

L'Occupation, l'État français et les entreprises [The Occupation, the French State, and Business]. Edited by Olivier Dard, Jean-Claude Daumas, and François Marcot. Paris: Association pour le Développement de l'Histoire Économique, 2000. 487 pp. Notes, bibliography, tables, index. Fr 180. ISBN 2-912912-06-7.

Reviewed by Donald Reid

Henry Rousso coined the term “Vichy Syndrome” in 1987 to refer to the French obsession since the early 1970s with the Vichy regime. The syndrome was born when the 1968 generation repudiated Charles de Gaulle’s “invented honor,” which sought to create the foundations for a postwar French renaissance by enveloping all but the most egregious and emblematic collaborationists under the cloak he could provide as leader of the Free French. This Gaullist-inspired amnesia deflected attention from the study of business in occupied France. And the subsequent focus on the regime’s collaboration in the Holocaust continued to limit examination of this topic. Major works on business during the Occupation remained those of British and American scholars like Henry Ehrmann and Alan Milward.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed a new interest in French business during the Occupation, as scholars in France sought to move away from the obsessions and fixations that characterized the Vichy Syndrome toward a more dispassionate examination of the Occupation, one that applies the standards and methods of academic history. *L'Occupation, l'État français et les Entreprises*, the product of a conference held in 1999, falls within this new generation of work. It encompasses a wide range of subjects, among them General Weygand’s ambitious, but unrealized, plans of 1941 to industrialize Algeria—a project largely abandoned, Daniel Lefevre notes, until de Gaulle’s last-gasp effort to create a new *Algérie française* in 1958. Vincent Viet conducted an excellent study of the tortured labor policies of Vichy, whose enforcement of mandatory labor service ultimately broke the long-standing administrative boundary between the legal systems governing French and foreign labor.

The moral drama that constitutes the Vichy Syndrome is often accused of withdrawing actions in France from the context of German occupation. However, this volume examines the economic constraints at work in occupied France—and the role of the Vichy regime as facilitator of the German war effort. The surprisingly rapid defeat of France in 1940 left Germany unprepared to manage the French economy. It resorted to pillage, black-market purchases, and massive orders from French firms. Eric Alary shows how the division of France in 1940 functioned as a “political, economic and administrative garotte,” which the Germans used to

“blackmail” the Vichy regime while siphoning French resources for the German war economy (p. 54). After invading the Soviet Union, Germany tried to rationalize its economic policies by incorporating French production into the German war economy. Vichy vice-premier Pierre Laval and the technocrat Jean Bichelonne cooperated in order to assure a place for France in a postwar European economy dominated by what they imagined would be a victorious Germany. The Vichy regime encouraged firms operating in France to contribute to the German war economy in order to fend off German the export of raw materials and labor to Germany. Production in France to meet German needs was, Arne Radtke-Delacor shows, the dominant German economic policy during the Occupation, despite periods when pillage and expropriation took precedence. In the final years of the Occupation, French industrial production became an “indispensable” element of the German war economy (p. 23). Hans Umbreit concludes that, after the liberation of France, “Germany no longer had the means to support its war effort” (p. 35).

What sets *L'Occupation, l'État français et les Entreprises* apart from an earlier generation of work is that it chooses to explore the search by French firms for the best way to navigate a difficult economic environment rather than simply assuming a predetermined narrative of collaboration and resistance. François Marcot reviews the forms of collaboration outlined in the conclusion of an earlier important collection, *La Vie des entreprises sous l'Occupation* (1994), and rejects the label of collaboration for the most widespread type—to ensure survival of the firm—as revealing an unjustified suspicion of business. Workers for firms so categorized, he suggests, would have to be identified as collaborators for survival as well. Marcot, however, also rejects owners' postwar position that failure to collaborate actively made one a resister (and Radtke-Delacor questions owners' postwar stories of sabotaged production, given that the majority of German orders placed with French businesses were fulfilled). Marcot recognizes the difficulty of differentiating acts of self-interest from acts of resistance, and contends that the title “resister” has been conferred more readily on individuals from other social classes—the peasant who joined the maquis to escape labor conscription, for example—than on bosses whose acts are explained in terms of self-interest, even when the interest of the society was at work as well.

