

Employment of Women in Armament Factories (May 7, 1940)

Abstract

As the need for arms production increased, the Nazi regime needed to find ways to push the war economy further with limited resources. One of the most difficult resources to manage was the labor power necessary to keep Germany's armies well supplied, especially as young men were called into service. As available male labor dwindled, however, the regime was deeply reluctant to allow women to fill the gap. This reluctance stemmed from the deeply rooted misogyny of National Socialist ideology, which venerated masculine strength, heroism, and martial valor. Permitting women to perform hard labor in factories presented a direct challenge to their very public message of women's role as mothers, housewives, and above all subordinates to men.

When military needs finally pushed the regime to permit women's entry into the armaments labor force, Nazi leaders remained cautious about public opinion. In this brief memorandum to publishing firms, state authorities stipulated that any mention of women's involvement in war work had to appear to be voluntary and motivated by the women's desire to contribute to the Reich's war readiness of their own volition. Any hint that the economy was incapable of maintaining arms production *without* the aid of these women was to be strictly avoided. Likewise, other publications were to downplay the strenuous nature of this type of work, specifically to avoid the impression that the regime was placing women in difficult, dangerous circumstances.

Source

Following up on yesterday's note regarding a publication on the employment of women in armament factories, we advise you of the following: This topic is not going to be addressed in the form of a specific action, but through occasional depictions of the employment of women in armament factories, of the active support demonstrated by women during the war, the camaraderie at work, and of the fact that it is impossible for the women employed in armament factories to suffer overexertion. On no account must the impression be created that women's labor in armament factories is forced; in fact, the publications we wish to see are meant to serve as motivation to volunteer for this work.

Source: BArch, Slg. Oberheitmann, ZSg 109/11; reprinted in Bernd Sösemann (in Zusammenarbeit mit Marius Lange), *Propaganda: Medien und Öffentlichkeit in der NS-Diktatur: eine Dokumentation und Edition von Gesetzen, Führerbefehlen und sonstigen Anordnungen sowie propagandistischen Bild- und Textüberlieferungen im kommunikationshistorischen Kontext und in der Wahrnehmung des Publikums*, Band 1. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2011, p. 592.

Translation: Insa Kummer

Recommended Citation: Employment of Women in Armament Factories (May 7, 1940), published in:
German History in Documents and Images,
<<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/nazi-germany-1933-1945/ghdi:document-5121>> [July 06, 2025].