

**Forced Labour in Franco's Spain:
Workforce Supply, Profits and Productivity**

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Abstract

This article analyses the forced labour system created in Spain during the Civil War and maintained during the Francoist dictatorship, paying special attention to the economic logic that led the state and private enterprises to draw a profit from this kind of punishment. In order to deal with this question in depth my research has been focused on three main aspects: the workforce supply in a war economy and in a context of reconstruction, the margins of profit produced by this kind of labour in comparison with free labour, and the problems related to productivity levels. Through consideration of these questions I present an overview of the main research in the subject and make suggestions for new goals in Spanish economic history concerned with this kind of repressive practice, bringing it into line with international historiography on the forced labour economy.

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Keywords: forced labour, war economy, Spanish Civil War, Franco's Dictatorship, prison economy

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*“Putting the pickaxe to the road.
Some broke up the stone, others removed the earth with a shovel,
And others took it to the quarry’s edge in a cart,
Some days they assigned extra work to us,
And whoever did not finish his task had to go back at night with a sentry,
Aiming at him there, so that he would finish it”*

Andrés Millán, forced labourer on mountain roads in the Pyrenees¹

1. New Perspectives on Spanish Historiography on Forced Labour

During the last five years historiography on forced labour in Spain has undergone a great development. In fact, until then this matter had remained almost completely absent from research or synthesis on the civil war or the Francoist repression, and its conceptualisation and legal framework has even given rise to historiographical and judicial arguments. Besides this, historians have had to resolve special difficulties concerning documentation, such as access to military archives or those of the Justice Ministry². However, during recent years some important research

¹ A. Millán was one of the 6th BDST working battalion prisoners from July 1940 to December 1942. He worked in a small village of Navarre from July 1940 to June 1941. Oral interview recorded in 2003, March 3 (Mendiola and Beaumont, 2006: 162).

² One of the most important experts on this question for Nazi Germany, Spoerer (2004: 253), underlined that a good deal of research about German companies has resulted from recent indemnification litigations on forced labourers. In Spain, on the contrary, the legal invisibility of this kind of punishment and the legal restrictions for historians to consult public or company archives (Espinosa, 2006: 121 - 134) are closely related to the late development of this kind of historiography. For the legal conceptualisation of forced labour in recent Spanish legislation on historical memory, see Mendiola (2006b). Following some memorial (Llarch, 1975) or journalistic (Sueiro, 1976; Lafuente, 2002) publications, attention must be drawn to the research by Rodrigo (2005 and 2007), Acosta et al., (2005), Mendiola and Beaumont (2006) and Gómez (2008), which are pioneering works on the different modalities of forced labour in Franco's Spain. Another important goal for the historiography of forced labour is the creation of specific archives or documentary centres on this punishment modality, as can be found in Germany (the most important of which is the project “Zwangsarbeit 1939 – 1945 / Forced Labor 1939 – 1945” with more than 600 interviews with former forced labourers under Nazi Rule, <http://www.zwangsarbeit-archiv.de/en/index.html>). A specific archive about IG Farben has been created by Memorial Wollheim, <http://www.wollheim-memorial.de/en/home>. In Spain, the projects underway, although very interesting, are still far removed from this reality. The most important project is Memorial Merinales (Acosta, 2008), and also the website www.esclavitudbajoelfranquismo.org (created by the *Memoriaren Bideak* association and the *Geronimo de Uztariz Social and Economic History Institute*, in Spanish, Basque and English), where we can find some research projects, documentary films, and also private memories or autobiographies of forced labourers. About the importance of these kinds of project and its historiographical relevance, see Mendiola (2009 and 2010b).

has been carried out, and we are now in a position to introduce Spanish historiography into the main discussions about the contemporary history of forced labour, and to compare the Spanish case with some other forms of forced labour in twentieth century Europe, mainly with Nazi Germany³. Some international comparative efforts have already been made to understand the organization and operation of concentration camps, mainly by J. Rodrigo (2010), but if we want to understand the economic logic of forced labour we must go further, because in Spain the concentration camps were not a place for a long sojourn, but a kind of way station where prisoners of war were classified and then sent on to different destinations. Thus, although most of the forced labourers remained inside the administrative structure of the Concentration Camps during the war and in the post-war period up until 1942, the places where the work battalions themselves were stationed cannot strictly be considered concentration camps; instead they resembled stars and planets in what David Rousset called the concentration universe.

This obliges us to tackle the interrelation between the two main purposes of forced labour, the economic and the political, and also to deal in depth with the economic logic of that kind of punishment, taking into account some of the most important elements in the configuration of labour markets and business strategies, such as the workforce supply-demand relationship, the extraction of capital gains from the work, and the level of productivity of tasks carried out by forced labourers. In this way, we must insert the Spanish experience within the European discussions about relationships between business enterprises and fascist regimes, in which the deployment of forced labour has been one of the most important points of debate⁴.

Historiography on the great forced labour system in fascist Europe, that of Nazi

³ First of all, we have to deal with the difficulty of defining forced or unfree labour (Brass, 1997 and 1999). Discussion amongst scholars is not closed, and some of them even consider that there is no point in drawing a clear dividing line between free and “unfree” labour (Steinfeld y Engerman, 1997). In any case, most of the experts on the question underline some basic characteristics of forced labour, mainly the incapacity of the worker to sell his or her own labour power on the labour market (Brass, 1999: 57). The debate has continued up to today, and we also have to deal with new debates about work in prison and other forms of forced labour in the present day (ILO, 2009). In any case, historiographical discussion has underlined that research on forced labour must be understood within research on the formation of labour markets and within relationships between free and unfree labour in capitalist development, as has been pointed out by Linden (1997b: 501 - 523), Brass (1997: 71 - 75 and 1999: 145 - 165), Moulier-Boutang (2006: 49 - 101) or Buggeln (2008: 127 - 129).

⁴ Some general outlooks can be found in the works by Herbert (1997), James and Tanner (2002), Hayes (2002), Andreassi (2004), Spoerer (2005), or Plumpe (2005). The case of Italian fascism is different, because it did not develop the systematic deployment of prisoners (Andreassi, 2004; Segreto, 2002). In the case of Franco's Spain, it must be underlined that the deployment of war captives or imprisoned persons has been completely absent from the agenda of the research of economic historians on the war economy and business strategies. Indeed, almost nothing about it appears in some of the most important compilations and syntheses on the economy and business in this period (Sánchez Recio and Tascón, 2003; Fuentes Quintana, 2009; Martín Aceña and Martínez Ruíz, 2006; Cabrera and Del Rey, 2002), with the exception of González Portilla and Garmendia (1998: 113-115) and Gálvez (2006: 487).

Germany, has focused on different questions, such as its role in shaping the labour market or the degree of willingness of enterprises to gain profit from forced labour. While some historians, like Roth (1997), understand the deployment of forced labour within the changes in class relationships in the fascist regime before the war, and therefore as a structural measure for ensuring the new economic policy, some others, like Herbert (1997, 2000), emphasise that the forced labour program can only be understood within the logic of the war economy, and thus as a dynamic and circumstantial measure, which goes beyond and is even contrary to the Nazi economic program⁵. Focusing especially on ethnic policy, Gruner (2006) underlines the fact that forced labour had a special place amongst the measures against the Jewish population from 1938 onwards, long before the extermination measures started in 1942.

On the other hand, a parallel debate concerns the degree of willingness shown by enterprises towards the deployment of forced labourers. According to Spoerer (2005), and in part contrary to Herbert's opinion, German companies had very narrow margins of manoeuvre if they wanted to survive in a war context. This historian remarks on the need for analysing the strategies of German enterprises according to economic logic, mainly cost-benefits analysis, within a very special context. Hayes agrees with the need to deal with the complexity of the matter, but observes that most German businessmen “increased the need for such workers and worsened the conditions they were forced to suffer” (Hayes, 2002: 34)⁶.

Although further research will be needed to deal with this subject in depth, the main objective of this paper is to analyse these questions and to indicate some conclusions that will help us proceed further, starting from some of the forced labour sectors that are better known today, sectors that present a significant variety of situations and company strategies. The first of these is a leading sector of the Spanish economy, the mining and steel industry in the Basque Country; the second is the huge plan to open up mountain roads in the Pyrenees mountain range; and the third, civilian work on the railway infrastructure⁷. Thus, answering the challenge of Nicolás Sánchez

⁵ In fact, both approaches understand the dynamic nature of forced labour, linked to workforce shortages, in the case of Herbert (1997: 383 - 396), or to changing social relations, in the case of Roth. This historian emphasizes the concept of subproletarianisation (Roth, 1997: 127 - 143), closely related to that of deproletarianisation, proposed by Brass for understanding the use of forced labour in capitalist agrarian contexts (Brass, 1997: 71 - 74, and 1999: 158 - 164).

⁶ For Daimler-Benz, Gregor (1998: 216) remarks that the “resort to exploitation was not only a product of rational company choice” and had to be understood within “the normalization of this culture of barbarism”.

