., 62-63.
393 Ibid., 322. Müller also referred to it as a “Kreis installation.” Ibid., 224.
394 Ibid., 128.
395 Ibid., 130.
duration of the home’s existence, Buchheister issued orders for the children to go to the home, while the farmers for whom the girls labored enforced the orders. Nonetheless, although Buchheister prompted the establishment of the home, and members reported pregnancies among their workers and facilitated efforts to take infants to the home, the Helmstedt Agricultural Organization was not held accountable during the trial. There were no members of the Organization on trial, nor was its leader, Buchheister.

After Gerike and Buchheister confirmed that the home would be opened in Velpke, Gerike procured support from other local officials and staff. First, he informed Velpke and Kreis officials that a home would be opened to accommodate the children of Polish and Soviet civilian workers. He explained that after the child was born, and “in a state to live,” it would be sent from the Braunschweig Entbindungsheim to Velpke, and the mother would be returned to the farm where she worked. He announced that this would not be voluntary; mothers would be forced to give up their children. This meeting ensured that local officials were aware of Gerike’s plans, and would assist him in carrying out any tasks relating to the home. Gerike then chose a location for the home and hired a supervisor and an administrator, Valentina Bilien, a Volksdeutsche from the Soviet Union, and Georg Heßling, the district administrator of the DAF in Helmstedt,

396 Ibid., 100.
397 Ibid., 63.
398 Most of the children admitted to Velpke were born on the farms where the mothers worked, but some were born in the Braunschweig Entbindungsheim, Broitzemer Straße 200. Vögel, Entbindungsheim, 65.
399 Brand, Trial of Heinrich Gerike, 64.
respectively.\textsuperscript{400} Neither had experience caring for children or managing a children’s home.\textsuperscript{401} Nonetheless, the home was opened on May 1, 1944.\textsuperscript{402}

Next, Gerike issued orders to Bilien and Heßling regarding the home’s operation. As the superior official in charge, Gerike had the authority to give orders that either decreased or increased the infants’ chance of survival. Instead, he issued and enforced orders that endangered the children’s lives, revealing his high level of authority over the facility, and his disregard for the children’s well-being. He ordered that mothers could only visit every six weeks\textsuperscript{403} (soon changed to every two weeks because of the mothers’ frequent attempts to see their children), and infants were not to be taken to the hospital or returned to their mothers.\textsuperscript{404}

Moreover, in August 1944, Gerike issued an order that infants were not to be taken to the home until they were four to six weeks old. He later testified that he had the authority to change the age of the children admitted, without consulting the Gauleiter. Yet, he failed to do this until fifty children had already died.\textsuperscript{405} Although his order to increase the age that infants were admitted could have improved their chances of survival, in practice almost nothing changed, as the order was not enforced, and newborns were still taken to the home. The orders that Gerike issued throughout the

\textsuperscript{400} Ibid., 128, 129.
\textsuperscript{401} Ibid., 203, 243.
\textsuperscript{402} Ibid., 231.
\textsuperscript{403} During Bilien’s first interrogation she stated that, at first, mothers could visit every six months. However, during her trial testimony, after being asked if she confused the word “month” with another German word, she admitted that she might not have understood it correctly, and that officials actually said six weeks. Ibid., 86, 256.
\textsuperscript{404} Ibid., 250, 90.
\textsuperscript{405} Ibid., 94.
home’s operation reveal how rather than making decisions that ensured the children’s survival, he facilitated their deaths.

Because of Gerike’s superior position and the worsening economic situation in the Kreis, German farmers and other local Party officials followed and enforced his orders regarding the home’s operation. When the Ortsgruppenleiter\textsuperscript{406} of Papenrode, Gustav Claus, asked if a baby could remain with its parents, Gerike denied his request, stating that all babies had to be removed from the farms and taken to Velpke.\textsuperscript{407} Claus later testified that he agreed with separating children from their mothers because, “food production had to be safeguarded under all circumstances.”\textsuperscript{408} Furthermore, Heßling expressed a similar mentality about the treatment of Polish parents and their infants when he testified that the children were taken because, “the working power of Poles had to be maintained on the farms.”\textsuperscript{409} These examples reveal local Party officials’ concerns about the economic issues in the Kreis, and also Gerike’s control over the facility and his subordinates. They did not question Gerike’s orders because of his superior position, as well as their similar prioritization of foreign labor over the lives of foreign children.

From the establishment of the Velpke Children’s Home and throughout its existence, Kreisleiter Gerike maintained full authority over the facility and its staff. Gauleiter Lauterbaucher ordered Gerike to establish the home; however, Lauterbacher did not supervise the local personnel, direct the day-to-day management of the home, or

\textsuperscript{406} District Party Group Leader. Nazi Party official subordinate to a Kreisleiter, itself subordinate to a Gauleiter. Michael and Doerr, Nazi-Deutsch, 305.
\textsuperscript{407} Brand, Trial of Heinrich Gerike, 74.
\textsuperscript{409} Brand, Trial of Heinrich Gerike, 208.
demand a certain quality of care for the children. Although the Gauleiter assured Gerike that he was working with authorities in Berlin to find a uniform regulation for the financing of children’s homes throughout the Reich, Gerike testified that in October 1944, authorities in Berlin confirmed that they would not provide financial support for the home in Velpke.\(^{410}\) The affair remained the sole responsibility of Gerike and other Kreis and Velpke officials and staff until its closure in mid-December 1944.\(^{411}\) After ninety-one deaths, the only reason Gerike closed the facility was because the Volkswagen factory needed the barracks.\(^{412}\) The expansion of a factory essential to the war effort, and not the children’s deaths, finally convinced Gerike to use his authority to shut down the children’s home.

Although Gerike held the superior position of authority on matters relating to the home’s operation, he was assisted by several other local Party officials. A second Kreis official, DAF official Georg Heßling, took on an important role when he was appointed by Gerike as administrator of the home. Gerike ordered Heßling to act as his deputy in Velpke, and to settle all further questions about the home with the supervisor, Valentina Bilien.\(^{413}\) Bilien testified that she received all her orders from Heßling, who passed them down from Gerike.\(^{414}\) Heßling enforced Gerike’s orders by monitoring the ledger to make sure all children who had been registered remained in the home, and reprimanding Bilien if she sent children back to their mothers.\(^{415}\) As intermediary between Gerike and Bilien,

\(^{410}\) Ibid., 130.  
\(^{411}\) Ibid., 130.  
\(^{412}\) Ibid., 132.  
\(^{413}\) Ibid., 129.  
\(^{414}\) Ibid., 87.  
\(^{415}\) Ibid., 272.
Heßling had a level of supervisory authority that was comparable, but not equal to, Gerike’s authority. Moreover, Gerike never returned to the home after he selected the barracks; thus, Heßling had more knowledge of the conditions, as he visited every four weeks to pay bills and staff wages.\footnote{Ibid., 99.}

As part of his financial duties, Heßling collected revenue for the home, which was charged by the farmers to the Polish and Soviet parents of the children. For example, after Polish laborer Johann Biczak was ordered to take his child to the home on July 4, 1944, Biczak reported to his employer, Hugo Voges, that he did not expect the child to live long there.\footnote{Ibid., 49.} On August 1, Voges received a letter from Heßling ordering him to subtract one Reichsmark per day from Biczak’s pay for the upkeep of the child. The letter also stated that because the child had been “not fit to live,” it had died on July 20.\footnote{Ibid., 48.} In his trial testimony, Heßling attempted to diminish his authority by claiming that he only managed the administrative and financial aspects of the home, and therefore, had no responsibility for the children’s deaths.\footnote{Ibid., 101.} The evidence showed, however, that he was regularly updated about the high death rate, and was actively involved in the management and operation of the home.\footnote{Ibid., 248.} As a \textit{Kreis} official appointed by Gerike as administrator, he failed to use his authority to intervene.