Jean-Claude Daumas goes further, suggesting that the history of firms during the Occupation be removed from the collaboration/resistance dichotomy employed during and after the war and use made instead of “the same categories as for any historical period” (p. 436). He joins Marcot in replacing collaboration to survive with coerced adaptation, a move in line with Philippe Burrin's work on accommodation in *La France à l'heure allemand* (1995). If the French sought through the postwar purges to identify individual collaborators, the prosopographies in this collection pursue a different project. Typical is Nathalie Carré de Malberg's study of the

twenty *inspecteurs de finances* during the Occupation who inverted to common prewar practice of moving from state service to private business. She establishes as one of her guiding principles the need to avoid seeking to “establish a scale of guilt among high functionaries, which is not the job of the historian” (p. 262). Instead, she situates the inspectors’ decisions within the culture of the inspectorate, “the perverse effects of the meritocratic culture *à la française*” (p. 275), not political sympathies.

In a fascinating study of the stock exchange during the Occupation—when it experienced one of its most dramatic rises in the twentieth century—Jacques Marseille concludes that the market follows no particular political logic, just that of self-interest based on expectations: “Neither Gaullist nor Petainist, neither resister nor collaborationist, the stock exchange acted in these quite unusual years in a quite ordinary fashion” (p. 425). Individual firms and the stock exchange thought increasingly in terms of the future, even as the Germans thought in more and more immediate terms. Michel Margairez reveals how the treasury and the Banque de France navigated the exceptional situation of the nation’s money markets during the Occupation, when they were preparing measures that would be critical to the postwar reconstruction of France. A number of the essays, like Alain Beltran’s on the electric and petroleum power sectors, underscore how the state’s important role in economic concentration and planning during the Occupation carried over to French policies that shaped the postwar economy.

Arnaud Berthonnet’s hard-hitting essay on public works enterprises identifies the large Sacer firm as “collaborationist?” because of its profitable contracts to build airports for the Germans and to repair them incessantly after Allied air raids in 1943 and 1944. Yet Berthonnet notes the gentle treatment of the firm and its management after Liberation in response to the French desire to put the war behind them and rebuild. Probably nowhere more than in the treatment of business was the Gaullist belief clearer that, except for a few firms and personalities who were clearly collaborationist without a question mark, French business had to be allowed to participate fully in the rebuilding of France. Recriminations like Berthonnet’s came later, well after firms like Sacer had emerged largely unscathed to contribute to the *trente glorieuses* years of postwar growth.

The dominant tone of this volume, then, is not condemnation of individual firms’ collaboration, but curiosity about how business and financial interests responded to the new situations created by the Occupation. Sophie Chaveau is sympathetic to the travails of the French pharmaceutical industry during the war. Whereas Annie LaCroix-Riz, leading Marxist historian of business during the Occupation (and absent from both this volume and *La Vie des entreprises*) has interpreted the actions of Rhône-Poulenc as collaborationist, Chaveau is more open to the

position promulgated by French firms after Liberation that they had acted to counter the attempt by the German pharmaceutical industry during the Occupation to eliminate French competition. “Beyond certain peripeteia,” writes Chaveau, “it is more the determination of businesses to survive and prepare for the postwar which marks the Occupation” (p. 360). Danièle Rousselier-Fraboulet frequently evokes the “prudent” management of metalworking enterprises in the Saint-Denis region and credits firms with the goal of preparing for the postwar period.

