

National Socialism and the war economy

1933–1945

In Nazi Germany, rearmament and the wartime economy dominated Siemens' business activities, too. During this time, production of military goods increasingly displaced civilian manufacturing, particularly after the hostilities that had begun as a European conflict escalated into a World War. The company's activities during this period also included the use of forced labor. Siemens has taken a clear position on this matter – repeatedly, responsibly and clearly.

As soon as the Nazis took power in January 1933, they began to interfere with the German economy and German companies. According to the country's new rulers, the economy's sole purpose was to serve the interests of a strong state – interests that included, in particular, German rearmament.

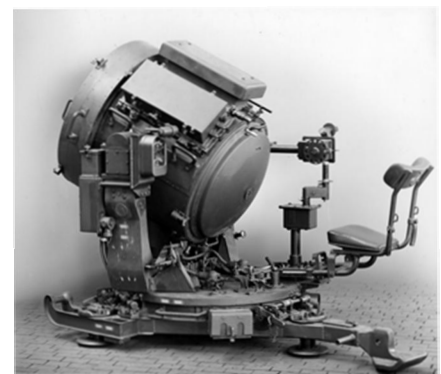
Rearmament brings economic growth –
And profits for Siemens

The German electrical engineering industry was, accordingly, also included in the Nazis' rearmament plans at an early stage and profited to a great extent from the armament program launched in 1935. Spurred by public-sector contracts, a period of economic growth, which began in 1936 at the latest with the initiation of a four-year plan to prepare the army and the economy for war, continued until 1945. As a leading representative of the German electrical engineering industry, Siemens increased its revenue more than fourfold between 1934 and 1944.



Making the most of leeway – Armaments production largely limited to electrical goods

Carl Friedrich von Siemens, who headed the company from 1933 to 1941, was a staunch advocate of democracy. Although opposed to the Nazi dictatorship, he was responsible for the company's well-being and continued existence – necessitating a political balancing act that also had to be mastered after his death in 1941 by his nephew and successor Hermann von Siemens. Although the German economy was increasingly regulated by government authorities, the company had a certain amount of leeway to pursue its own interests. However free or limited it may have been in individual cases, company management was largely able to restrict manufacturing activities in the armaments area to the production of electrical goods and to avoid producing goods outside Siemens' traditional portfolio. Even during wartime, the company's production of typical war goods such as weapons and ammunition was limited. Nevertheless, from the end of 1943 on, Siemens primarily manufactured electrical equipment for the armed forces.



Siemens-Schuckertwerke played a role in producing armaments, with electrical goods like flak searchlights.

A historical burden to be acknowledged – Siemens uses forced labor

Following the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, the Nazis' efforts to regulate the economy and maximize arms production reached a climax. In the second half of the 1930s, German companies could still keep pace with the boom in armaments production by recruiting additional workers from abroad. Starting in 1940, however, they were compelled to use forced laborers. These laborers were mainly people from territories occupied by the German military, prisoners of war, Jews, Sinti, Roma and, in the final phases of the war, concentration camp inmates. After about 1942, around 55,000 forced laborers worked at Siemens, accounting for nearly 30 percent of its total workforce. During the entire period from 1940 to 1945, at least 80,000 forced laborers worked at the company.



A historical onus: Siemens used at least 80,000 forced laborers between 1940 and 1945.



Acknowledging wrongdoing, addressing the issues and acting responsibly – Maintaining a clear position on the company's own history

Siemens acknowledges its past. This goes also for the actions of the company during the time of National Socialism, as Joe Kaeser clearly stated at the presentation ceremony for the Award for Understanding and Tolerance at the Jewish Museum Berlin on November 11, 2017. And he made clear: "It is important to me that we do all we can to prevent injustice from repeating itself, both in Germany and around the global. That is our obligation and our unequivocal position."

The fact that Siemens allowed people to work against their will during a time when the company was an integral part of the wartime economy of the national socialistic rogue regime is something that the company's current top management and employees deeply regret.

In the past, Siemens has shown its commitment to this responsibility through its contributions to the Jewish Claims Conference (1962), to its own "Siemens-Hilfsfonds für ehemalige Zwangsarbeiter" (1998–2000) as well as the foundation initiative of German businesses known as "Erinnerung, Verantwortung und Zukunft" (2000) in the amount of roughly €150 million. As an expression of this responsibility, the company today works closely together with the Ravensbrück memorial site, where each year Siemens trainees are sent to visit the various memorials and live on the premises for one week while carrying out discussions with historians and eyewitnesses. This has brought about a very important dialogue that provides young people with direct insight into this historical time.

Furthermore, we support select projects that serve to come to terms with and document the events that took place at that time. These activities are small but important contributions to ensuring that our history, even during that difficult time, remains alive and can serve as a reminder for the future.

Find out more

[siemens.com/history/1933-1945](https://www.siemens.com/history/1933-1945)