Two Party officials in Velpke, Richter\footnote{The trial records do not include the first name of Richter.} and Hermann Müller, held substantial authority over the home, especially in the absence of officials who were based in
Helmstedt. Since Velpke officials lived and worked near the home, they had more knowledge of the day-to-day operation than Gerike and Heßling. They had the opportunity to visit, speak with staff, and provide supplies, but both took limited action. Richter, mayor Werner Noth’s secretary and a representative of the DAF in Velpke, was the only official in Velpke explicitly assigned by Gerike responsibility for the home. Trial evidence indicated that Gerike ordered Richter to oversee the home locally, and to work with Heßling and Bilien on matters relating to its administration. Less information emerged during the trial about Richter’s role, as he hanged himself before American troops liberated Velpke.

A second Party official in Velpke, Ortsgruppenleiter Hermann Müller, held a prominent position of authority in the Party and Velpke community, but testified that he had wanted nothing to do with the home and declined all personal responsibility. Müller may have been too overworked with his duties as Ortsgruppenleiter and chief stationmaster, or he may have known that the children were not meant to live, and wanted to avoid being held accountable for their deaths. Regardless of his reason, Müller avoided the home, opting out of his responsibilities as Ortsgruppenleiter with matters relating to its management. Müller made one call to Gerike and asked if he knew about the death rate. He did not follow up with Gerike, or make another complaint about the conditions. Three of Müller’s character witnesses testified about how decently he

422 Ibid., 277.
423 Ibid., 12.
424 Ibid., 220.
425 Ibid., 223, 225.
426 Ibid., 224.
treated Polish workers.\textsuperscript{427} Yet, his neglect of the Polish children at the home shows a
different side to his character—one that caused him to look away while children were
suffering. Müller had seen the home and disapproved of it, but decided that he did not
want responsibility. Given their authority in the Party, out of everyone in Velpke, Richter
and Müller were likely in a position to take on more responsibility for the home and
protect the children, but did not.

Party officials in Helmstedt and Velpke had authority over the establishment and
management of the children’s home, but responsibility for the children’s care fell under
the local control of two German physicians and the \textit{Volksdeutsche} supervisor. Drs. Kurt
Schliemann and Richard Demmerich were practicing physicians in Velpke at various
times throughout 1944; therefore, from May to September and September to December
1944, respectively, the children’s home came under their jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{428} Moreover, the
supervisor of the home, Valentina Bilien, purchased the children’s food and medicine,
registered arrivals, and supervised the foreign assistants employed in the home.\textsuperscript{429} All
three were responsible for the everyday care essential to the children’s survival, including
feeding, bathing, and administering examinations and treatment. Unlike the Party
officials, the local personnel worked in the home itself, and had the greatest ability to
improve conditions.

\textsuperscript{427} Testimonies of Anton Koschinski, Roman Koschinski, and Kurt Burchard. Ibid., 228-229.
\textsuperscript{428} Ibid., 74-75. Demmerich was Velpke’s permanent doctor, but Schliemann served Velpke residents as a
visiting doctor while Demmerich was in the army. Schliemann had medical responsibility for the home
from May to September 1944, and Demmerich from September to December 1944.
\textsuperscript{429} At first, an older Soviet woman and her fourteen-year-old daughter worked in the home. Later there
were three or four young Ukrainian assistants. Only one had previous experience working in a children’s
home in the Soviet Union. Ibid., 236.
Although they were responsible for the children’s care, Schliemann, Demmerich, and Bilien did not have the same level of authority as officials in the Party. They made minor complaints, but for the most part, were unable to change what been decided upon by Kreis officials, such as the site of the home, the age of the infants, the number of staff, or the amount of supplies. For example, both doctors complained that the children were admitted to the home too young. In August, Schliemann’s warning not to take children who were younger than six weeks old led Gerike to raise the age of the children admitted. Yet, in September, Demmerich continued telling Bilien to ask the authorities not to send children to the home so young. Their suggestions as medical professionals failed to convince authorities to strictly enforce the age at which children were admitted, leaving the doctors responsible for children who were far too young to be separated from their mothers. Despite having no control over decisions made by Kreis officials, both physicians’ professional obligations led to their involvement.

As a Volksdeutsche from the Soviet Union, Bilien had even less control over her position and the circumstances at the home than Schliemann and Demmerich. Bilien was assigned the position of supervisor by the Labor Office against her will, despite her protests that she was not a children’s nurse. Multiple witnesses testified that Bilien

430 Testimonies of Demmerich (Ibid., 75) and Bilien, who speaks about Schliemann (Ibid., 234-235).
431 Ibid., 89.
432 Ibid., 75.
433 Both doctors were members of the NSDAP. Schliemann was former chief surgeon in Wolfsburg. Demmerich was a member of Stahlhelm, or the League of Front Soldiers.
434 Ibid., 85, 230.
cried often, and was desperate to leave the home. Bilien’s options were to accept her position, or to protest and likely face punishment.

In summary, although the local personnel did not have the same level of control as Party officials over the home or their positions, they were directly responsible for the children’s care. Kreis officials determined the circumstances at the home, but those who worked in the facility itself took on parental roles for the children who had been forcibly taken from their own parents. The infants’ survival was placed in their hands; therefore, some responsibility for the infants’ deaths falls under their authority as physicians and supervisor.

While the facility was controlled by local officials and personnel, not all local officials held the same level of authority. Authorities from the civil administration disapproved of the home, but had minimal influence over Party institutions. The efforts of Velpke mayor Werner Noth, Helmstedt Landrat von Hinüber, and the Helmstedt Public Health Officer Dr. Dibbelt, reveal the differences in the level of authority between the civil and Party administrations. As an official from the civil administration, mayor Noth did not have any formal responsibility for the home; however, he advised against its establishment and wanted to see it moved to another locality, as not to become a “black spot” for Velpke. Noth asked his superior, von Hinüber, to inform officials at the Health Office about the conditions at the home so that it would be closed, but von

\[435\] Testimonies of Maria Bakemeier (Ibid., 271), Martha Justus (Ibid., 186), Elsa Willgerodt (Ibid., 262), Gertrud Demmerich (Ibid., 181), and Richard Demmerich (Ibid., 163).

\[436\] Ibid., 261.

\[437\] Ibid., 277.
Hinüber repeatedly said that he could not do anything. In July, von Hinüber arranged for Dr. Dibbelt to inspect the home.\textsuperscript{438} After Dibbelt’s visit, an unknown official, likely from the Party, prohibited him from returning.\textsuperscript{439} All three officials from the civil administration, Noth, von Hinüber, and Dibbelt, lacked the authority to intervene in Party affairs.

By contrast, Dr. Morr,\textsuperscript{440} the \textit{Kreis} doctor, also visited the home in July. Unlike officials from the civil administration, as a Party official, Morr had the authority to close the home. According to Gerike, however, Morr claimed after his visit that “everything [was] all right in the home.”\textsuperscript{441} Thus, while Noth was indicted for his failure to intervene and save the children’s lives, the trial records revealed that local officials without positions in the Party did not have the same level of authority over the home. The Party was in control, and Party officials ensured that the home remained in operation.

Even though the evidence showed that local-level authorities and personnel determined the home’s establishment, management, and operation, as a \textit{Kreis} institution of the NSDAP, decisions made by upper-level Nazi authorities in Berlin and \textit{Gau} Südhannover-Braunschweig affected those made at a local level.\textsuperscript{442} For instance, existing central decrees on the treatment of pregnant foreign workers and foreign children born in the Reich had already led to the creation of foreign child-care facilities at the Reich and

\textsuperscript{438} Ibid., 277-278.
\textsuperscript{439} Ibid., 81.
\textsuperscript{440} The trial records do not include the first names of \textit{Landrat} von Hinüber, Dibbelt, or Morr.
\textsuperscript{441} Ibid., 153.
\textsuperscript{442} Ibid., 322.
By 1944 foreign child-care facilities were already quite numerous in urban and industrial areas, and this undoubtedly influenced the Gauleiter to order Gerike to open a children’s home in Kreis Helmstedt. Furthermore, it is likely that the Kreis and DAF leadership in Helmstedt had already been informed about the principles for the management of foreign child-care facilities, although Gerike emphasized that he himself was responsible. While there was clearly an existing precedent for establishing these facilities across the Reich, and the Gauleiter’s order to Gerike initiated the establishment of the facility in Velpke, the trial’s focus on the roles of local officials and staff leaves unanswered questions about the extent of upper-level involvement.