⁷ For the Basque mining and steel industry, see González Portilla and Garmendia (1988), Pastor (2010) and Mendiola, (2010a); for the railway infrastructure, see Olaizola (2006), Quintero (2009a) and Mendiola (2011); for mountain roads see Mendiola and Beaumont (2006 and 2007) and Mendiola (2010a).

Albornoz, it is time for economic historians to deal with the economic logic of forced labour⁸. For this purpose we will have to answer some questions: the extent to which it was related to workforce supply problems; what kinds of profits it gave to private enterprises and the state; and what were the reasons, related to productivity levels, that led some enterprises to decide to continue with this system after 1940, while some others asked for the replacement of forced labourers with free ones.

The main goal of this paper is to help in answering all these questions, but, in any case, before trying to deal with them, it is necessary to present a brief overview of the way that kind of punishment was organized.

2. Organization of the Forced Labour System

After World War I discussions on forced labour in Europe were closely related to war policy and the evolution of criminal law. On the one hand, the experience of World War I showed that forced labour, although it involved some organizational and productive problems, could help solve some of the labour needs of the countries at war⁹. On the other hand, specialists on penal history have remarked that the triumph of the prison as the most important form of punishment in the contemporary age almost resulted in the disappearance in Europe of the old image of prisoners working on several tasks, but this did not completely suppress the idea of work as a “correctional” instrument for imprisoned persons¹⁰. Within this context, Oliver (2007) suggests that we can talk of some kind of “reinvention of punitive utilitarianism” to define the way in which the Francoist

⁸ Sánchez Albornoz (2003: 1089), one of the most prestigious Spanish economic historians, underlined that it is time for economic historians to do research on forced labour in a text where he analyses the construction of a fascist memorial monument, the so-called *Valle de los Caídos* monastery. In fact, he was one of the thousands of antifascist prisoners that worked there. More information about this construction and the work of prisoners there can be found in the books by Sueiro (1976) and Olmega (2009).

⁹ Since Davis's (1977) pioneering study pointed out the importance of prisoners of war in a war economy, several historians have studied this matter in depth. During World War II almost every country made use of them, although undoubtedly it was Japan and Germany that established larger systems (Spoerer, 2002: 170). In the German case, Herbert (1997: 13 - 26) has underlined the importance of the experience of World War I for the deployment of forced labour during World War II. Besides, the government of the Spanish II Republic also started deploying prisoners in work camps during the Spanish Civil War (Ruiz, 2009).

¹⁰ For a classic explanation about the making of the modern prison and punishment, and the abolition of former kinds of punishment, such as different kinds of labour, see Foucault (1994). Nonetheless, in some countries, like many southern states in the USA, the leasing of prisoners to private enterprises was not forbidden until 1908. Later on, in any case, the so-called “chain gang” was essential for the development and improvement of rural roads there (Lichtenstein, 1996). For the evolution of German prisons during the Weimar Republic in Germany, see Wachsmann (2004: 17 -64). Within a very different penal tradition, the nascent USSR used forced labour from the very beginning, (Gregory and Lazarev, 2004; Linden, 1997a). In Spain the liberal penal system maintained some kinds of tasks for prisoners during the nineteenth century, but this had almost fallen out of use by the start of the twentieth century (Burillo, 1999: 203 - 247; Oliver, 2007: 20-26). The colonial territories were, in any case, a significant exception. In Cuba an important discussion took place on the profitability of slavery up until 1880, and Spain was, in fact, one of the last countries to abolish this kind of labour (Piqueras, 2002). On the other hand, in Guinea, the Spanish rulers established in the early twentieth century the so called “*prestaciones*”, in order to ensure native labour for opening up roads or carrying different commodities (Nerín. 2008: 71 – 78).

regime combined a new rhetorical discourse (appealing to the Catholic concept of the redemption of sin) and old punitive practices to justify the creation of a forced labour network during the civil war and in the post-war years.

This forced labour system must be understood within the changing context of political repression carried out by the Francoist government during the war¹¹. In fact, it was not until the spring of 1937 when this system was organized¹². This was closely related to the change in the political and strategic use and organization of repression at the beginning of 1937, when the perspective of a long war replaced that of a swift and forceful coup d'état, while the number of prisoners of war was increasing every week, mainly with the Francoist advance on the Northern front. Thus, at this precise moment we can note an important effort to organize the repression. This involved abandoning the indiscriminate killings without trial, which were replaced by military trials and a classification of prisoners of war according to political criteria, based on the reports made by local authorities about them¹³.

Thus, it is in the spring of 1937 when several legal rules on forced labour were established. The first of these was the so-called decree on the “concession of the right to work to prisoners and prisoners of war” (25th March, 1937), which spelt out the way for the two most important varieties of work in captivity: one involving imprisoned people, related to the Justice Ministry, and the other involving prisoners of work battalions, which depended on the new legal structure of the concentration camps, the so-called ICCP (*Inspección de Campos de Concentración de Prisioneros* - Concentration Camp Inspectorate for Prisoners of War), where prisoners of war were classified according to their political or trade union activity¹⁴. In that same year, 1937, the first

¹¹ In the German case, war is also the key to understanding the great development of forced labour. In any case, this should not lead us to forget that different kinds of forced labour were put into practice before the war, such as the Reich Labour Service (Reichsarbeitsdienst) for unemployed people (Roth, 1997: 131 - 132; Herbert, 1997: 32 -33), the SS camps (Jaskot, 2000: 13 - 34; and Allen, 2002: 57-78), the segregated labour deployment for Jews (Gruner, 2006: 5-8), or prison labour (Wachsmann, 2004: 95 - 106).

¹² In any case, during the first months of the war we can find evidence of the use of informal and not legally ruled forced labour as a kind of punishment for the so-called “*guvernative*” (preventive) prisoners in jail (Vega, 2005a: 184, 486).

¹³ Around 100,000 persons were killed behind the lines during the war and some 40,000 more after the war. The main trends and data of repression can be consulted in the works by Rodrigo (2008) and Espinosa, (2010: 77 - 78). Although thousands of captives died or were killed working, this political extermination mostly occurred outside the forced labour system.

¹⁴ For detailed research on the Spanish concentration camps, see Rodrigo (2003 and 2005). In Germany there was also a plurality of forms of forced labour, with the concentration camps, controlled by the SS, prisoner-of-war camps, mainly controlled by the army, the Wehrmacht, and prisons under the civilian justice administration also (Herbert, 2002; Spoerer and Fleischhacker 2002a). Here the Concentration Camps Inspection was created in 1934, under the control of the SS, with exactly the same name as later in Spain, Inspektion der Konzentrationslager (Wachsmann, 2010: 124).

forced labour battalions (*Batallones de Trabajadores* - Workers' Battalions) were created, which included those prisoners of war who were neither released nor sent to jail for a military trial. Thus, this modality of forced labour, the most important during the war and in the post-war period, was organized for prisoners of war classified as “*Desafectos*” (hostile to the régime) or “*Adictos dudosos*” (of questionable loyalty to the fascist regime). These battalions were dissolved in 1940, one year after the war finished, and reorganized with half of their members, the youngest, who were incorporated into the new BDST (*Batallones Disciplinarios de Soldados Trabajadores* – Disciplinary Battalions of Worker-Soldiers). On the other hand, in 1938 the new Justice Ministry founded the *Sistema de Redención de Penas por el Trabajo* (System of Punishment Redemption through Work), created for men and women in jail, which could theoretically shorten their time in captivity thanks to work. Thus, with all these measures, the Francoist government created the legal framework for forced labour during the war and the post-war period¹⁵.

