

Grant W., Nekkers J., van Waarden F. (eds), *Organising Business for War* (Berg)

This book is the product of an international collaborative research project on business interests and associations. Prompted both by the historical dimensions of their research, and by the current spate of World War II-related fiftieth anniversaries, the authors aimed to survey the impact of the war on traditions of corporatism and its institutional forms in nine countries - four protagonists (Britain, Canada, the United States, and Germany), four countries occupied by Germany (France, Belgium, Holland, and Denmark), and one neutral country (Sweden). Pooling their knowledge, the thirteen authors, drawn from all the countries under study, have managed to overcome many of the daunting obstacles to well-founded comparative research in such a field.

‘Corporatism’ is defined eclectically to mean any or all of the following: the compulsory regulation of conflicting business interests by nonmarket, inclusive business associations which may also be open to influence by the state in the interests of public policy; the regulation of conflict may extend beyond control of firms’ competition in product and capital markets to the compulsory arbitration of capital-labour disputes; the participation of business associations in making public policy, and also in the enforcement of policy upon the associations’ members, may be institutionalised (pp. 12-13).

The authors singly and collectively reject a deterministic approach. According to the latter, organisational forms are uniquely associated with economic environmental variables and objectives, to which they smoothly adapt. The divergent organisational traditions and political designs characterising each country, although combined with a shared environment and fairly similar immediate tasks of economic mobilisation and the distribution of scarce resources, ensured that different countries adopted quite different solutions to common problems (pp. 3-4, 283). Faced with such diversity, the authors recognise a variety of ways in which war might have helped shape the role of postwar business associations - temporary disturbance in a permanent pattern, the reinforcement and acceleration of prewar trends, or the breakup of old structures and creation of new ones (pp. 10-11).

If the book’s contributions have a common theme, it is the weakness and instability of corporatism in practice. Thus Britain seems to fit a ‘ripple’ hypothesis (the temporary needs of war production stimulated corporatist reorganisation of the defence sector, which reverted after 1945 to a prewar tradition of pluralism and liberalism. In the United States it was the corporatist trends of the prewar New Deal which subsequently appeared exceptional; again, corporatism had been just a temporary expedient. On the European continent, as in the United States, corporatist aspirations had been greatly stimulated by the ‘regulation deficit’ displayed by the liberal capitalist model in the interwar slump (p. 109). Here, corporatism and Nazi social thought seemed to suit each other well. In practice, however, whether at home in Germany or abroad under Nazi occupation, once the war started to go badly for Germany, there remained an inescapable tension between the corporatist implications of total mobilisation and the representation of independent business interests in any form. In German-dominated France, this tension ultimately drove business interests to side with the resistance - from self-preservation, more than from patriotism or morality.

The general picture of World War II which emerges from this study, therefore, is that corporatist trends typically failed to mesh with the requirements of political control

and economic mobilisation. This is a fresh, original perspective, well supported by copious research and innovative analysis.

The book is not free of defects. In collaboration on this scale, it is not surprising if some authors adopt conflicting definitions and problematics. Such problems are mitigated by intelligent editorial surveys - a foreword and postscript by van Waarden, and a summary of experiences of occupation by Lammers; however, van Waarden's foreword is heavily laced with survey material and text references which unavoidably interrupt the flow. On a more substantive plane, the reader might regret the omissions of Italy and Japan, both challenging exemplars of the corporatist tradition in this century; in their absence, too much of the burden is born by German domestic institutional designs and policies of occupation. The British reader wonders whether the staying power of corporatist currents in the UK after the war is not understated through neglect of the aircraft industry. This was the single biggest branch of war industry, and the single largest wartime bureaucracy; it also provided a major focus for British postwar government-industry relations.

On the whole, however, this book is a remarkable and weighty (120,000 words) contribution to comparative research both in business history and in the study of World War II.

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