Nonetheless, an analysis of the individuals responsible proves that the Velpke Children’s Home was a locally-controlled facility. Complaints from the Helmstedt Agricultural Organization prompted its establishment. Kreisleiter Gerike selected the location for the facility, issued orders, and supervised the staff, and Heßling handled the administration and finances. Party officials in Velpke helped manage it locally and enforced Gerike’s orders, and Schliemann, Demmerich, and Bilien were responsible for the children’s care. The second part of this chapter considers the reasons for the children’s deaths. Two principal questions remain: How did ninety-one children die in the span of eight months? Were the children neglected or intentionally killed?

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443 For examples, see Memorandum Signed by Ernst Kaltenbrunner on Treatment of Pregnant Foreign Women Workers and Children Born to Foreign Workers in the Reich, Berlin, July 27, 1943, File No. 1383, Box 29; National Archives Collection of World War II War Crimes Records; Nürnberg Organizations (NO) Series; RG 238; NACP; Exhibit 1 (WO 235/271), Rühen Baby Farm Case, WO 235/263-272, RG-59.016M, Judge Advocate General's Office: War Crimes Case Files, Second World War (WO 235), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.
444 Herbert, Hitler’s Foreign Workers, 271.
445 Vögel, Entbindungsheim, 64.
Intent versus Indifference

While there are distinctions between intent and indifference, it is difficult at times to differentiate between the two, as both behaviors were exhibited by the individuals responsible for the Velpke Children’s Home. Although individuals’ involvement cannot be categorized strictly as intent or indifference, the trial records revealed that Kreis officials showed intent to cause the children harm, and the physicians and supervisor who cared for the children remained indifferent toward their fate. This section will not focus on the roles of the accused Velpke officials, Ortsgruppenleiter Müller and mayor Noth, because the preceding analysis demonstrated their indifference by showing how both chose not to take responsibility for the home or improve conditions for the children.

For this analysis, the question of intent focuses on the actions of the Kreis officials responsible for the home. It asks if those with the highest level of local authority intended for the children to die, and deliberately acted in ways to ensure that result. Evidence of intent is apparent from Gerike’s decisions regarding the establishment of the home, as well as witness statements that suggest Kreis officials did not intend for the children to live. Furthermore, authorities’ efforts to camouflage the reasons for the deaths and prevent outside interference with the home provide evidence that Kreis officials attempted to conceal their intent to cause the children’s deaths. While there is not enough direct evidence to confirm the motives of any of the defendants, the following analysis will show how Kreis officials did not remain simply indifferent toward the children’s fate; Kreis officials knew that the children would not survive, and their actions ensured that they did not survive.
Gerike’s initial decisions regarding the home’s establishment reveal his intent to cause the children’s deaths. Before the home was opened, Gerike expected that children would die. During a meeting with local officials, he announced that, because the children would not be allowed to stay with their mothers, the mortality was likely to be higher than in ordinary circumstances.\(^{446}\) Moreover, although he testified that he had the authority to determine the age that children were admitted, he ordered children to be taken to the home as soon as the mothers left the Braunschweig Entbindungsheim, which in normal cases, was eight days.\(^ {447}\) This gravely endangered newborns like Monika Blaszczyk, who was released from the hospital after eight days and transferred to Velpke, where she died a month later.\(^ {448}\) In the period from January 1 to September 30, 1944, forty-seven Polish and Soviet children from Kreis Helmstedt were born in the Braunschweig Entbindungsheim, thirty-five of whom died in Velpke.\(^ {449}\) Knowing that many would die in this way suggests that Gerike did not intend for the children to live.

Furthermore, Gerike chose as the site for the home a corrugated iron hut without running water, heat, or electricity, even after Ortsgruppenleiter Müller and mayor Noth warned him that it was not suitable.\(^ {450}\) No doctor or trained medical personnel were assigned to the home in case of sickness,\(^ {451}\) nor did Gerike provide any medicine or

\(^{446}\) Brand, *Trial of Heinrich Gerike*, 64.
\(^{447}\) Ibid., 94.
\(^{450}\) Testimonies of Müller (Brand, *Trial of Heinrich Gerike*, 220) and Noth (Ibid., 275).
\(^{451}\) Ibid., 248-249.
medical equipment.\textsuperscript{452} Gerike’s orders not to return children to their mothers or take sick children to a doctor provide clear evidence of his intent, as he forbade staff from taking two measures that could have saved the children’s lives.\textsuperscript{453} After being separated from their mothers and admitted to a facility without trained medical staff, the infants had a small chance of survival, and Gerike knew this. His early decisions regarding the home’s establishment made the deaths of many a certainty.

Gerike’s actions suggest that there was an understanding among local authorities that the children were not meant to survive. This may have come in the form of an explicit or implied order from \textit{Kreis} officials, or even from upper-level officials at the \textit{Gau} or Reich level, but no evidence exists for the latter. Whether letting the children die was ordered or alluded to by upper-level Party officials cannot be confirmed; however, as \textit{Kreis} officials had complete authority over the home, a solution was likely decided upon at a local level. Statements made by \textit{Ortsgruppenleiter} Müller support the theory that \textit{Kreis} officials made decisions about the children’s fate, yet it is not known if their decisions were based on superior orders. Velpke milkman Wilhelm Munnig testified that Müller mentioned to him that he did not want to have anything to do with the home because “everything was meant to go wrong,” and that the “matter came from above, from Helmstedt.” According to Munnig, Müller was implying that authorities in Helmstedt had decided the children were not meant to live.\textsuperscript{454} Munnig’s testimony provides an interpretation of Müller’s comments, but it raises questions about Müller’s

\textsuperscript{452} Ibid., 249-250.  
\textsuperscript{453} Ibid., 90, 250.  
\textsuperscript{454} Ibid., 43-44.
awareness of decisions concerning the children’s fate. It is possible that Müller knew that Gerike intended for the children to die, either as Gerike’s own policy or one based on instructions from upper-level Party officials. This provides one explanation for why Müller avoided taking on responsibility for the home, even though it fell under his authority as Ortsgruppenleiter.

Moreover, if the children’s home was established with the goal of deliberately causing the children’s deaths, a motive becomes evident when considering remarks allegedly made by Kreis officials. These comments indicate that they viewed Polish and Soviet children as a threat, either to the German “master race” or to German dominance and expansionism in Eastern Europe. Because of this perceived “threat,” it is possible that Kreis officials established the home with the intent of letting the children die there. Mayor Noth, for example, overheard a Kreis official remark that the children did not need to be fully raised because the Germans would be fighting them again in twenty years.455 This suggests that the official saw these infants as future enemies of the Reich who would seek revenge if they were to reach adulthood. Gerike made a similar statement when he announced to Velpke residents during a public assembly that “in twenty years’ time they will be our enemies again.”456 Moreover, after Dr. Demmerich asked supervisor Valentina Bilien to complain to the authorities about the deaths at the home, Bilien returned from the Party office in Helmstedt and informed Demmerich that she was told there was “no need to get excited about it because they were only enemies.”457

455 Ibid., 276.
456 Ibid., 70.
457 Ibid., 78.
examples introduce a possible motive for putting the children in a primitive, inadequate barrack without proper medical care or trained staff: the elimination of an alleged future threat to the Reich.