The main aim of these kinds of work was double, as emerges in almost all the measures mentioned: the economic purpose of obtaining a profit from people in captivity, and the political purpose of preparing them to live in a dictatorial context¹⁶. The second article of the Battalions Regulation is a good example of this double aspect, where the main aims are described as mixing economic purposes (compensation for prisoners' maintenance and reparation for war damages) with the “correction of the prisoner”:

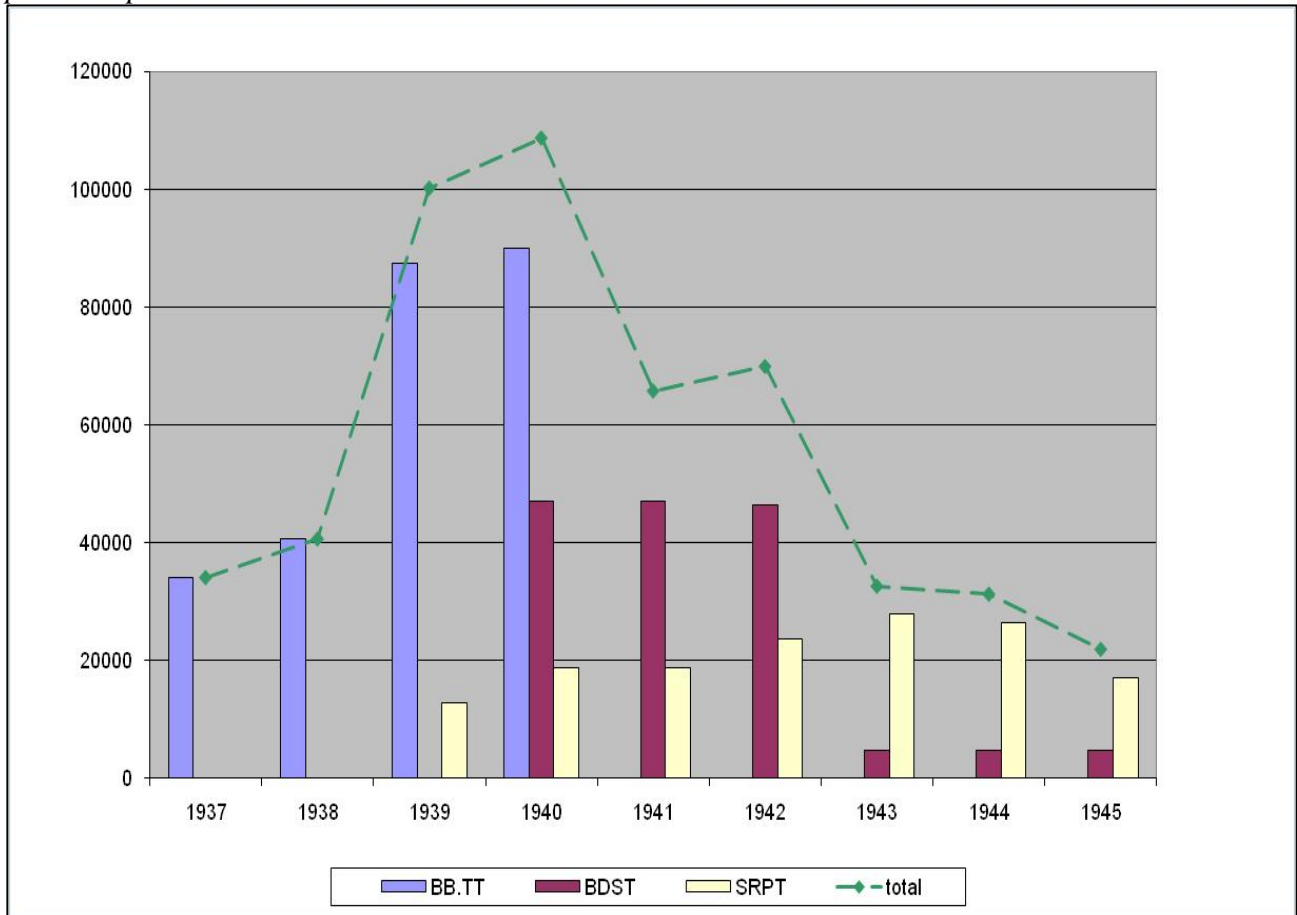
That of achieving the **correction** of the prisoner, providing him with the means and occasion to demonstrate his intentions and at every moment his degree of moral, patriotic and social rehabilitation, acquiring the habit of deep discipline, prompt obedience and respect for authority, precisely and very specially at work, as the prior and indispensable basis of his adaptation to the

¹⁵ The organization of the concentration camps during war and the classification of prisoners have been studied in depth by Rodrigo (2003 and 2005). Subsequent research by Barriuso (2006), Mendiola and Beaumont (2006), Monfort (2009) and Mathews (2010) has focused on the formation of Labour Battalions (BB.TT.). Post-war battalions (BDST) and the characteristics of their prisoners have been explained in depth by Beaumont and Mendiola (2004) and Mendiola and Beaumont (2006 and 2008). The special case of BDST (P) can be consulted in López Jiménez (2003). For the System of Punishment Redemption through Work, see mainly (Acosta et al., 2005) and Gómez (2008). Concerning this system there is also interesting research by Roldán (1988: 183 – 199), Cenarro (2003), Prada and Rodríguez (2003), Heredia (2006), and Quintero (2009b). In fact, although with important changes and in a declining way, work in prison was maintained under the System of Punishment Redemption created in 1938 until the change in the Penal Code in 1996. After the so-called Destacamentos Penales were cancelled in the sixties (Quintero, 2009b) and the Militarised Penitential Colonies Service in 1960 (Acosta et al, 2005: 94 - 101), prisoners work was made inside prisons, with several Prisons Workshops (Lorenzo Rubio, 2010 and 2011: 160 - 163).

¹⁶ This political purpose, in an agrarian and theoretical context, is also remarked upon by Brass (1997: 71 – 74, and 1999: 158 - 164), with the concept of deproletarianization, or by Roth, who includes forced labour amongst the variety of policies included in a process of “un-making” the German working class before World War II (Roth: 1997: 129 – 134).

social environment of the New Spain¹⁷.

Figure 1. *Quantity and modalities of forced labour under Francoism during the war and in the post-war period*



Source: Mendiola and Beaumont, 2006: 70

As can be seen in Figure 1, the total number of those involved in forced labour increased during the war and reached its peak (108,781) at the beginning of 1940, one year after the war ended, when prisoners of war battalions were still working, and the System of Punishment Redemption for people in jail continued to grow. After this time, this kind of repression evidently lost importance, with the dissolution of the post-war battalions (BDST) in December 1942, and the decline of prison labour from 1943 onwards. Thus, it is clear that most of the work was organized and carried out during the war, and that most of the forced labourers were included in the extra-judicial sphere, working in battalions that depended directly on the concentration camp structure¹⁸.

¹⁷ “Reglamento Provisional para el Régimen Interior de los Batallones de Trabajadores”, approved by Franco on December 23, 1938 (AGMA, CGG, 2, 155, 16). This double purpose, political and economic, also appears in other laws or decrees, such as the System of Punishment Redemption through Work (Boletín Oficial del Estado -BOE-, 1938, October 11) or the Militarised Penitential Colonies Service (BOE, 1939, September 17).

¹⁸ These two essential characteristics have also been described for Nazi Germany (Roth, 1997: 130 - 137; Herbert,

Nevertheless, once the war was over and the concentration camp directorate dissolved, forced labour did not end, but remained as a special kind of punishment for imprisoned persons.

If we analyse the data in Table 1, we can see what the use of work in captivity represented for the war economy¹⁹. Thanks to these figures, we can conclude that approximately half of the prisoners were posted to military tasks, mainly fortresses and service corps. The other half, on the contrary, was mainly used for transport infrastructure (roads, railway, bridges..) or for the reconstruction of civilian buildings in towns and villages, that is, construction tasks that, while many were related to war needs, had their own influence on the civilian economy after the war.

Table 1. *Kind of work carried out by prisoners of war in December 1938.*

	prisoners	%
Airports	2333	2.7
Railway infrastructure	6206	7.1
Mountain trails and roads	23530	26.9
Bridges	1463	1.7
Industry	1580	1.8
Mining industry	1320	1.5
Forestry works	298	0.3
Urban reconstruction	2064	2.4
TOTAL PUBLIC WORKS, MINING & INDUSTRY	38794	44.3
Fortresses	17797	20.3
Service corps and other military tasks	16691	19.1
Vehicles and war material recovery	6426	7,3
TOTAL MILITARY WORKS	40914	46.7
Unknown	7781	8.9
TOTAL	87489	100

Source: AGMA, CCG, 1, 46bis, 8 and AGMA, CCG, 1, 46bis, 9.

But this undoubtedly changed after the end of the war, when a lot of battalions were moved to the Pyrenees, and many of them started working on mountain roads²⁰. Thus, although it is

2000; and Spoerer and Fleischhacker, 2002a).

¹⁹ This table has been elaborated using the only two exact reports on the situation of every workers' battalion during the war, in December 1938 and January 1939. The situation could change from month to month, but I think this kind of "snapshot" provides us with a good approach to the distribution of prisoners of war at work. Even with such an exact list, we can see that the localisation of almost 9 % of prisoners was unknown.

²⁰ Exact data on the work done by each battalion in the Western Pyrenees and the respective dates can be found in Mendiola (2010a: 14 - 15). For the Eastern Pyrenees, see Clara (2007), Dueñas (2008), and Monfort (2009).

impossible for the time being to produce a table for the exact distribution of workers in the early 1940s, it can be said that the great majority worked on construction tasks, such as urban reconstruction, railways or hydrological infrastructure, such as reservoirs or irrigation channels, the Lower Guadalquivir Channel for example²¹.

