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Astrid Gehrig. *Nationalsozialistische Rüstungspolitik und unternehmerischer Entscheidungsspielraum: Vergleichende Fallstudien zur württembergischen Maschinenbauindustrie.* München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 1996. Ppp. 364 Cloth. (gebunden), ISBN 978-3-486-56255-2.

Reviewed by Mark Spoerer
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A. Gehrig: Nationalsozialistische Rüstungspolitik

This book is Astrid Gehrig's University of Tuebingen dissertation. In a comparative biographical approach, the author examines three leading entrepreneurs of the southwest German mechanical engineering industry: Rolf Boehringer (Boehringer, Goeppingen), Max Knorr (Fortuna-Werke, Bad Cannstatt), and Otto Fahr (Werner & Pfleiderer, Stuttgart-Feuerbach). These three men not only led their firms during the Nazi era; they were also active in the *industrielle Selbstverwaltung*, which was a hybrid between armaments bureaucracy and private-sector regulatory bodies. The author looks primarily at the distribution of power between the Nazi regime on the one hand and these entrepreneurs on the other. What were the economic or ideological conflicts between the two sides and how were they solved?

The study is based on the archives of the three firms, which are stored in the Wirtschaftsarchiv Baden-Wuerttemberg, and documents of the government armaments bureaucracy stored in federal archives. It is structured in six chapters, the first of which briefly describes the three entrepreneurs and their firms before 1933. The second is a business history of the three firms which focuses on production and investment strategies, on *Auftragsverlagerung* to factories in the occupied territories, and on the *Verlagerungen* towards the end of the war. Whereas the third chapter centers on labor relations, i.e. the role of the entrepreneur in his own firm – including some pages on forced labor – the fourth looks at industrial organization and thus primarily at the entrepreneurs' role within the *industrielle Selbstverwaltung*. A short fifth chapter deals with the *Entnazifizierung* and related aspects, and the sixth summarizes the author's conclusions.

Gehrig's main findings are that Nazi economic policy restrained the entrepeneurial *Handlungsspielraum* but also created new business opportunities. The picture which emerges is that of the Nazis determining the overall course but leaving enough room for manoeuvre within the industrial Selbstverwaltungsorgane_. Clever entrepreneurs took the opportunities and entered into the arrangements that the regime offered. Boehringer, who was active in two *Fachuntergruppen* (under Speer called *Arbeitsausschuesse*) seems to have been especially successful in pursuing the interests of his own firm under the pretext of "national duty." The entrepreneurs' long-term strategies were always directed at their traditional products. Only reluctantly and sometimes under pressure did they participate in production that was relevant (and salable) for armaments purposes only. Hence, conflicts normally were not of an ideological nature but originated from differing economic motives. These motives found expression in the not-too-scrupulous use of foreign and smaller German firms' production capacity, and in the use of forced labor. All in all, the author concludes, it was these business opportunities related to the *Selbstverwaltung* which served as an incentive for cooperation with the regime. The entrepreneur's activities were led by "*oekonomische Zweckrationalitaet und strikter Utilitarismus*" (327). This is what, according to Gehrig, determines their responsibility for collaboration with the regime. Ideological issues hardly mattered – except for the successful sabotage of the selfdestruction orders in the last weeks of the war which afterwards was stylized as *Widerstand* in the course of denazification.

The book is a bit hard to read because it is structured functionally. The author's constant switches from Boehringer to Knorr and then to Fahr require a lot of concentration. But her arguments are balanced and well-founded. What is missing – and this would presumably have strengthened her argument – is an attempt to assess the personal income of the three entrepreneurs (admittedly difficult) or at least the profitability situation of their firm. Only sales figures are reported, which is a bit unsatisfactory given that the author quite often refers to

profit motives or profits (e.g. 120, 123, 323). This is, to be sure, a minor criticism.

The greatest difficulties come in the assessment of this book's originality. Most of what the author says is not too surprising and has been said elsewhere, e.g. in the booklet by Paul Erker on *Industrie-Eliten in der NS-Zeit* (1993), or in the work of Richard Overy. Moreover, one could question the extent towhich three southwestern entrepreneurs of the mechanical engineering industry represent the German entrepreneur in general (328-9). What about entrepreneurs who did not have access to positions in the *Selbstverwaltung*, or those who refused to participate? What about entrepreneurs in other industries which were less important for armaments production? While the author is undoubtedly convincing concerning her own case studies, she is a bit rash in generalizing her results. Nevertheless, the book has important things to say against recent trends in the literature which (again) stress the alleged nearly total power of the Nazi regime towards entrepreneurs.

Mark Spoerer

University of Hohenheim (Stuttgart)

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