Overall, Gerike’s decisions and orders regarding the home’s establishment and the children’s care, as well as the remarks allegedly made by Kreis officials, provide strong evidence of intent from Kreis officials. These examples indicate that the highest level local Party authorities intended for the children to die. Yet, while the comments purportedly made by Kreis officials provide circumstantial evidence of their intent to cause the children’s deaths, these statements, as well as the motive behind them, are impossible to confirm. Nonetheless, they reveal Kreis officials’ racial biases against Polish and Soviet children, indicating that their neglect of the children stemmed from their ideological beliefs. As Bernhild Vögel writes, whether Gerike or other Nazis actually publicly stated that it did not matter if the children died because they would be their enemies again in twenty years is disputable—that this was their ideology is beyond doubt.458

The lack of extensive direct evidence confirming Kreis officials’ intent is due, first, to the destruction of documents before Allied troops liberated Helmstedt and Velpke, second, to the absence of records confirming the defendants’ motives, and third, because those responsible for the home camouflaged the reasons for the deaths. Kreis officials developed a psychological façade to conceal the neglect of the infants, convincing themselves and others that the appalling conditions and shocking mortality

458 Vögel, Entbindungsheim, 68.
rates were, as Gerike testified, due to the “conditions of war.”\(^{459}\) In addition to Gerike’s announcement to Kreis and Velpke officials that he expected the mortality rate to be high, a June 7, 1944 letter to the Helmstedt police from the Kreisleiter’s office provides further evidence of authorities’ anticipation of the infants’ deaths. It stated that the children “are brought in with all sorts of illnesses and have little ability to live.”\(^{460}\) The fabricated existing illnesses and alleged weakness of infants born to foreign laborers were used as a cover for the deaths. To deter questions about why children were dying in the home, authorities emphasized that before infants entered they were “not fit to live,”\(^{461}\) deflecting suspicion from those in charge of the home and placing the blame on the mothers and children.

Not only did Kreis officials camouflage the reasons for the deaths; but also camouflaged the home itself. Party officials used threats, warnings, and arrests to maintain the secrecy of the home, uphold the façade that it was a typical child-care facility, and prevent the public from learning the truth about its conditions. Authorities attempted to keep outsiders from the facility in several ways: forbidding residents from helping at the home,\(^{462}\) placing a sign on the door that prohibited entrance,\(^{463}\) covering windows with blankets,\(^{464}\) and having a farmer stand guard outside.\(^{465}\) Furthermore,

\(^{459}\) Brand, Trial of Heinrich Gerike, 158.
\(^{460}\) Ibid., 64; Exhibit D (WO 235/159), Velpke Baby Home Case, WO 235/156-161, Reel 14, RG-59.016M, Judge Advocate General’s Office: War Crimes Case Files, Second World War (WO 235), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.
\(^{461}\) Brand, Trial of Heinrich Gerike, 48.
\(^{462}\) Ibid., 21.
\(^{463}\) Ibid., 12.
\(^{464}\) Ibid., 11.
\(^{465}\) Ibid., 34.
multiple Velpke residents became a target of the authorities’ intimidation tactics after learning too much about the home.

First, Stanisława Slomian and Valeria Nowak lived across from the barrack and visited when it first opened. 466 After a few weeks, all the women in their building received a letter from the village council forbidding them from entering the children’s home. The letter frightened them, and none returned. 467 Shortly thereafter, Nowak was told to report to the Helmstedt Gestapo, where officials accused her of trying to get the people of Velpke “excited” about the home, and threatened to send her to a concentration camp. Before Nowak was released, the Gestapo instructed her to “go home and tell the other women not to look after Polish children,” otherwise “they will all be arrested.” 468

Second, Emma Hoppe and Martha Golatta met two Polish girls who begged them to take their children, as they heard that children were dying in the home. 469 The women agreed, and Golatta took one child, a three-year-old girl, and Hoppe took the other, an eight-month-old named Bruno. 470 Three days later, Müller and Noth arrived at Hoppe and Golatta’s building. Müller asked, “You know that you have enemies here—Poles are our enemies—don’t you,” 471 and warned the women that they would be punished if the children were not brought to the home immediately. 472 The women complied, and five

466 Testimonies of Stanisława Slomian (Ibid., 9) and Valeria Nowak (Ibid., 20).
467 Ibid., 21.
468 Ibid., 22-23.
469 Testimonies of Emma Hoppe (Ibid., 32) and Martha Golatta (Ibid., 38).
470 Ibid., 38.
471 Ibid., 33.
472 Ibid., 39.
weeks later, Bruno was dead.\textsuperscript{473} Although Müller and Noth would not take actions to save the children’s lives, they enforced Gerike’s orders to send them to their deaths.

Third, a young Soviet worker approached German resident Anna Siede and asked her how to get to the children’s home. As Siede showed her the way, the girl began to cry and explained that she had to take her child to the home and knew she would not see it again.\textsuperscript{474} Three days after this encounter, Siede was ordered to report to the Braunschweig Gestapo, where she was accused of telling people that children were dying in the home.\textsuperscript{475} Siede was afraid for her own children’s lives, and told the officials that they were mistaken. They threatened to beat her, and remarked that “it was a pity [she] was a German woman as otherwise they knew what they would do with her.”\textsuperscript{476}

Finally, Polish and Soviet mothers also suffered intimidation and arrests at the hands of the authorities. One Polish worker was arrested for taking her child from the home and confined in a \textit{Arbeitserziehungslager}, or Work Education Camp, for thirty-five days. The mother survived her stay, but the fate of the child is unknown.\textsuperscript{477} Moreover, when Polish laborer Stefanie Zelensky refused to leave her baby, Natalia, at the children’s home, a policeman forced Zelensky to leave her, and took the child away from her. Two weeks later, Natalia was dead.\textsuperscript{478} Through threats and arrests, authorities attempted to maintain the secrecy of the home and conceal the mistreatment of the

\textsuperscript{473} Ibid., 34-35.
\textsuperscript{474} Ibid., 31.
\textsuperscript{475} The accused, Fritz Flint, an \textit{S.S. Obersturmführer} (First Lieutenant) for the Braunschweig Gestapo, was head of the department responsible for Siede’s interrogation.
\textsuperscript{476} Brand, \textit{Trial of Heinrich Gerike}, 32.
\textsuperscript{477} It is unlikely that the child survived, but its death was not registered in either Sülpplingen, Braunschweig, or Velpke. Vögel, \textit{Entbindungsheim}, 60-61.
\textsuperscript{478} Brand, \textit{Trial of Heinrich Gerike}, 54-55.
children. They also used force to keep children in the home and take them from mothers against their will. These methods appear to have silenced anyone who tried to talk about what was happening or break the rules. In time, the intimidation tactics used against Velpke residents and Polish and Soviet mothers, as well as the secrecy surrounding the home, created an atmosphere of fear and paranoia for all who attempted to intervene.

Evidence from the trial gives credence to the theory that Kreis officials did not intend for the children to live, and suggests that measures were taken to conceal their intent. Yet, placing the children in a situation where the probable consequence was death differs from an explicit plan to kill them. The latter is less likely, but the trial did not prove or disprove that the children were intentionally killed. Post war knowledge about the Nazis’ crimes against “inferior races” intensified suspicions that the children’s deaths in Velpke were deliberate, and the revelation of the shocking number of deaths led to further speculation that the children were murdered, possibly by lethal injection or poison. For example, a report from a UNRRA Child Welfare Branch searching for Polish and Soviet children in the U.S. zone of occupation in early post-war Germany indicates that lethal injections were the cause of the deaths. An American search team discovered an “orphanage” in Velpke and reported that “Polish children were brought to this home by police and given injections from which they died.” The source of this information is unknown.

479 For more information on the UNRRA, see footnote #372.
Furthermore, significant suspicion centered around the children’s food, leading to theories that they were poisoned. After Edward, the child of Polish laborer Aleksandra Misalszek, died at the home, Misalszek began working there to find out why so many children were dying. Misalszek observed the food the infants received: cow’s milk and water with dissolved citrate tablets. She soon became convinced that the children were being poisoned with the citrate tablets, and later testified that when the children received milk with citrate in it six times a day, by the sixth feeding, they could not drink the milk. After they received citrate tablets, she claimed, they soon became sick and died.

Although several medical professionals testified that citrate tablets were commonly used for infants who had been separated from their mothers, Misalszek’s observations point to the problem of infants dying shortly after being fed.

It remains unclear if the children were murdered, either by lethal injection, poison, or another method. The charge of willful neglect emphasized that the suspects deliberately neglected the children, but eschewed the theory that they were part of a plan to kill them; thus, minimal evidence emerged during the trial. Although there remains skepticism about whether the children were deliberately killed, the trial records revealed that Kreis officials did not intend for the children to live. Kreis officials demonstrated intent to bring about the children’s deaths by deliberately putting them in a situation that was nearly impossible to survive.

