

De gjorde Danmark større . . . De multinationale danske entreprenørfirmaer i krise og krig 1919–1947 [They Made Denmark Larger, but Did They Make Her Greater? Danish Construction Companies in Crisis and in War, 1919–1947]. By *Steen Andersen*. Copenhagen: Lindhardt and Ringhof, 2005. 573 pp. Index, notes, bibliography, photographs, tables, figures. Cloth, 349 kr. ISBN: 875-952496-0.

Reviewed by Knud Knudsen

The five years, from 1940 to 1945, during which Germany occupied Denmark constitute one of the most contested periods in Danish modern history, not because of any lasting effects they have had upon Danish society, which appear to have been minimal, but because they have given rise to certain moral questions: Which actions taken under occupation were right? Which were wrong? Did cooperation with the Germans go too far? A few years ago, a Danish newspaper wrote a series of articles about the cooperation—or collaboration—of Danish businesses with the Germans. The series, which did not reveal much that was new, triggered a heated political debate in Denmark and led to the establishment of a publicly financed research project on the activities of Danish businesses during World War II. Steen Andersen's book, which deals with the history of multinational Danish contractors between 1919 and 1947, was written under the auspices of this project.

Andersen focuses on the four biggest Danish companies of the time, Christiani & Nielsen, Højgaard & Schultz, Kampsax and Wright, Thomsen & Kier, and he describes their operations both preceding and during the German occupation. The companies had been engaged in international projects during the 1930s: Kampsax in the Middle East; Christiani & Nielsen in Brazil and in northern Germany. Thus, Andersen points out that there was a strong element of path dependency, since during the occupation these companies relied on strategies they had adopted before 1940.

The study's conceptual framework is "political risk" and its influence on Danish multinational contractors. Which strategies did Danish businesses adopt, at home or abroad, "in order to control or reduce the political difficulties posed in this politically and

financially turbulent period”? How did the course of the war and the political developments between 1943 to 1945, when there was no official Danish government, affect their interests, attitudes, and actions?

Andersen has consulted both public and private archives in Denmark and public archives in London, Washington, Moscow, Hamburg and Freiburg to produce his well-documented study. He uncovers the fact that Danish contractors were doing business throughout German-occupied Europe—in the former Yugoslavia, Norway, France, Germany, and, of course, in Denmark—often working for Organisation Todt, the civil and military engineering arm of the Third Reich. These Danish companies chose to adapt to conditions in each locality and, in most cases, to accept the conditions imposed by the Germans, including the use of prisoners of war as forced labor in order to ensure that their operations ran smoothly. As an aside, Andersen mentions that Kampsax, a Danish contractor, also worked in Iran with the British during the war.

While exploring the degree to which businesses cooperated with the German occupying authorities, Andersen does not impose moral judgments. Since each contractor adopted its own strategy, he is interested in discovering why each one chose to adopt the course it did and what factors led it do so. After the war, the companies and the apologists for cooperation circulated the story that the contractors had only worked on the projects because they had been ordered to do so by the Danish government. This was a myth. The interesting point is that, from the beginning, the companies were considering how to legitimize their decision to work for the Germans. In 1943, as the fortunes of war began to change and the Danish government collapsed, the companies began to limit the number of contracts they undertook for the Germans, since it was no longer possible to argue that they worked by order of the government. In his final chapter, “The Threatening Peace,” Andersen shows how the companies prepared for the postwar period, positioning themselves to fend off reprisals.

I would only make one criticism of this excellent book, which is that it gives too little space to the war’s aftermath. After the war, some companies were put on trial, but the laws against industrial collaboration with the Germans were not sufficiently clear to allow the government to prosecute them. The allied prosecutors found it difficult, if not impossible, to find any mitigating circumstances in the companies’ willingness to

cooperate. However, the firms countered with the argument that, by cooperating with the Germans, they were acting in the national interest and complying with requests from the Danish government that they cooperate in order to prevent the German contractors from bringing in their own workforce, thereby facilitating the nazification of Danish society. However, as Anderson demonstrates, this argument had no basis in fact. Although the Danish government indicated that it wanted the Danish firms to undertake projects for the Germans, it did not order them to do so. The companies were given the option to decide for themselves whether to cooperate or not. In fact, some companies refused to do business with the Germans. Those that agreed to work for them from the beginning made enormous profits, and they also received very good pay from the Danish state.

This is altogether an excellent book, and it has received enthusiastic reviews in Denmark. Although it might have been improved by the incorporation of studies from the international literature, Andersen's conclusions are in accord with growing criticisms of the official wartime policy of cooperation with the Germans, and they will surely be applied to future comparative studies of this important subject.

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