

Schermer, Jonas; White, Eugene (Hrsg.): *Paying for Hitler's War. The Consequences of Nazi Hegemony for Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2016. ISBN: 978-1-107-04970-3; VIII, 468 S.

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For many years I have been studying Nazi rule in Europe, and, I must admit, that it is a very tough and complex academic undertaking, which demands a multi-language approach (more than 20 languages) and research in numerous archives and libraries. It exceeds mental and physical abilities of any individual, and to do the job you need a coherent team of scholars. This book (a bulk of it grew from a conference held at the German Historical Institute in Washington, DC, in 2009) tries to tackle the issue with case studies of 12 nations and 3 overviews of more general subjects. They are written by 18 contributors and organized into 4 sections.

According to the editors they did not pretend giving a new synthesis. They wanted to provide „the broadest possible picture“ of the „magnitude and methods of Germany's economic exploitation of its conquered foes, its allies, and its neutral trading partners“. They could not include into the book important chapters on Italy, Spain, Romania and Switzerland (p. 7). To this short list of missing countries one can add Greece, Yugoslavia and big parts of the Soviet Union („Ostland“). But given final results this book does purport to have something serious to say.

It starts with a set of three important and detailed essays on Germany – her economic aims and expectations at the end of the First World War; the role of different institutions involved in the financial exploitation during the Second World War, and the economics of prisoners-of-war employment. Carsten Burhop argues the continuity of Germany's war aims from the First to the Second World War. He finds German expansion plans of 1914–1918 to be limited in nature and not being a prerequisite for the future Nazi policies. Jonas Scherner does not support a widely spread view that there was a lot of confusion and mismanagement in the German war

economy. He proves that in regard to the fiscal matters there was much more consistent effort involved; with Wehrmacht authorities (OKW) held a key decision-making position. In his thorough analysis of the economic exploitation of prisoners-of-war and foreign labor Johann Custodis provides a detailed insight into existing historiography and modern debates. His conclusion that as much as 10 percent of Reich's wartime GNP was produced by foreign and POW labor and that had severe repercussions for the post-war Europe looks very well proved.

The second section of the book deals with the occupied Western Europe (France, Netherlands and Belgium). Two pieces on French experiences show how controversial history is. While Eugene White stresses the detrimental impact of the Nazi rule for France, Marcel Boldorf shows that there were major beneficiaries among companies, and some types of collaboration turned into mutual postwar economic cooperation. A similar complicated version is given for the Dutch economy by Martijn Lak. In contrast, Belgian experience is treated differently. According to Kim Oosterlinck and Eugene White, due to a government-in-exile and a strong administrative structure headed by senior civil servants in the ministries, Belgium was able to avoid being absorbed directly into the Reich. Belgium's initial boom after the war is explained as a result of a careful wartime planning. The last contribution to the section, written by Fabian Lemmers, is devoted to a rather neglected area of research – huge German construction programs in France and Italy conducted primarily via the Organisation Todt.

Section 3 of the book covers experiences of the four north European countries: Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland. All contributors show how sensitive issues of collaboration or just economic ties with the Nazis still are for the entire region. But it is a piece on Finland, which I find extremely dubious. The offered text lacks integrity and does not concentrate on major issues proclaimed by the book. On 20 pages Jari Eloranta and Ilkka Nummela outline all possible subjects – from foreign policy to military and economic aspects. Like in school text books the storytelling goes statement by statement with-

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out too much detail or elaboration. We are taught that „a small Nordic democracy“ was a very weak state. It had to defend itself from the Soviet Union, „a major threat, as the Winter War and subsequent events demonstrated“. Unfortunately, „subsequent events“ are not described. Authors genuinely believe that Finnish troops did not participate in the blockade of Leningrad. They do mention the Finnish Waffen SS battalion, but don't explain what members of the „Nordic democracy“ in the SS uniform actually did in Russia. Facts, like Marshall Mannerheim's proclamation of the holy war against the USSR, do not fit the narrative.

The fourth section deals with Eastern Europe, and it is exactly the area where weakness of the current research is most evident. It is not a fault of the editors or failure of contributors; it's just the state of the things. Jaromir Balcar and Jaroslav Kučera methodically describe economic transformations in Czechoslovakia after the war but provide too little on the war period. As a result, a principle question of the book – How European countries paid for Hitler's war? – remains unanswered. Similar remark implies to a text on Bulgaria. Vera Asenova deals namely with financial matters but prefers to call it „German economic exploitation“. This thesis is not proved and is not appropriate to treat a complex set of relations between Bulgaria and Germany. A survey on Poland is a good short narrative but Poland deserves more attention and research. The author is not familiar with vast archival resources available in Russian archives. Particularly important is a collection of the Reichswirtschaftsministerium at the Moscow State Military archive. I am also puzzled when governments of Byelorussia and Ukraine are mentioned (p. 444) as separate entities conducting their own policies. I think there was one Soviet government in Moscow.

Only one chapter in the book is devoted to the Soviet Union and it is written by Kim Christian Priemel. There is an obvious discrepancy between two angles of a declared research – to study Ukraine and the Soviet Union simultaneously. The more it goes the less attention is given to Ukraine. The author uses lots of sources from the German archives

but German collections in Kiev and Moscow also deserve some attention. The consequences of Nazi rule for the Soviet Union require an integral and comparative approach otherwise one nation experience (Ukraine in this book) does not look very persuasive, and statements like „Ukraine had the worst of the war“ could be easily challenged by other nations, Byelorussians in particular. Though, from my point of view, any attempts to find the most „suffered“ during the war are futile, as they explain too little about Nazi policies and hardships they brought to the entire European region. For the sake of a precise piece of information one has to mention that Crimea before the Second World War was not just an „independent republic“ (p. 392, f. 12), it was an autonomous republic within the Russian Federation. Two important subjects – German agricultural and financial reforms in the Ukraine – for some reason are not discussed by the author. Though they had been meticulously planned and executed as the instruments to force the locals to pay for Hitler's war.

This book clearly shows complexity of the issues arising from studies of the Nazi occupational policies and their impact on postwar world. Regardless of some criticism it is indeed a vital contribution to modern research.

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