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482 Ibid., 116, 119.
483 Testimonies of Anna Rodehuth, assistant chief doctor in the Ludwigstraße hospital at Braunschweig (Ibid., 264), Demmerich (Ibid., 178), and midwife Maria Barkemeier (Ibid., 271).
By contrast, the personnel who cared for the children, Dr. Kurt Schliemann, Dr. Richard Demmerich, and Valentina Bilien, demonstrated indifference through their failure to act. They may not have taken measures to cause the children’s deaths, yet they did little to prevent them. Of these three, Dr. Schliemann showed the most shocking indifference when he simply decided that the home was not his responsibility. He told officials that he would not look after the home unless it was run properly, and thus declined all medical responsibility for the children’s care. Schliemann did not enter the home until four weeks after it opened, and did so only because Müller told him he had to sign the death certificates to enable the burials. Bilien testified that after his first visit, Schliemann came to the home when she called, but hardly made an effort to treat the children. When the most deaths were occurring, Schliemann was coming to the home every second day, but only to issue death certificates. He refused to care for the children because, as he told Bilien, “I cannot take any responsibility; the children are too young, and when I go there I cannot help them.”

Although Schliemann claimed that his refusal to take medical responsibility stemmed from the hopelessness of the situation, his attitude was likely representative of his apathy toward the lives of Polish and Soviet children. For example, when Bilien asked him to come to the home and treat the children, he remarked, “these dirty dogs are not

484 Ibid., 110.
485 Ibid., 109.
486 Ibid., 233.
487 Ibid., 110.
488 Ibid., 251.
worth being attended to.” Polish assistant Aleksandra Misalszek testified that when Schliemann signed a death certificate, he did not seem upset about the death. He looked at the dead child, smiled, said “Good that it died,” and walked away. Schliemann’s excuses—that the home was not his responsibility and his efforts were useless—demonstrate how strongly he had internalized the racist element behind his omission of care. It cannot be certain that he neglected the children because of their “race,” but his deliberate choice not to try to save their lives suggests that he did not care if they died.

Dr. Demmerich, on the other hand, cared for the children at the home at first, and then gradually distanced himself from it except to sign death certificates. This suggests that his indifference progressively emerged as his other medical duties increased, and that he began considering his efforts at the home useless and accepted that the children would die. Demmerich claimed that when he returned to his practice in Velpke in September 1944, he did not know the home was operated by the Party, and was not officially designated as its physician. When he first heard about the home, he visited and cared for the children there, however, later he only tended to the children whom Bilien brought to his consulting hours, and only visited the home to sign death certificates.

When Demmerich was asked why he did not spend his time at the home treating living children instead of signing death certificates, he replied, “It was part of our duties as doctors to make out death certificates.” This may be true, but his response indicates

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489 Ibid., 30.
490 Ibid., 117.
491 Ibid., 160, 163.
492 Ibid., 165.
493 Ibid., 166.
that he carried out his duty after the children died, but neglected his duty while they were living. One death certificate was for one-month-old Verika Skap, who died of intestinal catarrh on November 27.\footnote{Death Certificate, November 27, 1944, 2.2.2.4/77102963/ITS Digital Archive, accessed at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on August 16, 2017; List of Children Who Died at the Foreign Children’s Home in Velpke, Date Unknown, 3.3.1.1/82264481/ITS Digital Archive, accessed at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on August 16, 2017.} It is likely that Demmerich was not called to the home until Verika was already dead, and he testified that this happened frequently.\footnote{Brand, \textit{Trial of Heinrich Gerike}, 178.} It should have been clear to Demmerich that his regular assistance at the home was necessary because of the number of death certificates he was called to sign. He claimed that, due to his large practice, he could not find time to write letters of protest to the authorities, or, in the later period, to visit the home.\footnote{Ibid., xxiv, 166-67.} He prioritized his other patients and neglected the children at the home, even though he knew how many were dying.

The causes of death reported on death certificates by Demmerich and Schliemann provide evidence of the indifference of both physicians. The doctors did not examine the living children or conduct autopsies on the dead to find out the causes of the deaths. Instead, eighty-four death certificates were registered with the Helmstedt Health Office and \textit{Landesdienstamt} (District Administrator’s Office), almost all with catarrh of the intestines, general weakness, or diarrhea and vomiting listed as the cause of death.\footnote{Ibid., 18.} The doctors used the terms “general weakness” and “diarrhea and vomiting,” neither of which are proper medical diagnoses, rather than use their medical expertise to find the real reason that the children were dying. Six-week-old Monika Blaszczzyk allegedly died of

\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 18.}
diarrhea and vomiting, and was one of the many children who never received a medical diagnosis. The causes of the deaths were not questioned by the offices that received the death certificates. The certificates were received, filed away, and forgotten.

Demmerich’s wife, Gertrud, admitted to an attitude likely shared by Demmerich and Schliemann: “After I saw how many died I began to believe that there would not be many [who] would leave this home alive.” A woman untrained in medicine recognized the dire situation at the home. Drs. Demmerich and Schliemann, both experienced medical professionals, undoubtedly saw it too, and yet did little to determine why the children were dying. Instead, they allowed the deaths to continue, remaining indifferent toward the children’s fate.

Supervisor Valentina Bilien appeared the least indifferent among the three personnel who cared for the children. She purchased medicine and extra food with her own money, returned children to their mothers against orders, and sought out other

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\(^{498}\) List of Children Who Died at the Foreign Children’s Home in Velpke, Date Unknown, 3.3.1.1/82264479/ITS Digital Archive, accessed at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on August 16, 2017; Death Certificate, May 31, 1944, 2.2.2.4/77079997/ITS Digital Archive, accessed at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on August 16, 2017; A post-war search for Monika Blaszczyk by the Central Tracing Bureau revealed her tragic fate. It was thought that she had been repatriated to Poland in 1946 after spending time in a DP camp in Augsburg, Germany. After no trace of her was found in Augsburg or Poland, it was determined she had died in Velpke, and the case was closed on 4/27/1948. See select ITS documents accessed at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on August 16, 2017, Case Cover Sheet on Monika Blaszczyk, Date Unknown 6.3.2.1/84168498/ITS Digital Archive; Case Report on Monika Blaszczyk, Date Unknown, 6.3.2.1/84168503/ITS Digital Archive; Case Report on Monika Blaszczyk, January 23, 1948, 6.3.2.1/84168504/ITS Digital Archive; Case Report on Monika Blaszczyk, May 2, 1948, 6.3.2.1/84168505/ITS Digital Archive; Case Report on Monika Blaszczyk, August 25, 1948, 6.3.2.1/84168506/ITS Digital Archive; Case Report on Monika Blaszczyk, August 30, 1948, 6.3.2.1/84168507/ITS Digital Archive; Case Report on Monika Blaszczyk, October 6, 1948, 6.3.2.1/84168508/ITS Digital Archive; Case Report on Monika Blaszczyk, February 25, 1949, 6.3.2.1/84168514/ITS Digital Archive; Case Report on Monika Blaszczyk, December 29, 1949, 6.3.2.1/84168517/ITS Digital Archive.

medical professionals for advice and assistance.\textsuperscript{500} When Bilien’s efforts to save the children failed, it is likely that she adopted an attitude of indifference not out of ill-intent, but to cope with the frequent deaths. Yet, her efforts to save the children contrast with evidence of her indifference toward their care, such as her frequent absence from the home. Polish laborer Alexisandra Misalszek, for example, testified that Bilien was gone for three to five days at a time, while Demmerich testified that things would have been better at the home if Bilien had not left so often.\textsuperscript{501} When Bilien was in Velpke, only the foreign assistants slept in the home; Bilien returned to her apartment and never cared for children during the night.\textsuperscript{502} While Bilien’s absence suggests that she was indifferent toward the children’s survival, due to conflicting testimonies, her reasons for leaving the home remain unclear. The prosecution claimed she was visiting her children, and Bilien and other witnesses testified that she was buying medicine for the children at the home.\textsuperscript{503} A third possibility is that she simply left the home to emotionally and physically distance herself from the constant deaths.