3. Workforce Supply and Demand

Although the forced labour system was maintained and continued to grow after the war, there is no doubt that the birth of this kind of repression must be understood within the context of the war economy, at a time when the exceptional situation and the need of an efficient use of production factors led the fascist authorities to ensure the work force supply, within a general economic strategy of large-scale mobilization directed by the state, a kind of monopolistic capitalism in which the state is one of the main suppliers of labour power²². As a matter of fact, the war had a direct impact on the quantity and quality of the workforce, not only during war, but also during the post-war years, as has been pointed out by several historians like Nuñez (2003), Martín Aceña (2006) or Prados de la Escosura and Roses (2009a and 2009b)²³. Thus, one of the purposes of forced labour during the war was to supply the necessary workers so that strategic and militarised factories could keep on producing, and in the same way the state itself could obtain the necessary workforce for civilian or military tasks²⁴.

If we consider figure 2, we can see that the percentage of prisoners in the workforce was closely related to the war economy, although it never represented an important factor for ensuring global production during the war or in the post-war period, as happened in Germany, where different modalities of forced labourers reached around 40% of the total work force in 1942 - 1945²⁵. In any case, so as to better understand the economic logic of this kind of punishment, in

²¹ Acosta et al (2005: 43 – 49 and 65 – 75) have published a huge list of the works carried out within the System of Punishment Redemption after the war, but the authors observe that it needs to be completed with new documents that are not yet available. For the BDST, Mendiola and Beaumont (2006: 99 - 100) provide information about their location in 1942, but at present it is not possible to determine the exact task of each of them.

²² E. San Román (1999: 89 - 139) stresses that this kind of military organisation of the economy acquired importance in Europe during World War I, and that it was favourably viewed by some sectors of Spanish army.

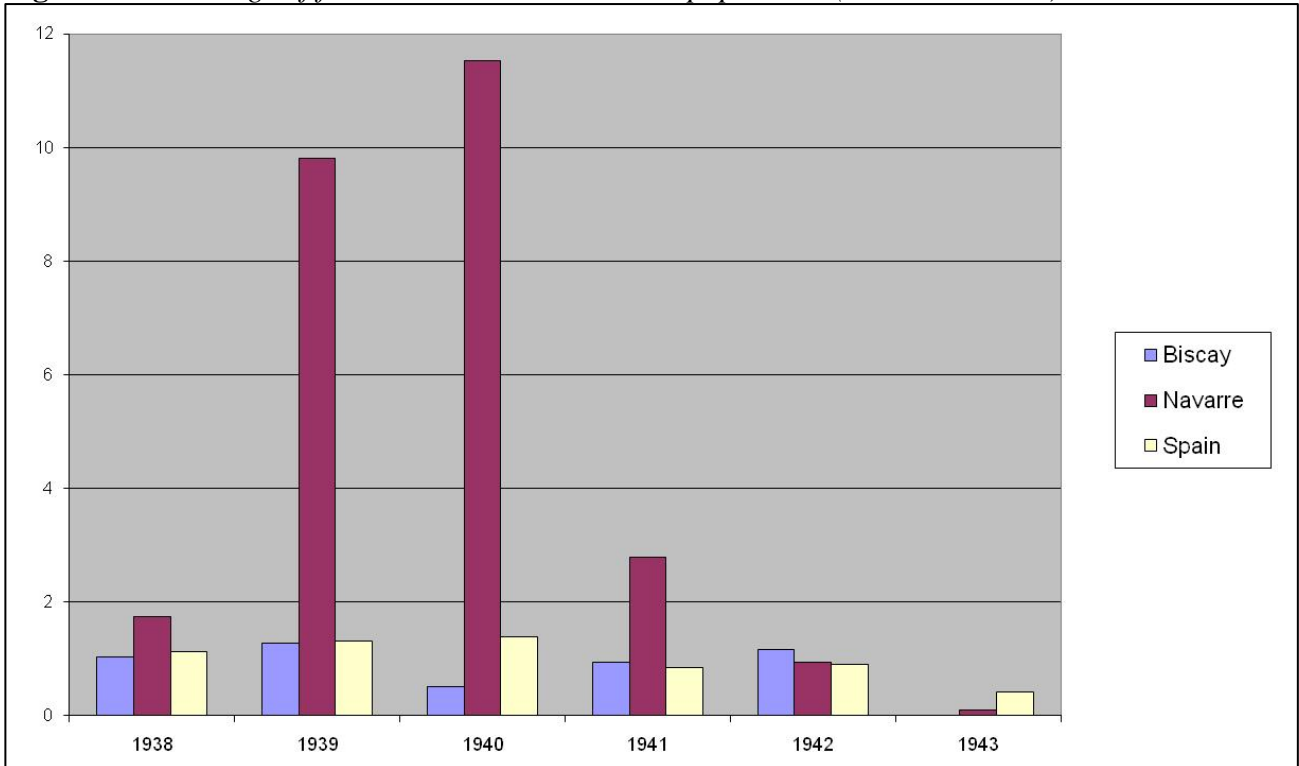
²³ Prados de la Escosura and Rosés (2009b: 27) have calculated the sharp decline in the total quantity of labour during the war and its rise in the early 1940s until 1943, when the total figure remains relatively stable until the start of the next decade.

²⁴ In the regulations for the deployment of prisoners, we can appreciate that sometimes there was some competition to obtain a profit from these workers, which made the state lay down some rules about what kind of tasks would be carried out by prisoners. In 1938, when the Redemption System was created, the 6th Article was clear about this question: “petitions for work by the State, the Provincial or the Local Councils will be chiefly attended to” (BOE 11 octubre 1938, 103, pg. 174)

²⁵ More than 7 million forced workers in 1944 were deployed in different branches of the German economy with several legal statuses. The main global figures on forced labourers, their classification and their percentage out of

figures 2 and 3 we have completed global percentages for those of two provinces and three economic sectors that have been researched in depth, and we can see that global trends must be understood according to the needs of specific sectors, such as mines, industry or construction²⁶.

Figure 2. *Percentage of forced labourers over active population (December 1940)*²⁷



Source: Data on forced workers in Biscay and Navarre (Mendiola, 2010), data on forced workers in Spain: Figure 1. Data on active population in December 1940, Census data.

First of all, we must underline the importance of prisoners in the restructuring of Basque iron mining after the fall of Biscay to the Francoist army in June 1937. At that precise moment it was of strategic importance for the military government to ensure a fast growth of production in mines and factories, and the shortage of workers, especially skilled ones, is mentioned

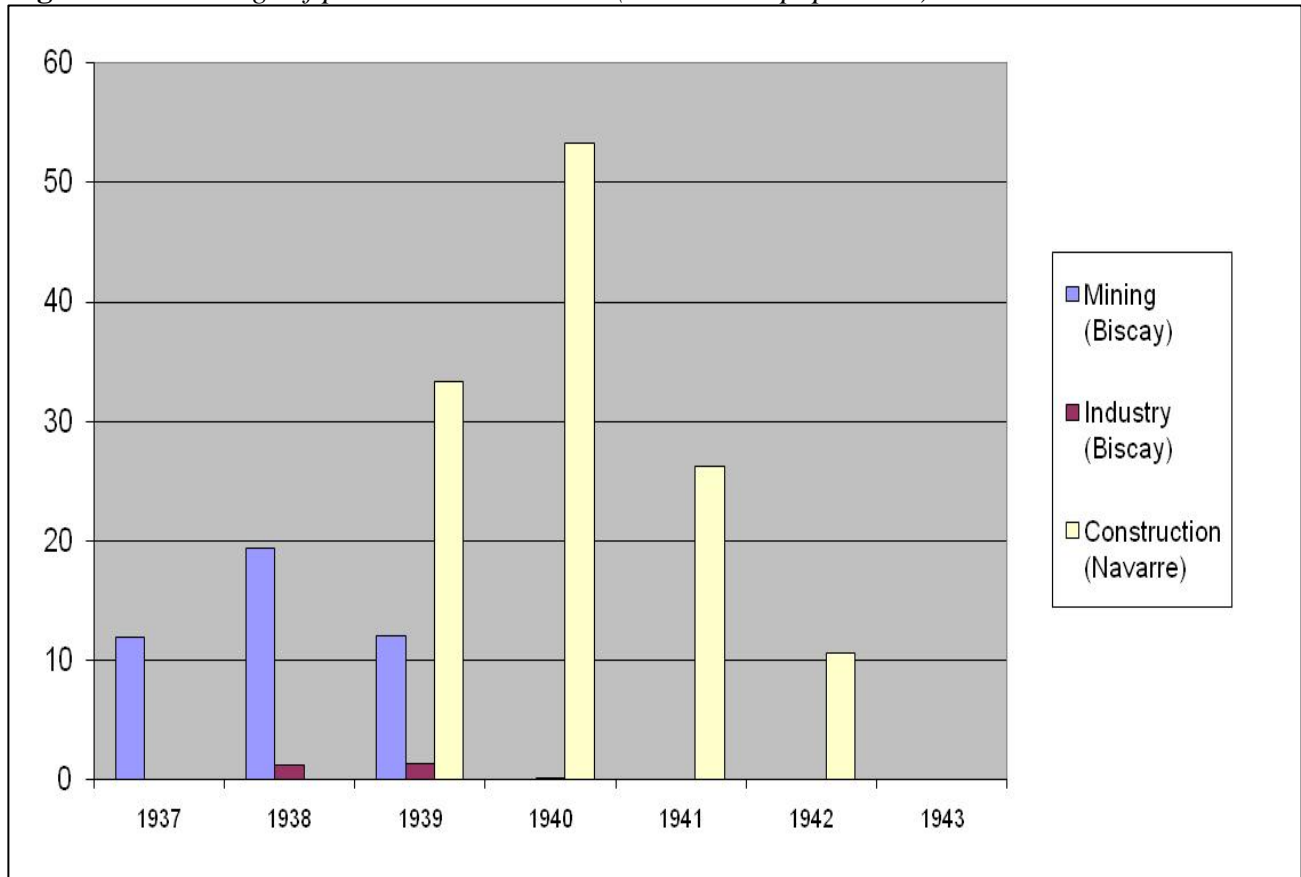
the total workforce have been calculated by Herbert (1997, 2000), Roth (1997: 132, 137), and Spoerer and Fleischhacker (2002a). In the end, there was a growing and essential contradiction between the needs of the war economy and racial policy, with important tension developing between an economically oriented sector (headed by Speer, Minister of Armaments and Industry from February 1942) and some other leaders of the Nazi party (mainly the Security Head Office, RSHA), which did not like the massive use of foreign workers inside Germany, mainly from 1942 onwards; this has been emphasized by Gregor, who explains “the growing incompatibility of productivist and racist goals” (1998: 165), Hayes (1987: 319-320), Herbert (1997: 387 – 389), Kotkin (2000: 187 – 189), Mazower (2008: 395 - 427), and Buggeln (2009: 620-625), who remarks the need of researching the economic logic of subcamps. See also Speer’s own explanation (1969: 439 - 454)

