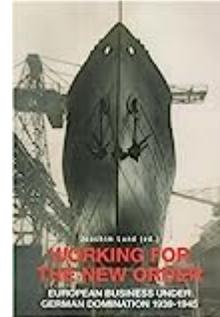




Joachim Lund. *Working for the New Order: European Business under German Domination, 1939-1945.* Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2006. 192 pp. \$34.00 (paper), ISBN 978-87-7674-105-1.



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Business History in the Nazi Era as “Prisoner’s Dilemma”

This book comprises twelve chapters of greatly varying length and depth, all of them presented at a conference in Copenhagen in May 2002, plus a brief introduction under the expressive title “Damned if you do—damned if you don’t: The Collaboration Dilemma in Business during War and under Dictatorship.” Three of the contributions are in German, and the rest in English, but only one in the latter group is by a native speaker, which leads to numerous lapses of phrasing, spelling, and punctuation throughout the text.

Like many such collections, this one represents both a worthy attempt to tackle a hitherto neglected topic and a missed opportunity. Scholars’ schedules being what they are, few conferences can gather at one place and time the necessary range of researchers on a topic as large as “European Business under German Domination.” Thus, a work claiming continental scope ends up including essays on Holland, Belgium, France, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Greece, and Byelorussia, but none on Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Slovakia, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Finland, and the Baltic States. More-

over, conference participants often understand their responsibilities differently. Some provide full-dress treatments of their title subjects, best exemplified here by Harm Schröter’s shrewd, suggestive essay, “Skandinavien und die NS-Großraumwirtschaft,” and Hein Klemann’s richly informative piece (in fact, the best in the volume), “Industrial Development in the Netherlands, 1940-1945.” But, many others, mindful of the limited time to make oral presentations and too busy to revise extensively afterwards, provide only summary accounts, however solid in substance, such as Herve Joly’s contribution on “The Economics of Occupied and Vichy France,” or mere abridgements of the author’s recent publications, such as Robert Bohn’s eight-page chapter, “Grundzüge der deutschen Wirtschaftsinteressen in Norwegen 1940-1945.” Finally, some attendees prefer to describe what they know rather than what the conference rubric calls for, and thus one gets Mogens Pelt’s essay on “Germany and the Greek Armaments Industry,” which deals almost entirely with events prior to the German occupation of Greece, indeed, prior to 1939. The absence of a compre-

hensive bibliography or an up-to-date list of suggested readings at the end, as well as the frequent omission from the individual essays of references to fundamental works on the subjects at hand, add to the ways in which this book falls short of being as useful as it might have been.[1]

In other words, this work is a reminder that for conference volumes to succeed as books, they seldom can confine themselves to being records of a scholarly gathering. An editor is well advised to take that occasion as the starting but not ending point for his or her work. In this case, that would have entailed soliciting more and fuller essays and being more critically selective about what to publish. Particularly unfortunate in this respect is the inclusion of Dietrich Eichholtz's "Die 'Neuordnung' des europ ischen Gro wirtschaftsraumes" as the principal contextualizing essay, immediately following the editor's introduction. This contribution conveys the state of the interpretive art in the German Democratic Republic around 1980. Given the number of able scholars working today on the National Socialist economy, surely the conference organizers, let alone the editor of this book, could have obtained a more current, less tendentious piece, especially in view of its central importance to the volume. Sadly typical of Eichholtz's method is his handling of the New Order documents generated by German industrial sectors in the summer of 1940, around which much of his essays pivots. A reader new to the subject would have no idea that these documents were not spontaneously offered by corporations that had been working out rapacious intentions for months in advance, as the author insinuates, but were requested by the German Ministry of Economics in peremptory fashion and assembled according to a format laid down by that ministry.[2] Equally unfortunate for readers is Eichholtz's complete inattention, particularly in a chapter replete with categorical statements about the motives and behavior of German industrial and financial leaders, to the numerous detailed histories of individual corporations in Nazi Germany that were published before his essay went to press.

All that said, Lund's collection has a number of virtues that offset its blank or blind spots. Per Hansen's conclusion rightly situates corporate behavior in the Nazi empire in two decisive contexts: first, that of the loss of faith in liberal politics and economics that was a general feature of post-Depression Europe and that lent luster to Nazism's peculiar mixture of capitalism and state control; and second, the circumstance that firms and even national economies in 1939-42 could not afford to lie idle while waiting to see which side would win World

War II. Thus, the pressure to sustain themselves and those who depended on them worked almost irresistibly on both corporate and governmental decision-makers in German-occupied or -allied states in favor of "working for the New Order." Moreover, as many of the individual essays demonstrate, productive alternatives to this course were almost nonexistent. With what other country was virtually blockaded Sweden to trade in order to pay for its indispensable imports of coal, coke, fertilizers, and wool, if not with Greater Germany? Both managers and bureaucrats confronted a wartime situation in which failing to serve German markets would leave that opportunity to competitors, shut plants, swell unemployment, impede recovery of some of the vast occupation charges being extracted by the *Reich*, and perhaps lead to even more extensive transfers of both machinery and laborers to Germany than in fact occurred. In these circumstances, as Hansen summarizes, "To get the country, the firm, the employees, and the family through a period of great uncertainty and anxiety, as well as possible, had first priority" (p. 180).

Several other chapters offer smaller scale, but equally accurate and arresting insights. Schr ter and Klemann remind readers of the perhaps surprising and surely discomfiting point that both Norway's and Holland's industrial capacities benefited on balance from the German occupation. Herve presents a less favorable macroeconomic outcome for France, but stresses that certain industries profited immensely from German purchases at prices that exceeded prewar levels. Pelt's piece may fall outside the parameters of the book, but it exposes the irony of how a Greek firm operating on the basis of licenses to produce German munitions became a source of considerable foreign exchange for the *Reich* in the late 1930s, primarily by selling to the *Republican* side in the Spanish Civil War! Joachim Lund's essay, "Business Elite Networks in Denmark," conveys how widespread and eager industrial collaboration there was, extending even to the manufacture of machine guns for the Wehrmacht and the construction of military facilities and parts of the Atlantic Wall. Finally, Paul Sanders's chapter on the German occupation of Byelorussia captures the lethal combination of chaos, contradiction, and coordination that characterized Germany's extraction of what it needed from the conquered East.

In sum, although this is not an altogether satisfying book on multiple levels, its best chapters direct attention to significant findings and numerous opportunities for future empirical work and comparative analysis. Still, in a volume centered on European business, the concentra-

tion on macro- rather than microeconomics is striking. Even the best sections would have been enriched by attention to the balance sheets of exemplary individual corporations in the sectors and countries scrutinized, since only a closer look at which firms in specific industries did and did not profit, at which times, and to what degree will allow scholars to get a clear sense of where the boundary of inescapable economic cooperation with the Nazi *Reich* in fact lay.

Notes

[1]. For example, two ground-breaking and missing texts in English are John Gillingham, *Belgian Business in the Nazi New Order* (Ghent: Jan Dhondt Foundation, 1977); and Richard Vinen, *The Politics of French Business 1936-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[2]. See Peter Hayes, *Industry and Ideology: IG Farben in the Nazi Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 266-68.

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