

British Business in the Formative Years of European Integration, 1945–1972. By Neil Rollings. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. xvi + 278 pp. Tables, notes, index. Cloth, \$85.00. ISBN: 978-0-521-88811-0.

Reviewed by Harm G. Schröter

British Business in the Formative Years of European Integration, 1945–1972 is an extremely useful book. It starts from the point of view of enterprise, not only of business organizations, such as chambers of commerce; it fulfills its promise to provide “a key link between economic integration, political integration, and the process of Europeanization”; and not least it argues that we must understand business and its actors in relation to their whole environment.

The book is organized in ten chapters plus an introduction and conclusion. As background, the first part (“Economic Realities”) provides the development of the foreign economic relations of the U.K. for the whole period. In the U.K. the share of manufactures of all exports shrank from 25 to 11 percent during 1950 to 1970, a devastating development for an old industrialized country. Chapter two (“Overseas Investment, Corporate Strategy, and European Integration”) shows British business redirecting its activities towards Europe earlier than commonly suggested—first without, later with, government support. Part two, “The Development of Perceptions of European Integration,” traces the changes in British businesses’ attitudes towards integration with Europe. During the first phase, 1945–1955, British industry was not actively engaged in European integration. During “The Establishment of the Common Market and the Free Trade Area Proposals, 1955–1958,” British business tried to safeguard its position and in the end supported the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) proposal. British businesses tried to keep one foot in both the Commonwealth and European markets, which were drifting away from each other. Rollings shows in chapter six how crucial the period of 1958 to 1963 was for British enterprise. Business hopes, pinned on EFTA, evaporated by 1961. While the Federation of British Industries (FBI) was heavily engaged in the EFTA project, it was single firms that convinced the government to support the European Economic Community (EEC).

Chapter seven shows how business became “pessimistic and at a loss what to do” (p. 165). By the early 1970s, Rollings reveals it was not only tariffs that mattered, but much more the whole environment in which business operated. Though there were a few firms with “a loud voice” against joining the EEC, the majority appreciated European integration. Rollings then takes up the subject of “European integration as more than tariffs” in part three, which covers competition, taxation, and law. It is mainly here where Rollings comes up with a fresh viewpoint, and consequently these three last chapters are the most interesting. During this period the British market was even more protective than the European one. At the European level competition was not an aim but a tool for integration. “Indirect taxation” was another issue British business took very seriously in its evaluation of European integration, while the last chapter, on law, shows British companies rather alienated by ideas such as worker participation, which were part and parcel of the idea of pan-European integration. Rollings concludes that researchers as well need more “Europeanization,” a feeling or deeper understanding of the trend to further European integration. One needs to take into account also cultural aspects in order to fully comprehend what happened and why at the level of enterprise. A second suggestion is to pay even more attention to the intimate interaction of economic and political integration: Since none can explain integration without considering both, researchers are advised to work on both fields at the same time. His third suggestion underlines the importance of business as actors: At a European level it has not yet been put enough emphasis on this approach for explanations. Rollings work is a first step in this direction, and I hope for similar studies from other countries.

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