

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Hans-Jürgen Schröder, ed. *Marshallplan und Westdeutscher Wiederaufstieg: Positionen Kontroversen*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990. 256 pp. DM 29,80 (paper), ISBN 978-3-515-05761-5.

Reviewed by David A. Meier (Department of Social Sciences, Dickinson State University)
Published on H-German (October, 1995)



The Marshall Plan stands as the pre-eminent symbol of America's commitment to European reconstruction after the Second World War. Initiated by the now-legendary speech of George C. Marshall to Harvard's graduating class in June 1947, the Marshall Plan represented America's long-term commitment to free market capitalism and to fighting the spread of communism and socialism. Popularly perceived as the result of effective planning and foresight, it led not only to Europe's economic recovery but set the stage for the eventual demise of communism in eastern Europe. A half-century later, various "Marshall Plans" have been promoted for regions around the globe where political instability and weak regional economies have inhibited democratic growth and free market capitalism.

The Marshall Plan's simplified image changed with the release of new documentation and publications in the 1970s. Beginning with John Gimbel's *The Origins of the Marshall Plan* (1976), it became clear that the American camp – including Marshall himself – had anything but a clear vision of what the Marshall Plan would later become. The American camp found modest unity only in the general belief that an American presence should be maintained in Europe. In addition, Gimbel held that there existed little if any evidence that American policy was guided towards undermining the political left. Gimbel's work stimulated additional studies of the origins and effects of the Marshall Plan.

In this anthology of perspectives, Hans-Juergen Schroeder has attempted to guide the reader through the various responses to Gimbel's analysis through a selection of fifteen articles organized around four themes. First, Schroeder presents two articles outlining the pa-

rameters of the debate over the nature of the Marshall Plan, i.e., as a plan for European reconstruction or as an improvised response to problems in Germany. Second, these themes are taken to greater depth by reviewing the Marshall Plan's place in America's policy towards Germany and the impact of the Plan upon developments within western Germany. Third, four articles debate the economic significance of the Plan, i.e., did the Marshall Plan bring about economic prosperity in West Germany or simply restore confidence to a demoralized people? Finally, Schroeder draws readers into the realm of foreign policy and the Marshall Plan. Consequently, the reader is left with an analysis which suggests that the Marshall Plan was more significant as a foreign policy statement on the part of the United States than as a viable explanation for West Germany's swift economic recovery.

Specifically, in the opening article, John Gimbel presents the crux of his argument developed in the aforementioned publication. Responding to Gimbel's position, Manfred Knapp takes Gimbel to task for not acknowledging the context in which Marshall's speech was made, namely, an awareness of parallels with the 1930s, the Moscow Conference's failure to address Germany's economic recovery, the massive infusion of American aid into Germany through GARIOA, and the realities of Soviet-American ideological conflict. Contrary to Gimbel's focus upon Germany, Knapp links the Marshall Plan with (a) an American plan to bolster political and economic stability in western Europe, (b) a component of American strategic planning against the spread of communism and socialism, and (c) and the recognition of West Germany's key role in the realization of those same objectives. Knapp's second article in this publication,

however, acknowledges West Germany's central role in American foreign policy and detracts somewhat from his initial conclusions. Germany's division, consequently, is perceived as a consequence of changes in American foreign policy. As for assessing the impact of the Marshall Plan, Knapp holds to the view that the plan's political significance was greater than its economic impact.

Subsequent articles by Erich Ott and Werner Link contribute both breadth and depth to the political dimensions. Erich Ott adds a straightforward historical overview which outlines the basic parameters of postwar Germany, shows the Marshall Plan as a key component of American foreign policy, and reviews the economic impact of the plan on West Germany. Ott underscores his support of Knapp's basic theses. He sees the Marshall Plan as marking a decided change in American foreign policy and as a clear departure from the decisions rendered at Potsdam. Neither Knapp or Ott provide significant depth into understanding Soviet actions which led to changes in American policy vis-a-vis western Europe in general and western Germany in particular.