²⁶ For a detailed description of the use of forced labour in the different Basque sectors, see Mendiola, (2010a).

²⁷ Logically, exact data on the active population for every year is not available. So I have used that of December 1940 (census data) to calculate percentages. This approach, surely the best that can be made at present, does not take into account changes in the active population from year to year, mainly for the war period, when these forced labourers were only located in the regions occupied by Franco’s army.

as an important problem, together with the mention of prisoners as the best means for resolving it²⁸. In any case, we must bear in mind that the deployment of prisoners of war in these iron mines did not reach even one-third of the projected figures. Furthermore, what was to be an important experiment for the running of coal mines in another province, Asturias, did not find any meaningful continuity there²⁹.

Figure 3. *Percentage of prisoners over sectors (active male population)*



Source: Mendiola, 2010.

Although a shortage in the workforce was reported as one of the main problems of the iron industry in Biscay following its occupation by the fascist faction, the big factories did in fact manage to increase their personnel with a very low percentage of forced labourers. In fact, in contrast to mining, where most of the employed prisoners had no previous qualification in that kind

²⁸ For the workforce shortage in Basque industry and mines after the fascist occupation and the help given by entrepreneurs to the new authorities, see González Portilla and Garmendia (1988: 101 – 133), Pastor (2010: 25 - 32) and Mendiola, (2010a).

²⁹ Apart from the battalion that worked in the mines in Biscay, only one other was formed during war, BB.TT. 2, stationed in Peñarroya (Córdoba) (AGMA, CCG, 1, 46bis, 9.). After the war, more than one thousand forced labourers worked in mines in Albacete, Burgos, Ciudad Real, Asturias, León, Lleida, Murcia, Ourense, Pontevedra and Teruel (Acosta et al., 2005: 65 – 74; Terrón, 2007, and Rodríguez Teijeiro, 1999). Nonetheless, the percentages of captive workers in mines are much lower than in mining in the Rhur in Germany, where almost one-third of the workers were unfree (Herbert, 1997: 240).

of work, the presence of captive workers in Basque industry has to be understood as a selective strategy that was aimed at obtaining qualified workers who were difficult to find on the labour market³⁰.

The shortages in the workforce in Basque mines and industries is closely related to another important factor in the composition of labour markets, that is, gender values and women's participation, something that has been underlined by the historiography on forced labour in Germany. In fact, although some enterprises asked for women to fill the gap in the workforce due to the recruitment of young males, the Nazi regime ruled out this way of solving the problem, mainly because it was afraid of the problems that might arise in family life and in volunteer social services³¹. In Biscay, and nowhere else in Spain as far as we know, there is no mention of the possibility of solving the problem with the deployment of women, something that would have gone against gender values enforced by the new regime³².

Another special branch of activity where there was a serious problem of lack of workers was in the railway infrastructure. In the context of the war, both the maintenance of already existing railways and the opening of double tracks were essential for the mobilization of military units³³. In this situation, the lack of workers was an important problem, mainly for ensuring the availability of railway infrastructure as soon as possible, a problem that was in large measure solved

³⁰ In fact, the percentage of captive workers was quite low even for the industries in which prisoners were deployed. In Biscay the enterprise that deployed most prisoners was S.E. Construcción Naval Astilleros de Sestao y Nervión, with 229 forced labourers, some 13.4% of the workforce (Mendiola, 2010a: 14). Nonetheless, in the case of smaller factories, lower figures may be indicative of a greater dependence on forced labour crucial for the survival of the enterprise, and further research will be needed. For general trends in Spanish industrial production during the civil war, see Catalán (2009). As pointed out, percentages were much higher in German industries (Herbert, 1997: 205 – 238).

³¹ The importance of gender values has been noted by several historians, analyzing the opposed opinions on this of enterprise managers, who were asking for German women, and the Nazi government, which was wary about its consequences (Herbert, 1997: 387 -392; Gregor, 1998: 153 – 156; Hayes, 341-342). Paradoxically, in 1942, the Justice Ministry requested that imprisoned women should carry out the same tasks as men (Walchsmann: 2004: 231).

³² In Spain, prison labour for women was based on gender values (Fernández Holgado and Gastón, 1997: 110:114). In fact, the order creating the System of Punishment Redemption and the Civil Code reform that restricted the civilian and labour rights of married women were signed during the war, in 1938, by the same Justice Minister, T. Domínguez Arévalo (Mendiola, 2010c: 41 – 56). Different gender values that arose in the civil war have been analysed by several historians, such as Nash (2009) or Di Febo (2003). The latter underlines the special influence of the Catholic church in the shape and rhetoric of Spanish fascist discourse on female domesticity. This discourse, in any case, must be understood within labour market formation in the long term, during industrialization, with a clear tendency toward masculinisation in Spain from the end of nineteenth century that went unbroken until late Francoism (Mendiola, 2002; Borderías and Pérez Fuentes, 2009).

³³ Military geographer Cañete San Juan (1936) had already remarked, before the war began, on the strategic importance of the double track on the main railways. At the same time, the war meant a significant increase in railway traffic that quite seriously affected the situation of private enterprises; this has been studied by Cayón García and Muñoz Rubio (2009).

thanks to the deployment of thousands of prisoners, as we have seen in table 1. Even when the war was over, this lack of workers continued to pose a problem for swift reconstruction and for progress to be made on the double tracks that had already been started, as can be seen in different letters between the MZA Company and the Chief of the National Military Service in April 1939, where mention is made of “the scarcity of our own workers that we have been able to gather”, and of the need for prisoner of war battalions “to get the works done at the fastest rate possible”³⁴.

In any case, this focus on the supply and demand of labour must involve analysis not only at the level of the state, but also at the local and regional levels, since forced labour could be a useful means of ensuring the movement of workers to less populated places, where the local population could hardly carry out the required tasks; the Pyrenees mountains are a good example of this³⁵. As we can see in table 2, the local population was simply insufficient for opening the required roads in those mountains, and there is no doubt that enormous efforts and good wages would have been needed to ensure the movement of free workers to such isolated places, and for them to work and live in such hard conditions.

Table 2. *Ratio between prisoners working on mountain roads (in BDST Battalions) and the civilian population of some villages in the Navarran Pyrenees. December, 1940.*

	Civilian population	prisoners	Ratio (prisoners / population)
Lesaka	2285	969	42.4
Igal	121	592	489.3
Vidángoz	292	310	106.2
Roncal	494	274	55.5

Source: Mendiola, 2010, and Census data

4. A Good Opportunity for Huge Capital Gains

Another important question for economic historians concerns the profits involved in such kinds of repression. Sánchez Albornoz pointed to this challenge when he explained his own experience of some months in a Penal Detachment: “*The forced labour of the prisoners represented*

³⁴ Letter from an engineer of the MZA Company (Compañía Madrid, Zaragoza, Alicante) to the Director (1939, April, 16th). Fundación de los Ferrocarriles Españoles, Archivo Histórico Ferroviario (AHF), C - 0395 – 005, (Mendiola, 2011).