Economic and political organizations are explained in terms of prewar developments and evaluated in light of the relation of wartime activities to postwar developments. Daumas examines labor management not in terms of a top-down application of the Vichy Labor Charter but rather as the continuing implementation of strategies developed by owners after the traumatic strikes of 1936 in the favorable conditions created by the Vichy state. The rationalization and expansion of social policies within the firm and the dissemination of a new discourse in place of the discredited paternalism offered important legacies to France after Liberation, obscured by an earlier historiographic focus on the Labor Charter that itself vanished with the Vichy regime. Antoine Weexsteen shows how Jean Milhaud’s scientific management organization escaped the dissolution that befell its parent business organization by becoming an auxiliary of the state, but with a minimum of Vichy ideological baggage. The organization showed firms, for instance, how to manage the administrative demands of a directed economy, while proposing human relations models with a future that matched American experiences rather than Vichy traditionalism.

In an exceptional contribution, Olivier Wieviorka diverges from the majority outlook and condemns the liberals around Pierre-Étienne Flandin, briefly vice-premier early in the Vichy regime, for their efforts to rethink and adapt their antistatist liberalism during the Occupation because they turned a blind eye to the political ramifications of collaboration with the Nazi state. Yet Wieviorka’s position is not the explicitly moral one of the Vichy Syndrome. The liberals’ thought was intellectually deficient. Another Germany (like the Federal Republic) might have pursued a “technocratic” economic “alliance” with France, but analysis of the Nazi state should have cast doubt on these visions. The opportunist rallying to Vichy of Flandin’s liberal followers and their acceptance of collaboration to protect particular interests marginalized them as individuals from postwar planning, and their ideology was discounted as France turned the experience of Vichy state direction of the economy in new directions after Liberation.

In line with the Vichy Syndrome, the expropriation of Jewish businesses receives considerable, well-deserved attention in this collection. The final paragraph of Hervé Joly’s prosopography of the directors of organizational committees established by the Vichy regime for

each business sector is revealing. Joly points out that after the war these directors saw no reason to excise this experience—a mark of their prominence and the respect they were accorded—from their postwar biographies but in his final sentence, with a nod to the salutary effect of the Syndrome, he mentions that the experience necessarily involved these individuals in “aryanization” of enterprises. Aryanization of large businesses, commercial establishments, and small artisanal concerns is the subject of articles by Philippe Verheyde, Laurence Badel, and Jean Laloum. Few “aryan” French businessmen were concerned with the fate of their Jewish colleagues, and the Vichy regime devoted its worries to the opportunities aryanization offered for increased German control of the French economy while contemplating the forms of economic concentration that the seizure of small enterprises allowed. Another excellent article that addresses Vichy Syndrome concerns is Paul Sanders’s study of black-market sales to the Germans. Black-market sales among the French in Vichy France were often chronicled in novels and films after the war and were even presented as a form of resistance to German control of the French economy. Sanders, however, looks at the extensive French black-market sales of materials to Germany in the first years of the war, which Germany paid for with the tribute it exacted from France.

Inclusion of several essays on the economies of other nations occupied by Germany in 1940 helps break the solipsistic quality of some Vichy Syndrome literature. French business interests were not alone in pursuing survival and profit during German occupation. During World War I, the British had blockaded the Netherlands with dire effects, and German occupation of Belgium had devastated the nation’s industry. Memory of this conflict led the Netherlands and Belgium to make plans before World War II that left them better prepared than France to manage their economies after German invasion. Remembering the blockade, the Netherlands amassed a large supply of primary materials before the war. German occupation of the Netherlands in 1940 brought German industrial orders that lifted Dutch industry out of the depression, a depression that had been prolonged by autarkic German policies in the late 1930s. Food supplies remained adequate for the population until the devastating final period of the war. Belgium’s vivid memories of German occupation during World War I led it to accept economic collaboration as a form of self-protection, “the least evil.” *L’Occupation, l’État français et les Entreprises* is a successful effort to examine the Occupation in the light of specific issues posed by business and economic history in the period extending from the Depression to the Fifth Republic. And it compares the economy of occupied France with those of other nations occupied by the Germans in 1940 without eschewing examination of the particular horrendous political, social, economic, and moral policies of the Vichy regime.

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