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Martin Kukowski. *Die Chemnitzer Auto Union AG und die "Demokratisierung" der Wirtschaft in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone von 1945 bis 1948.* Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2003. 221 S. ISBN 978-3-515-08059-0.

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Changing Gears: Socializing the Auto Industry in the Soviet Zone, 1945-1948

The leap from the wartime Nazi years to the development of a communist society in the Soviet occupation zone (SBZ) is intrinsically dramatic–perhaps even more so than the Nazi seizure of power. Not only was the East German transformation, with all of its attendant issues of change vs. continuity, decisive for the incipient German Democratic Republic (GDR), it marked a segue into the international alignment that turned into the Cold War. The GDR outlasted the measly Nazi regime by more than twenty-eight years, so the transitional years from 1945 until the foundation of the new East German state established the parameters for two generations of social, economic, and cultural life.

Despite the inherent significance of the period, much of the rapidly expanding literature on the SBZ remains, as Catherine Epstein puts it, "less than the sum of its parts," because it reflects the sudden deluge of archival information at a time when the GDR, and everything associated with it, is burdened by the disadvantage of unification on West German terms.[1] The recent literature is deeply researched and subtle, but, unfortunately, often picayune. It somehow misses the soul of the experience.

My chief criticism of this book is that it loses the human dimension of the cataclysmic changes occurring during the immediate postwar years in the SBZ. Did workers support the changes, or did they resent losing their jobs? What about the pathos of the managerial and entrepreneurial Germans who hoped to survive despite the pre-existing devastation of the war and the confusion of first U.S. and then Soviet Union occupation? How did these issues affect the attitudes of Germans towards their new state? In Leipzig, for example, the city archives clearly record the plaintive begging on the part of managers and owners towards the American and Soviet authorities, fruitlessly trying to gauge the direction of the wind.

To be fair, this book is not about either the *alltÃ¤glich* or the social dimensions and instead is an excellent and well-researched case study full of nuanced surprises concerning the reorganization of the all-important auto industry in Chemnitz. In fact, this book charts the struggle of the managers of the Chemnitzer Auto Union against the conditions and politics that marked the immediate postwar society. Even before the war, the production of

automobiles was important to the Saxon economy, and with the transfer of authority to the Soviets, it became a key exemplar of the implementation of the new communist form of industrialization. Kukowski charts the stages of the interaction between those who ran the industry and the communist authorities. After an introductory overview of the pre-1945 auto industry, Kukowski essentially looks at three periods: the reorganization and the demontage in the immediate aftermath of the war from May until September 1945; the period of confiscation from October 1945 to August 1946; and the economic rebuilding under the guiding hand of politics from 1946 through 1948.

The Auto Union was already the most important Saxon car firm and a "privatwirtschaftlich gefÃ¼hrtes Staatsunternehmen" (p. 194) before and during the war and it profited from the militarization of the economy under the Nazis. As soon as the war ended, a new governing council formed that reflected the sudden emergence of the antifascist movement in Saxony. The Auto Union had an eye on the future, hoping to favorably influence whoever ended up in charge. The new management of the AU remained guardedly optimistic in the first few months of the occupation because the conditions in Chemnitz were similar to those in the western zones and because the diplomatic future of Germany was fluid. The primary struggle, especially after June when the Soviets took over, was to oppose the dismantling of German industry. Despite the loss of productive facilities, the Auto Union stayed alive by undertaking repair work. At this time, the newly installed communist leaders were not quite sure of the direction and there was considerable debate even within the zonal administration over local vs. zonal control, the future unification of Germany, and the nature of the communist control over the SBZ. The Auto Union reorganized its management and productive capacity with a view towards a hopeful future, despite the painful dismantling of the local industry by the Soviets.

On October 3, 1945, the Landesregiering confiscated what remained of the AU and created a joint stock company called the SÃ¤chsisches Aufbau-Werk GmbH (SAW). This move occurred at roughly the same time as the land reform and the SAW became a model for state-owned industrial companies. Where the land reform was by and large politically popular for reallocating land to over a half million small farmers, refugees, and laborers, the move to turn over private industry to the state proved more complicated. The new authorities had to decide the level of government that should run these new industries–local, provincial, or zonal. In contrast to the land reform, which benefited many people, the expropriation of industry yielded few benefits as neither the owners nor the employed workers were happy with the straitened conditions of the post-war economy. Especially problematic for the process was that the expropriation followed so quickly after the onset of the Soviet occupation.

A few observations are in order here. First, the state formed a joint stock company, not a cooperative venture, so the authorities did not completely jettison the capitalist concept. Instead the SAW was financed primarily by the SÃ¤chsischen Landesbank; the difference between the SAW and the old Auto Union (a privately run state enterprise) was still fairly small, although the SAW was a clear step towards greater state control over the auto industry. The SAW devoted itself to repairing machines for the occupation authorities with additional income from the repair of household and agricultural machinery. Second, a glimmer of hope remained for the Saxon auto industry, which was trying to hold on through the bad times in the hopes of a more favorable political situation. That glimmer, however, was fading as the winter of 1945-46 saw a gradual hardening of the Soviet resolve to remake its German zone. Also dimming the luster was the increasing unprofitability of the SAW.

The final stage came shortly after the formation of the Socialist Unity Party (SED). After considerable debate, decentralization was rejected in favor of linking all the Saxon branches of the auto industry together. Profitability continued to decline. The disconnection between the different zones contributed to the failure of Saxon auto production and access to materials and markets became more and more limited. The SAW metamorphosed into the Vereinigung Volkseigener Betrieb, Industrie Fahrzeugbau, Chemnitz. After 1946 the pressure of politics pushed the remains of the Auto Union into a fully socialized industry by 1948.

Kukowski lays out a periodization that corresponds to the political vicissitudes of the time. Furthermore, socializing the AU was not a straightforward process; at first the Auto Union hoped that by reforming its leadership structure it could be acceptable to the provincial and zonal authorities. Then it hoped that a close relationship with the provincial authorities might save the industry. Confusion, dashed hopes, and failure to keep up with the pace of change in the SBZ characterized the Auto Union's program. From the communists' side, the tangled politics of expropriation did not lead immediately to the full socialization of the auto industry, but instead

took time in order to work out the internal party debates over how best to exploit industry. For those who need a detailed case study of the auto industry's assimilation into the new communist system, this book is an excellent starting point.

Note

[1]. Catherine Epstein, "East Germany and Its History since 1989," *Journal of Modern History* 75 (September 2003): p. 658.