³⁵ The suitability of forced labour for this kind of territory has also been observed in the former Soviet Union. In this case, Linden (1997a: 362) expresses very clearly: “*it was a very cheap way of mobilizing labour in regions and economic sectors where free wage labourers could only have been attracted with great difficulty, (and if successful, for very high wages)*”.

a crude accumulation of capital for the construction companies of Francoism, (...) Business, then, at two points, the state and the companies, with a single payer: the prisoner” (2003: 1088 – 1089). Moreover, profits resulting from forced labour have formed the subject of research for historians in some other countries, like Germany, and it is necessary to distinguish here between profits for private enterprises and profits for the state itself, or even for one of its administrations³⁶.

In order to proceed with this question, we must explain the way in which enterprises, and the state itself, obtained prisoners’ labour in Spain. The first decree on forced labour, in May 1937, regulated this question, and established some criteria that would remain in force, with some changes, over the following decades. The first of these is the idea that forced labourers would, theoretically, earn some kind of wage. So, the amount of profit would depend on the way the wages to be paid were divided up. In this decree we find that prisoners should earn a minimum wage of 2 pesetas, (0.5 to be paid in hand, and 1.5 that would be designated for his maintenance). If he had a wife and children, the family could obtain some extra wages (2 more pesetas for the wife, and 1 more peseta for each son or daughter under 15 years), although the final amount could never be higher than the average wage in the village where the prisoner was working. Some months later, the Workers’ Battalions Rule established some changes in this kind of forced labour. In this case, the wage was also of 2 pesetas, divided in a different way (1.65 pesetas for maintenance, 0.25 to be paid in hand, and 0.10 pesetas for extra needs)³⁷. These rules for prisoners of war were quite similar to those for imprisoned men and women, which were included in the order of the Ministry of Justice that created the *Patronato de Redención de Penas por el Trabajo*. In this order the break down of the wage mentioned in decree of 1937 is maintained, and it also regulated the use of prisoners by private enterprises; in this case the latter “would pay the whole wage to the National Prisons Service”. The latter should take responsibility for the maintenance cost of the prisoners, the payment to the prisoners’ families, and the remainder should be sent to the State Treasury³⁸.

³⁶ Whatever the reasons that led enterprises to deploy forced labourers (and, as we have seen, historians do not agree about these) there is no doubt that during the war most of them obtained huge profits from that kind of workforce (for IG Farben, see Hayes, 2001: 325 - 331). On the other hand, the benefits for the state were not only economic. In some cases this power was used by some of the institutions, like the SS, to gain political influence thanks to the economic control of growing enterprises, like DEST (German Earth and Stone Works, created in 1938) (Jaskot, 2002: 12 - 22). Moreover, forced labour was also used to strengthen some public administrations, such as the case of senior officers of the Justice Ministry, who tried to justify and improve their situation with manipulated statistics about the good results of prison labour (Wachsmann, 2004: 233-4). In Spain, differences between different sectors of the regime appeared clearly in 1957, during the debate on the suppression of the so-called Militarised Penitentiary Colonies, although few prisoners were working in them at that time (Acosta et al, 2005: 94 - 101).

³⁷ 2 peseta were to be spent every month on shoes and material, although this was clearly insufficient, as we can read in some military documents (AGMA, CGG, 2, 155, 10).

³⁸ BOE, 11 de octubre de 1938, nº 103. Orden del Ministerio de Justicia. There was a great difference between legal

Hence, it is easy to see that the State itself was the main beneficiary of that kind of repression, on occasions as an employer, and at other times by hiring out workers. In the first case, there is little doubt about the benefits provided by this kind of worker: although the state was obliged to cover some of the costs of maintaining the working prisoners (such as food, lodging, control...), it is obvious that these costs were lower than what the state would have been obliged to pay in salaries for the works carried out. In the second case, the state rented out the workforce and obtained significant profits from this³⁹. Calculation of the total amount of these profits is another goal for economic history, but thanks to some local research that has already been published on the Basque mining industry, we know that the total profits for the state were between 50% and 60% of the wages paid by enterprises⁴⁰.

On the other hand, the profit margin for private enterprises renting prisoners from the state was clearly lower, as these enterprises had to pay the minimum wage of their locality to the workers, (except for a part designated for the workers' maintenance, and a small part to be paid to them in hand)⁴¹. In any case, enterprises had some special ways for obtaining an extra profit from this kind of worker. One of them was to directly ignore the rules about that kind of payment. This was more difficult within the System of Punishment Redemption for imprisoned men and women, but in other cases, like the prisoners of war in the BB.TT. it was easier. One clear example of this is the MZA railway company, which for many months did not obey the regulation about payment for the renting of prisoners. It simply ignored this, and when it was required to pay, complaints began to be made⁴². Besides this, Nicolás Sánchez Albornoz reminds us that in some cases (the construction of the *Valle de los Caídos* monastery, for example) companies paid lower wages to prisoners than to free labourers, "one third, or more, less than the wage of a free worker" (Sánchez Albornoz, 2003: 1088). Because of the good opportunities for increasing profits with forced labour, Sánchez Albornoz remarks that this kind of capital accumulation can be regarded, in a certain way, as

provisions and reality in the question of payment to forced workers' families. In the case of Labour Battalions depending on the Concentration Camps Inspectorate, oral testimonies tell us this simply never existed (Mendiola and Beaumont, 2006). In the case of the post-war System of Punishment Redemption, this was not always implemented (Acosta et al, 2005: 214 - 216), and even when it was the local administration often created difficulties for the payment to the families, as has been shown for Segovia province in the research of Vega (2005b: 124).

³⁹ This is also the case of Germany, where different administrations, such as the Wehrmacht, the prisons (Wachsmann, 2004: 234) and the SS (Allen, 2002: ; Hayes, 2001: 352) made a profit from renting out forced labourers.

⁴⁰ According to the planning provisions of September 1937, it would be 50.3 % of what the companies would pay (AGMA, CGG, 1, 57, 42). Real payments in 1938 were quite close to the estimations, with profits of some 55.3% for the state (Pastor, 2010: 74). Some other official estimations for the System of Punishment Redemption note that 65% of the payment made by companies was direct profit for the state (Acosta et al, 2004: 61).

⁴¹ According to the cited decree, the salary should be just the same as the basic salary in the locality where work was carried out.

⁴² For further details, see Mendiola, (2011).

primitive (2010: 86).

Another way of increasing profits for all those who were managing forced labour (private enterprises, army officers or public administration workers) was the opportunity to earn quite a lot of money thanks to corruption and the black market in food and clothing, the so-called “*estraperlo*”. In fact, the black market was an economic mechanism for capital accumulation in post-war Spain⁴³, and we must bear in mind that the reproduction costs of forced labourers represented a good opportunity for private businesses, especially for those administrators or companies more interested in obtaining fast private profits than in the efficiency of the tasks carried out by prisoners. Thus, this problem held a direct relationship with the accountability of the battalions, which had to be reformulated in to cover up the real destination of a great deal of the food and clothes that were to be used by prisoners. In this case, oral testimonies are essential to a proper understanding of administrative documents, because the latter were seldom managed by prisoners⁴⁴. One special case was that of N. Sánchez Albornoz, who years later became one of the most relevant economic historians in Spain, and he also warns us about their lack of veracity:

“One of my duties consisted in drawing up a daily menu (...) In the months when I elaborated it I never had to consult the cook, nor did I set foot in the store. It was a question of a theoretical exercise to meet an administrative requirement.” (Sánchez Albornoz, 2003: 1089 -1090).

In any case, if we want to consider the real effect of forced labour, and also its real influence on enterprise strategies, we must bear in mind that changes in the labour market, new salaries and labour conditions were also fundamental in understanding the extent to which the deployment of captive workforce was the best option for the enterprise. If we want to deal in depth with what Spoerer has called a cost-benefit analysis, we have to consider the opportunity costs of using forced labour, and also the output obtained with it. That is, on the one hand, it is necessary to take into account the great fall in real salaries during the war and in the post-war period due to the labour policy of Franco's government (Vilar: 2004)⁴⁵, and, on the other, we have to deal with one of

⁴³ As has been pointed out by González Portilla and Garmendia (2003: 237-260) or Del Arco Blanco (2010: 65 - 78) amongst other historians.

⁴⁴ Some reports by the Concentration Camp Directorate in 1942 about the lack of credibility of the internal accountancy of battalions are analysed in Mendiola and Beaumont (2008: 20 - 25). For a specific black market during road construction in the Pyrenees, see Mendiola and Beaumont (2006: 262 – 267), where we can read the testimony of Luis Ortiz Alfau, captive in the BDST 38, who worked as a clerk in the battalion. Some other cases can be found in the memories of another forced worker in Araba and Navarre (Arenal, 1999: 104 - 110).

