

Schanetzky, Tim: *Regierungsunternehmer. Henry J. Kaiser, Friedrich Flick und die Staatskonjunkturen in den USA und Deutschland*. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag 2015. ISBN: 978-3-8353-1767-3; 420 S.

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Tim Schanetzky is not the first scholar to suggest that there parallels between some of the economic policies undertaken by the regimes of Adolf Hitler and Franklin D. Roosevelt, who of course both took power in the same year, 1933, and continued in their respective positions until 1945. But in this substantial, important and well written monograph, he grapples with the topic at an unprecedented level of sophistication, and he does so based on an extraordinarily broad range of archival sources.

Hitler's Germany and Roosevelt's America were obviously profoundly different from one another. But, regardless of these differences, the two countries were among those worst affected by the Great Depression. More importantly, though, and related in part to the similarities in their experience of the Depression, they shared levels of industrial dynamism, fuelled in large part by the industries of the Second Industrial Revolution, that were unlike those experienced anywhere else. This was, furthermore, a long-term development that had started in both cases in the last third of the nineteenth century and continued into the period after the Second World War. And it was not merely a parallel development: as demonstrated by the most recent work of Volker Berghahn¹ and by the case studies constituting the Washington, D.C., German Historical Institute's 'Immigrant Entrepreneurship' project², there was a considerable amount of interchange of ideas and people between the two countries during this entire period as well, in spite of deep differences and despite periods of conflict.

Schanetzky complements and extends these insights through concentrating on the parallel careers of Henry J. Kaiser, an American-born son of German immigrants, and Friedrich Flick. Both were active in business well before 1933, and both continued to guide

their respective firms well into the post-Second World War period, which allows the years between 1933 and 1945 (and especially 1941–1945) to be contextualised within longer-term, parallel developments in capitalism in both countries. In this, Schanetzky adds detail and nuance to existing literature. But his thoroughgoing comparison of the cases of Kaiser and Flick extends it significantly, too. After all, central to the development of capitalism in both countries were the increased role of the state in the economy on the one hand and the related erosion of boundaries between the private and public economic activity on the other, something widely recognised in U.S. and German historiography, but rarely analysed comparatively. Here, Kaiser and Flick, who built their respective business empires servicing the needs of the state in no small part by leveraging government money along with extensive and effective lobbying of the government contacts they assiduously cultivated, constitute excellent cases for comparison. The two were paradigmatic *Regierungsunternehmer*.

Kaiser started out in the road-building business, carrying out contracts for local, regional and state governments, mostly in the American West initially. He achieved fortune and fame when he was awarded the contract for building the Hoover Dam, an enormous feat of civil engineering. Flick, in contrast, started out in traditional heavy industry, first as a manager and then as an owner, achieving fortune and some fame by building up a business empire in central Germany during the inflation. Regardless of the differences in the industries that they engaged in initially, however, both shared a number of characteristics. Born into relatively poor families in provincial settings, they became extremely successful businessmen, although both remained outsiders in important ways throughout their careers. Both built firms that were eventually highly diversified and also very large, although central management in both cases was extremely small, enabling intensive and direct in-

¹ Volker R. Berghahn, *American Big Business in Britain and Germany. A Comparative History of Two „Special Relationships“ in the Twentieth Century*, Princeton 2014.

² See: <<http://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/>> (6 June 2016).

volvement of the owner. Kaiser and Flick also proved equally adept in their own ways at lobbying and at parlaying political contacts into government funding and procurement contracts that they used to build up their businesses. Those businesses not only transgressed industry borders – Kaiser, for instance, extended his empire from civil engineering into shipbuilding, magnesium, aluminium and automobiles, and Flick’s was similarly diversified – but also moral ones. Kaiser’s unwise entry into magnesium production involved hasty construction of a factory and a technical process that led to substantial death and injury. Moreover, when the subsidiary’s production costs proved too high, its managers sought a way out by actively cultivated markets for devastatingly fatal incendiary bombs that used magnesium powder. For his part, as is more widely known, Flick cynically used Nazi racial policies to expand his business empire through ‘Aryanisation’ and use of slave labour. After the war, each of the men experienced business setbacks, and both were vilified for their role in it. Finally, in the aftermath of the war, both also actively worked on rehabilitating their public image and on rebuilding their empires, which proved successful, at least for a while.

Schanetzky points out, however, that the differences between the two men and their respective careers are even more profound than these similarities in many ways. Being raked over the coals by journalists and politicians after the war, as Kaiser was, is not at all the same as being put on trial in Nuremberg, convicted and sent to prison, as Flick was. Causing some death and injury – regrettable and reprehensible as that was – through hasty construction methods and enabling the U.S. military to carry out its programme of incendiary bombing, which Kaiser did, involves a different order of moral turpitude compared to use of slave labour and plundering and spoliation (charges which Flick was convicted of in Nuremberg).

This was always going to be the tricky part of comparing these two men, who were so active and important in their respective regimes. Tim Schanetzky, though, has carried this out masterfully. The context of democracy vs. dictatorship on the one hand, and individual temperament on the other – these

explain the differences between the men and their respective careers. Making the most of opportunities for business expansion afforded by rising levels of state intervention and activity in the economy, not least by virtue of the rise of the national security state, on the other hand, represents a fundamental and significant similarity between Kaiser and Flick, and indeed between capitalism as it developed in the United States and in Germany from the late nineteenth century through the 1950s.

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