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Jewish forced labourers in the munitions factory of HASAG in Skarżysko-Kamienna during the Second World War

HASAG, i.e. Hugo Schneider Aktiengesellschaft Metallwarenfabrik, was a German metal goods manufacturer based in Leipzig. HASAG was established in 1863. However, initially, it was just a small factory focussed on armaments production. However, the enterprise was gradually expanding. In 1930, it employed almost a thousand workers and since 1932 it started producing ammunition for the German army. The HASAG factory had eight branches in Germany during the Second World War, in which the prisoners of concentration camps were the main labour force. The activity of the concern was transferred to the area of the General Government, where Hugo Schneider Aktiengesellschaft Munitionsfabrik was established in 1939 in Skarżysko-Kamienna in the pre-war State Munitions Factory.

The factory in Skarżysko-Kamienna was a leading manufacturer of munitions in Poland during the interwar period. When the enterprise based in Skarżysko-Kamienna was taken over by the occupation authorities, it would initially employ its then-current workers of Polish nationality. However, as time passed, the management of the concern decided to transfer the workers to factories located in the Third Reich. It was then, when workers of Jewish origin started to replace Poles. At the same time the premises of the factory were being prepared for the creation of a forced labour camp. Thus, in the summer of 1942 in Skarżysko-Kamienna, the first so-called “factory camp” in the General Government was founded. It meant that the Jews who worked there were owned by a private company. Initially, those who worked in the HASAG of Skarżysko-Kamienna were residents of surrounding towns and localities. The development of situation caused the phenomenon of transferring forced labourers also from Radom, Cracow, Warsaw, Lublin and, after 1943 transports of Jews from the ghettos in Łódź and Radomsko as well as from the camps in Płaszów or Majdanek occurred. It is estimated that at the peak of its activity, dated back to March 1944, there were around 9 thousand forced Jewish workers in the labour camp of HASAG factory. This number constituted half of the staff employed by the concern of Skarżysko-Kamienna.

No scientific monograph describing the history of HASAG munitions factory in Skarżysko-Kamienna after it was taken over during the war by the German occupation authorities focussing on showing the fate of Jewish labourers has been created yet.

The aim of this project is to prepare a series of articles, and, in the long term, a typescript of a book discussing the research subject described above. It is necessary to develop the themes mentioned and try to give a precise answer concerning the role of HASAG munitions factory in Skarżysko-Kamienna in the German armaments industry during the Second World War. Additionally, it would be advisable to examine the question the work of German forced labourers – try to determine their adequate number and origin, illustrate their working conditions and workload as well as their involvement in the acts of sabotage aimed at the German authorities. What differentiated HASAG from other German companies was the fact that the enterprise would initiate and actively take part in the killing of its forced labourers. All of the questions mentioned above require conducting detailed archival research (Yad Vashem Central Archives – Jerusalem, Bundesarchiv Koblenz, Militärarchiv Freiburg, Sächsisches Staatsarchiv Leipzig, Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej w Warszawie, Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej w Katowicach, Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Warszawie, Muzeum Miejskie w Skarżysku-Kamiennej) that would enable the development of a complete study regarding the subject.