⁴⁵ According to Vilar (2004: 97 - 105), the post-war decrease in real salaries in Spain was around 30%. In the Basque iron industry and mining, real salaries between 1936 and 1941 fell by 55.1%, and 82.4% if we take into account black market prices reported by the local Chamber of Commerce (González Portilla and Garmendia, 1988:182). In this context, forced labour was not a necessary condition for increasing profit rates during the war and in the post-war period, in spite of economic stagnation (Portilla and Garmendia, 1998: 134 - 139; Lorenzo Espinosa, 1989: 106

the main subjects of debate concerning forced labour, that of productivity levels.

5. Productivity Counts – on Occasion.

Before dealing with productivity levels in the forced labour system, it is necessary to recall that during the first years of Franco's dictatorship abovementioned rise in profits was compatible with a loss of productivity⁴⁶. In fact, this is the context in which some enterprises and the state itself decided to use forced labourers, an option closely related to the choice between capital intensive strategies or labour intensive ones⁴⁷. To put it differently, when was it especially profitable for enterprises to use forced labour? After all, productivity also mattered on occasion, and this was closely related to some of the essential features of forced labour: such as food and state of health, the workers' political attitude and resistance strategies, choices for training, deployment of prisoners in tasks they were not qualified for or accustomed to, the costs of controlling captive workers and the qualification of the political or military managers of forced labour⁴⁸. As we will see in the following pages, such kinds of factors led some Spanish enterprises to disregard forced workers after the war, and to manage with free ones, while others kept on taking advantage of that kind of punitive policy.

First of all, we must take account of the physical state of extreme weakness amongst forced workers⁴⁹. Hunger appears in almost every oral interview⁵⁰ and also in some military

- 107). For a global explanation of labour market changes in post-war Spain, see Soto Carmona (2003).

⁴⁶ GDP per hour worked fell (Prados de la Escosura, 2009b: 26) to below pre-war levels, and no improvement in labour quality (improvements in labour skill) was achieved until the 1950s (Prados de la Escosura, 2009a: 1079). This low productivity, directly related to economic policy, is also one of the keys to understanding the especially slow recovery of the Spanish economy after the war (Catalán, 2003, and Martín Aceña, 2006).

⁴⁷ Spoerer (2005: 548), for the German case, remarks that companies had little room for manoeuvre in deciding about the deployment of forced labour, but considerable scope concerning their working and living conditions, and this latter question implied the choice of one or another model. In some companies, like Daimler-Benz, the choice of labour intensive processes took place especially where the availability of cheap prisoners seemed endless, before 1942, and when the perspectives of defeat in the war were not an incentive for fixed capital investments or for training prisoners (Gregor, 1998: 176 - 203).

⁴⁸ Different estimations have been made about the differential productivity of free and unfree labour in Nazi Germany. The Daimler-Benz company calculated that a foreigner worker's productivity was about 70 or 80% of a free worker's (Gregor, 1998: 189 - 190). The internal company figures of the Krupp factories also show these differences in November 1942, and management reports explain the lower productivity of Eastern workers as being due to a deficient diet and insufficient clothing (Herbert, 1997: 225). In Dortmund, the Mining Authority noted that "*physical weakness is the main reason for this extraordinary low productivity level amongst Russian prisoners of war*" (Herbert, 1997: 309). Although wages were different according to ethnic classification, unfree labour was reported inside the company as being more expensive and less productive (Herbert: 1997: 299 - 300). In another metal industry, nevertheless, (DEW, in Krefeld), productivity levels reached the 100% of German free workers in December 1943, mainly thanks to a good training practice and provision of good food rations (Herbert, 1997: 300). In any case, this historian remarks that some other aspects, such as the possibility of enforcing the disciplinary regime or getting workers for especially hard works (such as installing factories underground) were much easier to develop with forced labourers (Herbert, 1997: 306 - 307).

⁴⁹ One of the reasons for this deplorable situation, linked to the low incomes received by workers, is that the forced

documentation, closely linked to low productivity. For example, the so-called *General Jefe de la Junta de Defensa y Armamento de los Pirineos Occidentales* wrote a report about the low productivity of 38 BDST, working on the road from Oiartzun (Gipuzkoa) to Lesaka (Navarre), in 1942, explaining that “one of the reasons may be the deficiency of food”⁵¹. Besides, the food situation, problems of lodging and hygiene, and the lack of clothes appear not only in oral interviews, but also in inspection reports of the Army Ministry, such as those for 28 and 29 BDST, working on Santiago de Compostela airport, where inspection reports about the prisoners state that “a lot of have to go to work completely barefoot”⁵².

Apart from this question, it is obvious that ideological factors and resistance strategies were also important for understanding the lower productivity of work in captivity. This happened during the war, but the will to create difficulties for the regime did not disappear following its conclusion, when thousands of prisoners were working on roads or railways. One of the later prisoners, Isaac Arenal, working in Jubera (Soria), describes their situation and their strategy at work as follows:

The food was scarce and bad, practically only potatoes and water, but on the contrary they wanted the work to be productive, so we tacitly began to carry out passive resistance (...) The truth of the matter is that – according to the estimations for production made by the RENFE technicians – the work was only advancing at a rate of 25%. (Arenal, 1999: 87-88)

In order to counter this attitude, efforts were sometimes made to increase productivity

labour system has to internalise all kinds of reproduction costs of the workforce (lodging, food, hygienic measures...) that are externalised to families under Fordist capitalism. Although externalised care is proportionally cheaper because of the use of unpaid female work inside the family unit, they need a minimum investment (linked to the so-called family wage) that was not necessary if reproduction costs are assumed by the state or companies. This latter option was cheaper in the short term, and even gave way to extra gains through the black market, but it reduced the physical condition of the workforce, and, as a result, the quality of that kind of work, as has been noted by different scholars (Carrasco, 2006). A good example is that of the Basque mining industry (in this case the enterprises had to take care of these tasks), where there were complaints on more than one occasion that the costs of suitable food and lodging were higher than what was stipulated by the cited forced labour regulation and that companies were able to provide (Pastor, 2010: 69 - 78). In the same mining enterprises, the shift from “enterprise barracks” to family households and the “lodging system” in family households in the early twentieth century was also (without dismissing class struggle) a consequence of the need for cheap care labour carried out by women (Perez-Fuentes, 2004: 45 – 51).

⁵⁰ For the alimentary situation of prisoners of war working in the BDST (contrasting official inspection reports and oral testimonies), and especially on mountain roads in the Pyrenees, see Mendiola and Beaumont (2006: 129 – 143). More information about this can be found in several research works (Acosta et al, 2004; 217 - 223) and forced labourers' memoirs (Arenal, 1999; Barajas, 2009; Padín, 2009), in which different strategies emerge to solve the problem (night time breakouts, thefts, exchanges of clothes or labour material...) as well as the importance of family relief, mainly carried out by women.

⁵¹ Pamplona, 1942, January, 25th. AGMA, Organización Defensiva del Pirineo, Caja 3572, 169.

⁵² “Visitas de Inspección: Bones. Trabajadores 2ª, 5ª, 7ª y octava Regiones, Baleares, Canarias y Marruecos”. AGMA, Ministerio del Ejército, caja 20.904. For the clothing situation on the Pyrenees roads, see Mendiola and Beaumont, 2006: 149 – 155).

by offering some economic incentives, such as extra earnings. In the Spanish case, the main incentive was overtime, since forced labourers working for private enterprises could obtain some additional direct payment in this way, something that has been demonstrated for Cuelgamuros monastery or the Lower Guadalquivir Channel⁵³. In any case, this was only put into practice in private enterprises, while there is no information on monetary incentives in battalions directed by the army. Besides this, the problem of the lack of qualifications and specific incentives for training was present in work in captivity. This has been broadly emphasised in the historiography on forced labour throughout the twentieth century. According to Herbert, the experience of forced labour in World War I showed that “*the greater the percentage of skilled labour involved, the more difficult it was to achieve high productivity by coercion*” (1997: 24). This problem also appeared in Germany during Nazi rule as a contradictory factor, because these kinds of incentive or investment in training often resulted in lower profits for the employer, mainly in the short term, although it could be useful for increasing productivity in the long term.

Another problem pointed out in several studies on forced labour is the permanent tension between control and productivity. Work in captivity involves important costs to ensure that workers cannot escape, that is, an investment in fixed capital and in other kinds of workers, such as soldiers, prison officers, policemen... Naturally, these costs were only profitable when the number of prisoners and the capital gain per worker was high enough to compensate for investment in security, and that was closely related to the management of large groups of prisoners. Thus, the greater the requirement for decentralization and specialization of workers, the more expensive and less profitable the employment of forced labourers became⁵⁴.

But the workers' situation was not the only source of problems for forced labour

⁵³ For the Guadalquivir Channel, (Acosta et al, 2005: 216). Sánchez Albornoz (2010: 79) has remarked that he could see the combination of carrot and stick: incentives and threats to send forced labourers back to prison, where they had less freedom and could get no extra earnings. Following a comparative model established by Fenoltea (1984), Sánchez Albornoz suggests that although legal slavery was not implemented under Francoism, the two main models of management of slavery, (one less qualified and more intensive in work, and a second that involved more chances of obtaining qualification and extra incentives for forced labour) took place in the Spanish forced labour system, and he identifies the System of Redemption with the second (2010: 90 – 91). This need for incentives proved to be fundamental in order to increase productivity in the forced labour system in Nazi Germany. Herbert (1997: 300 – 313) provides several examples of improving productivity thanks to training prisoners, not only in the metal sector, but in mining as well, although much less in the latter.