The evidence suggests that certain psychological coping mechanisms allowed Bilien to emotionally protect herself in the context of a situation she could not control by selectively caring for the children who she thought were more likely to survive. Bernhild Vögel makes the argument that Bilien prioritized the survival of the strong children over young, weak newborns. Vögel writes that in a facility already intended for

\textsuperscript{500} Ibid., 106, 250, 234, 241.
\textsuperscript{501} Ibid., 115, 76.
\textsuperscript{502} Ibid., 236.
\textsuperscript{503} Testimonies of Maria Barkemeier (Ibid., 271), Elsa Willgerodt (Ibid., 262), and Valentina Bilien (Ibid., 237).
“undesirables,” there was another “selection” that was based not in a racist component, but in the social-Darwinist principle of the survival of the fittest.\textsuperscript{504} Simply put, when faced with so many dying children, Bilien may have given up on those too weak, young, or ill, and focused her efforts on those whom she thought could be saved.

Bilien appears to have adopted an attitude like that of the Kreis officials, convincing herself that most of the children had little ability to live. Her reasons for the deaths were that the children were born weak, Polish mothers were too young and had no proper experience parenting, and she received children who were already sick.\textsuperscript{505} Internalizing this mentality, she likely decided that the sick, crying infants would not live anyway, and that devoting special care to them was therefore not worthwhile.\textsuperscript{506} There is not extensive evidence to support this argument, but Velpke residents Nowak and Slomian recalled looking through a window of the barrack next to the children’s home and seeing a crying child left by itself, who then died after a couple of days.\textsuperscript{507} While perhaps not conclusive, this may well be an example of one of Bilien’s coping mechanisms, a type of “selection” that favored the strong over the weak.

Furthermore, Bilien’s selective care of the stronger, older children gave herself a false sense of achievement and reassurance when they survived. Instead of recognizing her indifference toward the lives of the majority, Bilien displayed a sense of pride in the few she managed to save. Midwife Martha Barkemeier testified that when she visited the

\textsuperscript{504} Vögel, Entbindungsheim, 67-68.
\textsuperscript{505} Brand, Trial of Heinrich Gerike, 241.
\textsuperscript{506} Vögel, Entbindungsheim, 67-68.
\textsuperscript{507} Brand, Trial of Heinrich Gerike, 11.
home, Bilien proudly showed her children who were not sick. Rather than admitting that she failed to save almost ninety percent of the children, Bilien testified that she was pleased with the nine children who survived and were transferred to VW’s children’s home in Rühen. She proudly remarked, “I sent all my children to Rühen… they would not believe that they came from a home.” These survivors likely received Bilien’s preferential care, and were not those whom she neglected.

On a larger scale, indifference was exhibited by the residents of Velpke, who whispered about the home and complained that it was a scandal and a shame to the community, but remained silent observers in the background. When foreign women walked down the main street with their children, residents remarked, “good God, bringing more children into that home.” When bodies were removed from the home, some whispered, “look what they are doing there with those children.” Several locals witnessed a dog holding in its mouth an infant’s skull, with bloodied hair still visible. Even Bilien testified that by June 1944, everybody in the village knew about the deaths because it was “unpleasant for any decent human being.” At first, according to the testimony of Emma Hoppe, locals thought an epidemic had spread through the home. Later, people shrugged their shoulders and looked away. Although the authorities

508 Ibid., 271.
509 The trial records reveal inconsistencies in the number of children who were transferred to VW’s home in Rühen. Bilien (Ibid., 90) and Misalszek (Ibid., 118) testified that nine survived, Heßling testified that twelve survived (Ibid., 99), and Draper stated that fourteen survived (Ibid., 6). Including those transferred to Rühen, other children are reported to have survived: one mother stole her child from the home (Ibid., 40), and Bilien claims to have sent twenty to thirty children back with their mothers (Ibid., 250).
510 Ibid., 90.
511 Ibid., 24.
512 Testimonies of Nowak (Ibid., 22) and Slomian (Ibid., 11).
513 Ibid., 260.
514 Ibid., 35.
likely set up the children’s home on the outskirts of town to keep it hidden from the public, once the truth came to light, the indifferent attitude of the community helped to keep it in operation.

In sum, the trial records revealed that local staff and officials’ neglect was motivated by both intent to cause the children’s deaths, and indifference toward their fate. On one hand, it appears that local higher-level Party officials never intended for the children to live. *Kreis* officials in charge of the establishment and management of the home were in the position to make a facility conducive to infant care, but instead, deliberately put infants in a situation they could not survive. The children’s precarious situation suggests that the high death rate at the home was both deliberate and expected.

On the other hand, the other local officials and staff responsible for the Velpke home did not intend for the children to die, but they did little to save the children’s lives. Mayor Noth and *Ortsgruppenleiter* Müller had positions of authority in Velpke, but they both avoided taking responsibility for the home and the children’s well-being. Moreover, Schliemann, Demmerich, and Bilien saw the problems with the facility, such as the infants’ young age and the unsuitability of the barrack, as a hopeless situation that they had no authority to change. As a result, they callously accepted the circumstances and adopted an attitude of indifference, which sealed the children’s fate. They failed to provide the treatment and care that could have saved lives, even after *Kreis* officials decided that the children were not meant to live.

Although this analysis suggests that local officials with a high level of authority in the Party intended to cause the children’s deaths, even individuals who appeared
indifferent made the conscious decision to let the children die. Thus, any distinctions between intent and indifference should not be considered definite. As the months went by, everyone aware of the appalling conditions at the home understood that the children who entered would not survive. Yet, they did not intervene, and allowed the deaths to continue.

The “Velpke Baby Home Case” provides a unique lens through which to explore the circumstances surrounding the Velpke Children’s Home and the individuals responsible for the deaths of ninety-one children. The accused—Valentina Bilien, Richard Demmerich, Heinrich Gerike, Georg Heßling, Werner Noth, Hermann Müller, Gustav Claus, and Fritz Flint—all contributed to this tragic outcome, and an awareness of each of their roles deepens our understanding of this facility. Four of the eight—Gerike, Bilien, Demmerich, and Heßling—were convicted. Bilien was sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment, Demmerich to ten years imprisonment, and both Gerike and Heßling were sentenced to death by hanging.\textsuperscript{515} Claus was found not guilty after giving his evidence,\textsuperscript{516} no verdict was issued for Flint, as he died during the trial,\textsuperscript{517} and Kurt Schliemann was found unfit to stand trial.\textsuperscript{518}

The Velpke Children’s Home existed for a fleeting moment in history. It was in operation for only eight months in 1944, and then it was closed—forgotten or repressed

\textsuperscript{515} Gerike and Heßling were executed on October 8, 1946. Demmerich’s sentence was commuted to seven years on February 2, 1950 for good conduct. He was released on December 2, 1950. Bilien was granted clemency and released on January 23, 1954. Synopsis of Case, October 27, 1953, 5.1/82300570/ITS Digital Archive, accessed at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on August 16, 2017.

\textsuperscript{516} Brand, \textit{Trial of Heinrich Gerike}, 294. Claus admitted that he sent two children to the home, but it was not proven that he knew of the conditions there.

\textsuperscript{517} Ibid., 111.

\textsuperscript{518} Ibid., 108.
by the few who knew of its existence. Even almost seventy-five years later, the story of
this children’s home remains largely untold. While this chapter provides answers about
the facility’s development and management, the individuals responsible, and the
experiences of the infants, parents, and Velpke’s residents, this analysis also reflects the
limitations of the source base. The documentation is not as broad or as extensive as the
documentation on the VW Children’s Home; thus, numerous questions remain
unanswered. It is not certain whether Gerike received any further orders from upper-level
authorities about the home or the children’s care. Moreover, the facility’s closure raises
questions about the relationship between Kreis Helmstedt officials and Volkswagen, for
Gerike negotiated the transfer of the barrack and children to the VW factory. Lastly, the
extent to which local officials from the civil administration collaborated with Party
officials remains unclear.

