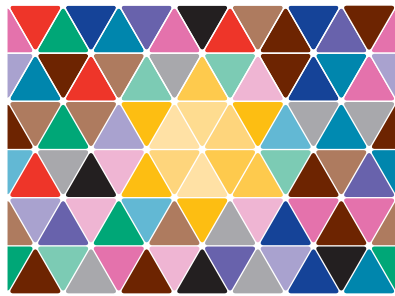


Wilhelm LEUSCHNER



Mosaic – Victims of
Nazi Persecution





Wilhelm Leuschner

Wilhelm Leuschner was born into a working class family on 15th June 1890 in the German city of

Bayreuth. Although Wilhelm had a passion and talent for art, it was difficult for a boy from a poor family to follow an artistic career, he instead trained as a wood sculptor after leaving school in 1904. On completing his apprenticeship in 1907, he joined the wood sculptors' trade union.

In 1908 Wilhelm moved to Darmstadt where he married Elisabeth Batz. The couple had two children, Wilhelm and Katharina. After serving in the First World War, he became increasingly involved in union activity in Darmstadt. In 1926 he was elected district secretary of the ADGB, Germany's biggest trade union federation. Wilhelm also represented the socialist Social Democratic Party (SPD), Germany's largest political party, in local politics and in 1928 he became Interior Minister of Hesse province, a position that brought him into frequent conflict with local Nazis. In January 1933 he became a member of the ADGB's national executive, making him one of the most important trade union leaders in Germany.

When the Nazis came to power in 1933, Wilhelm tried to unite the fragmented union movement into a single organisation which he hoped the Nazis would tolerate. However, he was arrested in May 1933 and spent four days in prison, where he was beaten up. He was then forced to accompany Robert Ley, the leader of the DAF (the new Nazi workers' organisation) to Geneva for a meeting of the International Labour Organisation where he was expected to defend the Nazis' actions to union leaders from other countries. Instead, he told the truth about what had happened, leading to his rearrest when he returned to Germany. He spent the next year in various prisons and concentration camps, where he was tortured.

After his release in June 1934, Wilhelm began to develop an illegal resistance network of trade unionists which connected thousands of people. From 1939 onwards he was also in contact with conservative and military opponents of the regime. If the army's attempt to kill Hitler and remove the Nazis on 20th July 1944 had been successful, Wilhelm would have been appointed as Vice-Chancellor (deputy Prime Minister). When the plot failed, he went into hiding but he was denounced to the Gestapo by a former neighbour. Wilhelm was executed in Berlin on 29th September 1944.