⁵⁴ This continuous tension between security and work has also been underlined by researchers on the Gulags or the German lagers, and also emerges several times as a serious problem in Spain, where sometimes the difficulties and punishment if recaptured after escaping, including immediate execution, acted as a more effective deterrent against escapes than the specific quotidian conditions, which were really difficult for the authorities to control. This has been pointed out by Olmeda (2009: 99-135), for the *Valle de los Caídos* Monastery, and by Mendiola and Beaumont (2006: 221 - 235), for the Labour Battalions. For similar questions in Nazi Germany, see Herbert (1997: 326 - 358), and for the Soviet Gulag system, see Gregory and Lazarev (2007).

profitability. In the case of the army, which controlled most of the forced labourers until 1942, in the documentation it is easy to find some important problems concerning management and the low qualification of officers, and also about the low number of the latter in many works, specially in those far from cities or towns, such as mountain villages. Even during the war this problem was reported by inspectors, and the situation did not improve in a significant way in its aftermath. On the contrary, it was difficult to find qualified officers for that kind of military unit, as we can see in several of the inspection reports for 1942, mention is made of different problems leading to a situation in which “productivity can be low and barely efficient”, due to the “low culture possessed by Chiefs and Captains in general”⁵⁵, or the “lack of attitude in many of them”⁵⁶.

In this context, we can see that some kinds of enterprises were not especially interested in the deployment of captives. It is quite significant that the low presence of captive workers in some industries tended to disappear in the first years of the post-war period, when the workforce shortage was over and low salary policies were consolidated. Moreover, we can also note the decline of that kind of repression thanks to the documents of some enterprises that call for the replacement of captive workers by free ones. One example of this is given by the mining enterprises in Biscay, the majority of which call for the withdrawal of the battalions in a context – the autumn of 1939 – of an abundance of workers and a shortage of demand for iron (Pastor, 2010: 78 -80). A different case is provided by the railway enterprises, such as the MZA Company. Here, one of the reasons that altered the profitability of that kind of worker was the order to obey the regulation on the payment for renting prisoners⁵⁷. Company documentation clearly shows us that captive work had a special function when a lot of workers were required, but after the urgent reconstruction works were finished there was a serious intention to dispense with them⁵⁸. One of the best examples of this intention is a letter from the director of the company to the *Coronel Jefe del Servicio Militar de Ferrocarriles*, explaining the reasons why they had to request the withdrawal of prisoners from the company’s works:

“It should be borne in mind, besides, that due to the peculiar characteristics of the workers who make up

⁵⁵ Batallones nº 4, 5, 13, 20, 24, 25, 26, 31, 32, 33, 45, 53. AGMA, Ministerio del Ejército, caja 20.904.

⁵⁶ Informe de la 4ª Región Militar. Batallones nº 19,42,43 y 48. “Visitas de Inspección: Bones. Trabajadores 2ª, 5ª, 7ª y octava Regiones, Baleares, Canarias y Marruecos”. AGMA, Ministerio del Ejército, caja 20.904.

⁵⁷ AHF, C - 0395 – 005. Different factors for the changing opinion of the MZA company about deploying prisoners are explained in depth in Mendiola (2011).

⁵⁸ This shows us the complexity of the classic debate about the profitability of forced labour and company preferences about it in a context without war. In fact, in several cases differing from the fascist context, such as slavery in the southern USA before the civil war (Fogel, 1995 -1974-: 191-209) or the work of prisoners in the same area (Lichtenstein, 1996), unfree labour has been reported to be efficient and to achieve huge profits for private enterprises.

those Battalions, (...) the average productivity per individual is considerably lower than that of a free worker, which means that, bearing in mind the working days established by the cited regulations, the works have a cost price that is much higher than the corresponding work done on contract (...)⁵⁹

In any case, this kind of strategy should not lead us to think that all enterprises chose the same path. As pointed out above, forced labour continued during the 1940s, and several construction tasks, such as work on transport infrastructure (airports or railways) or on hydraulic works (dams or channels), were carried out by thousands of captive workers, with a close connection existing between the Justice Ministry and private companies. This only shows that further research is needed, especially for the time when the Concentration Camp Headquarters disappeared in 1942, and thousands of prisoners were still deployed by private construction firms to carry out public works paid for by the state⁶⁰.

Moreover, some of these construction enterprises that made use of forced labourers were later to be numbered amongst the most important in Spain. A good example is that of Banús, a small family enterprise that began in the Cuelgamuros Monastery and became one of the most important construction enterprises in the tourist area known as the Coast of the Sun. In addition, two of the larger construction enterprises in 1977, Entrecanales and Dragados y Construcciones, had used forced labourers during the war or in the post-war period, and even today form part of two powerful groups, Acciona and ACS, respectively⁶¹.

6. Conclusions

The deployment of forced labour in Franco's Spain must be understood in a dynamic perspective, with special attention paid to the different factors that encouraged its use or made it difficult, such as the political and economic conjuncture and enterprise strategies. Without ignoring its political function, in this article I have focused on economic variables to provide a better explanation of its changing logic. Nonetheless, we should not forget that this repressive practice must be understood within the context of fascist rule in Spain and the state's intervention in the labour market, which was characterized by strict regulation and by one of the most repressive attacks on the labour movement in Western Europe.

⁵⁹ AHF, C - 0395 – 005. Carta del 12 de enero de 1940 del Director de MZA al Coronel Jefe del Servicio Militar de Ferrocarriles. Further explanation about changes in MZA labour policy can be found in Mendiola (2011).

⁶⁰ Research on the Lower Guadalquivir Channel (Acosta et al, 2005), and there is some further research on another important construction project, that of the Cuelgamuros Monastery (Olmeda, 2009), or on railway infrastructure (Olaizola, Quintero ...).

⁶¹ Entrecanales y Távora worked, using prisoners, in the renovation of the sewer system in Seville during the civil war (Martínez y Rodríguez Molina, 2007: 155). For works carried out by Dragados y Construcciones see Acosta et al (2005: 65 – 75). For the current situation of these construction companies, see Recio (2009: 135 – 143 and 148 - 149).

Besides these political factors, it is necessary to note that the deployment of forced labour during the war is closely related to the problem of workforce lacks in strategic sectors, such as industry, mining or transport infrastructure, and complementary military tasks. Besides, this system offered the possibility of increasing the profit margins of some enterprises, and was used with a political purpose, the disciplinary treatment of the politically opposed population.

In any case, some of the peculiarities of the Spanish Civil War explain the limits of this kind of punishment. On the one hand, workforce demand was not very high, due to the disarticulation of the pre-war productive network and the lack of economic dynamism. On the other, the inelasticity of the supply of forced labour (due to the limited numbers of prisoners of war), also made the expansion of this system difficult, because the costs of workforce reproduction had to be assumed by the company or the state. Besides, the lower productivity of forced labourers was evident, due to different factors (lack of qualification, physical weakness, ideological resistance ...).

Nevertheless, the end of the war did not bring the immediate dismantling of the forced labour institutions. Although some changes were made, extra-judicial forced labour within the administrative structure of the concentration camps was maintained until December 1942 with the new BDST. Together with imprisoned men and women, almost 70,000 forced labourers were used during that year as a cheap workforce suitable for the special needs of immediate reconstruction or for building military fortresses. Besides, it proved especially useful for ensuring the mobility of workers to places where there was a special workforce lack (borders, mountains ...).

After 1942, in any case, the concentration camp structure was dismantled, and forced labour became more and more scarce. This was linked to low workforce demand and economic stagnation, and to changes in labour market policies, with longer working days and lower wages that ensured growing profits and higher productivity for companies on the “free” labour market. Besides, in the case of the militarily-managed workers’ battalions (BDST), internal inspection reports clearly showed the low qualification and frequent corruption of many army officers, which resulted in especially low productivity in these battalions. In any case, although the figures were declining, thousands of prisoners were still deployed from 1942 onwards in several public works, helping to increase the profit margins of companies and the state itself, especially in labour intensive sectors (urban construction, railway, dams...).

It is therefore evident that new research will be needed to obtain better knowledge of a reality that has remained invisible in Spanish society and historiography for too long. Access to new documentation, mainly enterprise archives, will be crucial for advancing in our understanding of a complex economic reality, where political punishment and production aims were combined in different forms, according to changing circumstances. In any case, we cannot forget that apparently banal calculations of costs and profits, made by the state and private enterprises, amounted to much more than this, meaning life and death for thousands of captive workers. Once again, the banality of evil.

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