Consequently, it is also difficult to reach definite conclusions about the questions
of upper-level or lower-level management, and intent versus indifference, but several
notable findings emerge. First, the local Nazi Party was responsible for the facility’s
establishment, management, and operation, and a local Volksdeutsche supervisor and two
German physicians oversaw the children’s care. Second, local Party officials with a high
level of authority did not intend for the children to live, while other officials and staff
were grossly indifferent. Analyses of both these issues reveal that the Velpke Children’s
Home was, first and foremost, a local Nazi Party institution. Party officials determined
the circumstances at the home, as well as the children’s fate. There is, perhaps, no clearer

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evidence of this than Kreisleiter Heinrich Gerike’s statement to a British war crimes investigator during an interrogation on October 18, 1945:

I did swear an oath to be loyal to the Führer and to respect and obey him. I knew what my Führer thought of the Poles and Russians. I was a Nazi and a good Nazi. Mein Kampf by Adolf Hitler was and is my bible. We both know what my bible says about the Poles and Russians […] it was, however, unnecessary to kill the Poles to enable Germany to expand in the East. There were other ways.519

Conclusion

On a Sunday in the summer of 1944, Antonius Holling, a Roman Catholic priest in Wolfsburg, baptized seven Polish infants born to forced laborers employed in the area. After the children were christened, the Polish mothers told him, “Now we have to take our children to Rühen and we shall not see them again.” On the same afternoon, Holling visited the village of Tiddische, where he baptized two more infants. There, a Soviet mother made an almost identical remark. When Holling repeated the mothers’ concerns to Hans Körbel, head doctor at the VW Children’s Home in Rühen, Körbel responded that he would put “a thousand marks on the table if he could get rid of Rühen,” because one day, he would have to answer for the children’s deaths.520

Dr. Körbel and the Polish and Soviet mothers whom Holling spoke to had little in common. Körbel was a distinguished German physician and member of the SS, and the Polish and Soviet women were forced to live and work in Germany and surrender their newborn babies to the children’s home. Nonetheless, both expressed similar sentiments; they knew that the children sent to the Volkswagen Children’s Home in Rühen would not survive.521

While the Volkswagen Children’s Home does not represent all foreign child-care facilities, it is illustrative of the fate of infant children born to Polish and Soviet civilian laborers in Nazi Germany. The VW and Velpke children’s homes both stand as examples of what awaited the Polish and Soviet children who were taken to facilities such as these

521 Ibid.
between 1943 and 1945. As at VW and Velpke, the circumstances varied at foreign child-care facilities across the Reich depending on the phase of the war, the extent of central Nazi authorities’ involvement and, most significantly, the actions and attitudes of the supervising local officials and staff. What these facilities had in common was that the children never had a chance at life. In other words, as Velpke resident Martha Golatta stated in her testimony about the Velpke Children’s Home, “They just simply had to die there.”522 Their short lives were determined by policies set before their birth—policies intended not to keep them alive, but to solve the problem of the birth of “racial enemies” children who never should have come into the world.

The employment of Polish and Soviet civilian forced laborers in the Reich, and in turn, the existence of foreign child-care facilities, was heavily determined by the conflict between two of the regime’s principle goals: maintaining a Nazi racial hierarchy and ensuring economic efficiency. Yet, as Germany’s position in the war declined, the treatment of Polish and Soviet laborers reflected the regime’s loosening ideological stance. By the end of the war, economic priorities had gradually superseded racial priorities. While this transition improved the conditions for Soviet and Polish laborers, the conflict remained unresolved when it came to the question of their children.

Beginning in mid-1942, discussions between central authorities about the growing problem of pregnancy and childbirth among foreign workers emphasized economic and racial concerns; however, pregnancy and child-rearing among female workers threatened economic production, and raising “racial enemies” alongside German children threatened

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the racial hierarchy. Thus, while foreign child-care facilities emerged as a solution to both problems, initial discussions about the children’s fate centered around racial ideology. Throughout 1942, central authorities laid the ideological groundwork that caused a foreign child’s future to be determined by its “racial value.” The emphasis among central leadership on the value of a child based on its “racial descent” was the fundamental reason that Eastern European, and not Western European, children were forcibly removed from their mothers’ care and taken to foreign child-care facilities.

Although laying the ideological foundation for these facilities was essential to central authorities, the facilities were also intended to unburden the working mothers. The combination of central authorities’ focus on racial ideology, and the regime’s urgent need for manpower, meant that the facilities were established hastily and without plans for a long-term solution. Their actual development, operation, and management fell to local authorities and staff, and questions about superior authority, financing, and most significantly, the children’s fate, remained largely unanswered by central authorities. As the German war economy weakened, the “temporary solution” of foreign child-care facilities remained in place, as the children’s lives were not valuable enough for either central or local authorities to find a final solution. When concerns about the economic situation outweighed concerns about enforcing a racial hierarchy, authorities at all levels prioritized the foreign mothers’ productivity. The fate of their children was not of concern.

The “either/or” dilemma that Erich Hilgenfeldt posed to Heinrich Himmler in August 1943—“Either one does not wish to keep the children alive” or “one intends to
raise these children to utilize them later as a labor force”—remained unresolved, for by mid-1943, the most pressing issue involving foreigners in the Reich was their ability to work.\textsuperscript{523} For non-working infants who did not pose an immediate “racial” threat while confined to facilities, neither a solution that prioritized racial ideology nor a solution that prioritized the war economy took precedence over the other to determine their fate. The children fell victim to policies based on both goals—they were left to suffer slowly and die, while their mothers were utilized for labor. Ultimately, central authorities’ policies regarding pregnancy and childbirth among Eastern European laborers, combined with local authorities’ indifference, racism, and inadequate care, caused the deaths of thousands of Polish and Soviet infants at foreign child-care facilities across the Third Reich.\textsuperscript{524}

The foregoing analyses of the Volkswagen and Velpke children’s homes—case studies of two discrete facilities—have confirmed these findings about Eastern European forced labor and foreign child-care facilities. The chapters on the VW and Velpke children’s homes have addressed these broader issues by highlighting the centrality of the conflict between racial ideology and economics at two foreign child-care facilities. While these chapters have also focused on the questions of local-level versus upper-level management, and intent versus indifference in bringing about the children’s deaths, both issues must be understood in the context of the enduring tension between Nazi racial

\textsuperscript{523} Letter by Erich Hilgenfeldt of the Department of Social Welfare of the NSDAP to the Reichsführer SS, re: Treatment of Babies of Foreign Workers, Berlin, August 11, 1943, File No. 4665, Box 83; National Archives Collection of World War II War Crimes Records; Nürnberg Organizations (NO) Series; RG 238; NACP.

\textsuperscript{524} Schwarze, \textit{Kinder}, 154.
ideology and the regime’s economic needs. This study has resulted in the following conclusions.

First, the evidence shows that at both facilities, upper-level Nazi authorities initiated the facilities’ establishment, both through Sauckel’s centralized decree and orders from the respective Gauleiter. After central authorities’ initial involvement, however, the actual establishment, supervision, and operation of the facilities was determined by local-level authorities and staff. In Velpke, the Helmstedt Agricultural Organization brought the problem of foreign childbirth to the attention of the Kreisleiter, causing him to approach the Gauleiter and receive orders to establish the home in Velpke. After its establishment, local Party officials in Helmstedt had complete authority over the management and operation of the children’s home. Other officials in Velpke enforced the Kreisleiter’s orders regarding the home and assisted with its administration, and the children’s care fell under the responsibility of two attending German physicians and a Volksdeutsche supervisor. The home was indeed a locally-operated facility, and the local Nazi Party had complete control.

By contrast, in Wolfsburg, Volkswagen executives and staff—not Party officials—oversaw Volkswagen’s child-care facility. The chief executive of VW ordered its establishment after receiving Sauckel’s decree, and he placed the facility under the control of the factory doctor and the factory personnel director. Unlike at Velpke, the local Nazi Party did not determine the location, personnel, or supervise the facility’s operation. The Kreisleiter intervened to ask VW to take charge of the Kreis’ foreign child-care facility, but he left VW in control. While the supervising officials from VW
varied at each of the three locations of the children’s home, VW’s administration remained responsible for its management, and doctors and nurses from VW cared for the children. Overall, both the VW and Velpke facilities were controlled locally, with minimal outside or central-level involvement.