Werner Link's inquiry into the Marshall Plan's origins begins with a scathing critique of Erich Ott's article. Ott's reluctance to use primary sources, namely, published State Department documents or personal papers (both of which were available to Ott in Germany), undermines Ott's credibility. (In Ott's defense, however, one should note that he makes clear his intention to present only the "Ergebnissen neuerer Forschungen" relating to the Marshall Plan [60]). Link's basic research provides additional reinforcement for Knapp's basic conclusion, but adds two important points. First, American foreign policy goals reflected the influence of liberal minds within the American political establishment. As for western Europe's political and economic integration, American foreign policy paralleled that of West Germany. West Germany's firm integration into western Europe on all levels represented a "genuine deutsche Entscheidung" (94). In other words, Link identifies with the basic interpretation outlined by Hans-Peter Schwarz back in late 1960s.

The latter half of Schroeder's anthology is divided between analyses of the Marshall Plan's economic significance and foreign policy dimensions. Werner Abelhauser takes a hard look at short-term and long-term trends with the German and European economies. As far as long-term economic growth from 1880-1970 is concerned, increases in net production display an almost linear pattern of improvement. The Second World War

(specifically the period 1936- 1945) interrupts this pattern of growth. Abelhauser draws several interesting conclusions from his research. First, he decouples the Marshall Plan from the emerging Cold War and blames the western Allies for breaking with the Potsdam principle of treating occupied Germany as a single economic unit. Second, Abelhauser's study reveals a substantial economic recovery within the British and American occupation zones already in late 1947 – long before European Recovery Program aid arrived in mid-1948. Third, microeconomic analyses, namely, those of Bern Klemm and Guenter J. Trittel, show that Marshall Plan aid did help overcome specific weak spots in the postwar German economy, e.g., within the wool and electrical industries. However, these segments of the economy were not *key* to the recovery process. Finally, Abelhauser is convinced that West Germany's potential for economic growth had been momentarily blocked by the conflicting policies of the occupying powers. As a final note and basic criticism of Abelhauser, it is important to add that his assumptions of long-term growth are retrospective in nature and hardly reflect contemporary analyses of West Germany's political and economic situation.

The concluding three articles by Werner Buehrer, Manfred Knapp, and Hans-Juergen Schroeder drive one particular point home: The Marshall Plan's foreign policy implications far exceeded its economic impact. Buehrer sees West German foreign policy moving into the international arena as a direct consequence of the Marshall Plan. Contrary to Link, Buehrer does not perceive German policy to be a reflection of purely German interests, but rather a consequence largely of American occupation policies. While Knapp continued to reinforce his earlier arguments regarding the need to perceive the origins and emergence of the Marshall Plan within the larger context of American policy towards Europe, Schroeder argues that as a component of American foreign policy, the Marshall Plan functioned as to tool to further West Germany's political and economic integration into western Europe.

A final critique of Schroeder's selection of articles must take two approaches. First, these articles represent most major themes related to the origins and impact of the Marshall Plan. Gimbel, Knapp, and Abelhauser outline the parameters of the discussion, namely, America's development of the plan, its political impact, and associated economic issues. As a work presenting various analyses of the Marshall Plan, this volume serves as a basis for instruction and discussion for those with a knowledge of the German language. On the other hand, most of these

pieces have already been published elsewhere as articles. Furthermore, although mentioned in the select bibliography, one sorely misses a contribution by Michael Hogan. As for the interpretations rendered, one is hard pressed to find references to Soviet activities during the postwar era. Rather, we find several critical references to the West for abandoning the decisions made at Potsdam. In this light,

the omission of Soviet strategic planning seems strange given the intention to provide an overview of this era.

Copyright (c) 1996 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@H-Net.MSU.EDU.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

Citation: David A. Meier. Review of Schröder, Hans-Jürgen, ed., *Marshallplan und Westdeutscher Wiederaufstieg: Positionen Kontroversen*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. October, 1995.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=177>

Copyright © 1995 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.