



**SIEMENS**

*Ingenuity for life*

# National Socialism and the war economy

1933–1945

During the Nazi era, Siemens' business activities, too, were impacted by rearmament and the war economy. Particularly after the initially European conflict became a worldwide conflagration, the manufacture of military goods, which involved the use of forced labor, increasingly took priority over production for civilian purposes.

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.

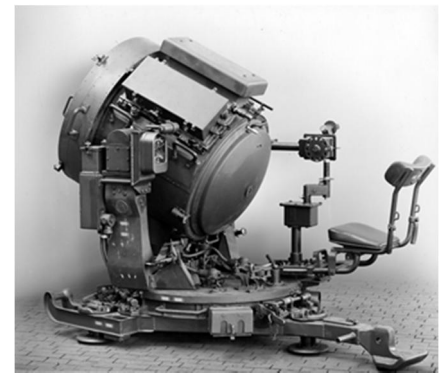


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### Making the most of leeway – Armaments production largely limited to electrical goods

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 failing for which the company would not acknowledge responsibility until much later.



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

Find out more

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