Second, this analysis has also focused on whether local staff and authorities intended to bring about the children’s deaths, or whether the deaths resulted from indifference. While all the defendants in the Rühen and Velpke trials were charged with willful neglect, Chapters Two and Three have offered examples of how some individuals responsible for the facilities showed intent to cause the children’s deaths, and others appeared indifferent toward the children’s fate. Because these are difficult legal and semantic concepts, distinctions between the two are not always clear; therefore, these conclusions remain provisional.

The evidence suggests that there is a correlation between the degree of intent and the responsible individuals’ level of authority or connection to the Party. At the Velpke home, local Party officials with a high level of authority, like Kreisleiter Heinrich Gerike, showed intent by deliberately taking measures that impeded the children’s survival. Moreover, at both facilities, officials who had slightly less authority, like VW’s top executives, Party officials in Velpke, and Dr. Körbel, did not take actions to intentionally bring about the children’s deaths, but they had the ability to intervene, and did not. This suggests that even those who appeared indifferent toward the children’s survival demonstrated a degree of intent through their inaction, particularly if they were in the position to make significant improvements.
By contrast, the individuals directly responsible for the children’s daily needs at the VW and Velpke homes, including supervisor Valentina Bilien and the medical personnel, showed reckless indifference toward the children’s lives by failing to provide adequate care, medical examinations, and treatment. At both facilities, Bilien, the German nurses, and the attending physicians gradually tended toward indifference as they became ever more resigned to the situation. Instead of trying to save the children’s lives, they accepted their foreseeable deaths. Their negligence revealed complete disregard for the children’s survival.

Examinations of these two trials has shown that, above all, the officials and staff responsible for the VW and Velpke facilities appeared indifferent toward the children’s fate. Yet, there is not a clear line separating intent from indifference. Due to the lack of direct evidence confirming the defendants’ motives, their actions or inaction cannot be categorized as strictly one or the other. Furthermore, while the Rühen and Velpke trials suggest that positions of authority or positions in the Party correlate with more intent to cause the children’s deaths, additional evidence is needed to support this provisional conclusion. Because of the narrow, localized focus of the trials, they proved only that the individuals charged for these crimes exhibited varying degrees of willful neglect, and that, most importantly, local authorities and staff share responsibility for the children’s deaths.

Finally, it is difficult to draw concrete conclusions about the extent to which racial ideology and economics motivated the establishment and operation of the VW and Velpke facilities. This is connected to larger issues that go beyond the scope of this
thesis. Furthermore, neither the Rühen or Velpke trials focused on the broader racial or economic implications, but rather on the individuals who directly caused the children’s deaths at the two facilities. Nonetheless, the foregoing analyses of local-level authorities’ management and their intent to cause the deaths provide a preliminary conclusion. Although both economic and racial concerns influenced the VW and Velpke children’s homes, there is minimal evidence that local officials and personnel prioritized Nazi racial ideology over economics.

At a local level, proof of staff and authorities’ devotion to enforcing Nazi racial ideology did not emerge in the Rühen or Velpke trials. Comments allegedly made by the defendants provide circumstantial evidence of their racial biases against Eastern Europeans, but there is not enough direct evidence to prove that the children’s deaths were motivated by ideology. Yet, it is likely that local staff and officials’ indifference stemmed from their conscious or unconscious embrace of the state’s racial policy. Even those defendants who claimed to have been ignorant, or to have been opposed to the Nazi government, executed the prevailing racist policies.\textsuperscript{525} While the trials provided few answers about the defendants’ ideological beliefs, it appears that local staff and officials’ indifferent attitude toward the children’s survival was motivated by their acceptance of the Nazis’ hierarchical system. An adherence to Nazi racial ideology thus provides one explanation for why they failed to save the children, and instead, accepted the inevitability of their deaths. Moreover, racial ideology limited the children’s chances of survival before and after birth by assigning Eastern European infants a low “racial

\textsuperscript{525} Eßmann, “Die Ausländerkinder-Pflegestätte,” 4.
status,” and encouraging local authorities to disregard the children’s lives and neglect their care.

The VW and *Kreis* officials responsible for the Volkswagen and Velpke children’s homes were far more concerned with maintaining efficiency from the foreign workforce than enforcing a racial hierarchy. As a state armaments producer for the Third Reich, VW’s production was essential to the German war effort, and so industrialists like Porsche and chief executive Piëch devoted VW’s resources and efforts to its workers, “focus[ed] on production,” and abandoned the children in its home.526 *Kreisleiter* Gerike established the home in Velpke because childbirth among foreign workers was threatening food production in his *Kreis*. The home was decided upon as an immediate solution to farmers’ concerns, and then Gerike devoted minimal resources to its establishment and upkeep because he received no support from central authorities. The children’s deaths were insignificant to him because, as he stated to investigators, “I do not consider it is murder to run a home in which children die during wartime.”527

The appalling circumstances and high death rates at the VW and Velpke children’s homes, especially during the summer of 1944, reflect the deteriorating economic situation in Germany. During the final stages of the war, preference was given to workers essential to the “total war” economy. Moreover, each doctor or nurse assigned to a home for foreign children, and every food ration or item of clothing given to foreign infants, meant less medical personnel and provisions for the German population, armed

forces, and workforce. With shortages of supplies and medical professionals, as well as a lack of centralized support, local authorities did not want to waste valuable resources on foreign, non-working children. As Körbel testified, the implicit motto in the last stage of the war was “work before children.” With the prioritization of German citizens and the regime’s workers, the lives of foreign children were put last, and minimal efforts were made to ensure their survival. Ultimately, this research reveals that rather than putting racial ideology into practice and intentionally killing the children, local officials prioritized economic production and, revealing their indifference, allowed the children to die.

This analysis has provided conclusions, but also gives rise to unanswered questions. First, more revealing documentation is needed to determine central and local authorities’ motives for causing or allowing the deaths, including evidence of high-level directives that decided the children’s fate. It remains possible that an explicit or implicit order, likely from the summer of 1944, determined that the children should die. Second, future research should focus on the relationship between foreign child-care facilities and economic enterprises to understand the extent to which economic demands affected the circumstances at these facilities. Third, the experiences of the mothers and the surviving infants who passed through children’s homes are largely unknown. Finally, additional studies should further examine the roles of the District Agricultural Organizations, the DAF, and state authorities in the establishment and management of such facilities.

While numerous questions remain, the conclusions reached here will broaden scholars’ understanding of foreign forced labor and foreign child-care facilities, and provide new insight into some of the fundamental questions faced by scholars in the field. This thematic framework, as well as these preliminary findings, can be used to guide future research on the hundreds of other unexamined foreign child-care facilities that existed across Nazi Germany.

Case studies of the Volkswagen and Velpke children’s homes have added to the body of knowledge on foreign child-care facilities, illuminating two stories that have been forgotten too long. Nevertheless, the stories of these children’s homes should not be told to identify the perpetrators, or to debate the crimes that they committed. Rather, these stories bring awareness to the fate of the facilities’ innocent victims, who if forgotten, would have been neglected not only in life, but also in death. Today, the words etched onto a bronze plaque at the site of the children’s graves in the Velpke cemetery read, “If the echo of their voices fades—we shall perish.”529 The Volkswagen and Velpke children’s homes should be remembered for the children—Natalia, Edward, Monika, Bruno, Verika, and 451 others.

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List of Abbreviations

DAF: German Labor Front *(Deutsche Arbeitsfront)*

ITS: International Tracing Service Archives

KDF: Strength Through Joy *(Kraft durch Freude)*

LKK Gifhorn: Reich Association of Health Insurance Funds *(Reichsverband der Landkrankenkasse)*

NSDAP: National Socialist German Workers’ Party *(Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei)*

NSV: National Socialist People’s Welfare *(Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt)*

POW: Prisoner of war

RSHA: Reich Security Main Office *(Reichssicherheitshauptamt)*

RuSHA: Main Race and Resettlement Office *(Rasse-und Siedlungshauptamt)*

SD: Security Service *(Sicherheitsdienst)*

SS: Protective Squad *(Schutzstaffel)*

UNRRA: United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration

VW: Volkswagen *(Volkswagenwerk GmbH)*