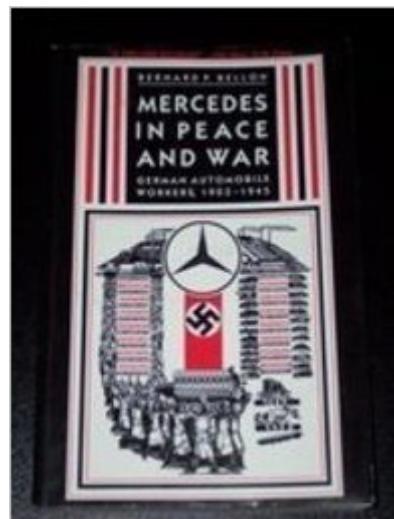


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Mercedes In Peace And War: German Automobile Workers, 1903-1945



Synopsis

Bernard Bellon combines a detailed study of the daily lives of factory workers at Daimler-Benz with a broader discussion of the role of the automobile industry in the economic and political development of Germany from 1903 through the end of World War II. Bellon was allowed access to previously closed company files detailing the company's labour practices during the Nazi period. His account of the close ties of Daimler-Benz officials with the Nazi leadership, and of the management's enslavement of prisoners of war and inmates of concentration camps is an important contribution to the ongoing debate concerning the role of German industry in the Nazi regime.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

With an attention to detail that is both warmhearted and exhaustive, Bernard Bellon recounts the history of Mercedes workers over the course of four pivotal decades (1903-1945). "Mercedes in Peace and War" opens with a chronicle of the company's beginnings, coupled with a thorough characterization of the skilled workforce necessary to make these highly prized luxury automobiles at the turn of the century. We are given a remarkable glimpse into at least a slice of the workers' lives. Occupation, skill levels, wages, education, marital status, age, and newspaper-reading habits are included among the wealth of raw, otherwise dry demographic information the author is able to weave into a compelling narrative. (There are also excellent descriptions of the struggles over piece-rate versus hourly wages for the workers, as well as the length of the workweek, and these run like threads throughout, helping to unify the book.) On one level, we are presented with a solid

labor history that encompasses everything from the character and habits of Mercedes' Swabian workers, to a compact account of the evolution of German trade unions and how the Soviet revolution impacted worker consciousness (hence labor relations). But it is the sensational nature of the author's findings about the worker slaves and concentration camp inmates used by the company during World War II that one might expect -- or even wish -- to dominate the book. Dr. Bellon is too evenhanded and sincere to fall into this trap, however. The Nazi era is fitted into its proper context at the end of the book, and I am glad I refrained from jumping to this section, though there were moments when, knowing what lay ahead, I was tempted to do just that.

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