

Hell's Cartel – I G Farben and the Making of Hitler's War Machine
by Diarmuid Jeffreys.
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For all students of the Shoah the name of the I G Farben conglomerate will be irrevocably associated with the Zyklon B prussic acid developed by one of their subsidiaries in 1941, tested on prisoners of the Nazi regime and then used on an industrial scale as part of the Nazi attempt to eradicate all Jews from the face of the earth.

Yet there are many questions about I G Farben that go beyond their foulest creation. What was the I G Farben conglomerate? How did it start? Who were its founders and other key figures? What was its 19th/20th century pre-history before the rise to power of Hitler? How did it form a relationship with the Nazi regime and come to play such an infamous part in the Second World War?

These and many other questions are fulsomely answered in Diarmuid Jeffrey's forensic, immaculately researched and highly readable history of I G Farben, Hell's Cartel. Close to half of the book explains the origins of the conglomerate in a series of ground-breaking companies, many still household names, which were at the forefront of scientific discoveries not least in the manufacture of artificial dyes. Jeffreys explains the extraordinarily cutthroat nature of the dyeing industry, the impact of the First World War and Germany's defeat and massive reparations payments, and the logical imperative that drove the creation of I G Farben out of several distinct smaller companies.

With the advent of the Nazis, and with the imperative to make money taken into account, Jeffreys makes it easy for the reader to understand why I G Farben executives embraced the new regime, and having done so began an ever closer collaboration and slide down into the pit of mass murder which culminated in the appearance of its leading operatives at a war crimes trial in Nuremberg.

Diarmuid Jeffreys has succeeded in presenting a complex story very clearly, and also explaining the actions of the company and its major officers during the Second World War. With the benefit of hindsight it is all too obvious that the Faustian pact made with Hitler would bring nemesis in its wake, damning the reputation of I G Farben for all time, and it is salutary to discover that the business still exists today, and its key component parts, such as Hoechst and Agfa, remain household names.

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