

Ostarbeiter Slave Labor

The Nazis began large-scale recruitment of slave laborers from conquered Soviet territories in early 1942, reaching a total of one million by summer of that year, and two million a year later. Sent to work in German factories, they were forced to wear identifying "OST" (East) badges, the only group besides Jews to suffer this indignity. Initially they had no mail privileges, but starting November 25, 1942, each Ostarbeiter (literally, East worker) could send home two postal cards or reply cards each month at domestic German rates. Cards were provided by camp commandants and factory managers, collected by the employers, and posted as a group (at a post office only, not a letterbox). All were censored at Berlin.

Two pieces of Ostarbeiter mail: A single 6-pfennig card canceled July 27, 1943, at Lauf, and the query portion of a 6-pfennig-plus-6-pfennig reply card canceled September 19, 1943, at Beeskow, both to destinations in occupied Ukraine. One wrote, "I live in the town of Lauf, 17 kilometers from Nürnberg. I'm working at a factory 11 hours. We are fed 300 grams of bread in the day, in the morning — tea, at dinner — cabbage, evening — tea. It rains here quite often. I am the only one from the Kaharlink district. I rue very much that I did not listen to Miwra; I repent very much, but it is too late."

