

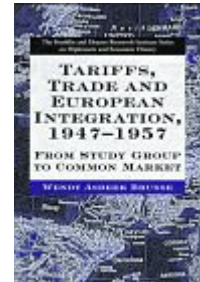
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Wendy Asbeek Brusse. *Tariffs, Trade and European Integration 1947-1957: From Study Group to Common Market*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997. xiii + 318 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-312-16518-5.

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It is a courageous scholar who seeks to unravel the byzantine history of trade negotiations. Despite the general importance of trade policy to economic performance and to international political relations, the details of tariff bargaining are notoriously arcane and tedious. Overcoming these drawbacks in her material, Wendy Asbeek Brusse of the University of Groningen has written a comprehensive and readable account of European trade diplomacy since 1945. Her main contention is that tariff reduction was not merely a Common Market issue, driven by The Six and culminating finally in the European Economic Community in 1957. Rather, tariff and trade negotiations took place simultaneously through a variety of different international institutions and with a variety of goals and outcomes. In an effort to present a more comprehensive and accurate account of the manifold approaches to trade liberalization, Asbeek Brusse has not shied away from this complexity.

Her account begins with two introductory chapters which describe trade policy from the nineteenth century to 1947. These chapters offer little new to our understanding of the 1940s but they set the scene for the European initiatives of the 1950s. The next three substantive chapters of the book rely on the archival records of six countries to describe the tariff initiatives expressed through various international agencies. The initiatives under the auspices of the OEEC had limited results due to the reversal of liberalization in the early 1950s as a result of balance of payments deficits associated with the Korean War. This chapter is the only place in which Asbeek Brusse attempts to measure the impact of tariff barriers but she relies mainly on the limited existing studies. Her original contribution is to compare the frequency

distribution of each country's tariffs according to their nominal rate for each SITC group. The results are unsurprising; identifying high and low tariff groups. She also examines the number of complaints about tariff barriers from individual countries through the OEEC. This data may have as much to reveal about politics within the OEEC as the burden of tariffs on particular industries. A more complete assessment of real effective tariffs would have helped to give context to the book's account of trade diplomacy. Asbeek Brusse's failure to attempt this, however, may be justified since the diplomatic efforts themselves were based on nominal tariff rates. This is a history of economic diplomacy rather than an economic history of tariffs in Europe.

The various still-born European initiatives in the GATT are described in the next chapter and the American response is also brought into the story at this stage. The subsequent chapter outlines the tariff proposals, which culminated in the Common Market among The Six. A final chapter describes national policy-making in Britain, the Netherlands and Germany in an attempt to put international economic diplomacy into the context of domestic debates. This chapter rather whets the appetite for more since it is clear that the national policies summarized in previous chapters were the result of domestic compromises which are more revealing about the construction of tariff policy than the international wrangling which is the focus of the book. The conflict between imperial preference and Britain's economic interests is particularly revealing in this regard.

Overall, this is a well written and detailed account of tariff policy with only a few minor weaknesses. The

account does not include the international monetary arrangements or exchange controls which were also used to influence trade patterns in Europe. Including these may have made an already complicated story unmanageable, but it requires that the book be read along with existing work on the sterling area and the EPU. The complexity of the institutional structure sometimes creeps into the organization of Asbeek Brusse's text. For example, the overlap of tariff negotiations is reflected in the inclusion of the Collective Approach to convertibility and the Annecy Round of GATT in the chapter on the OEEC.

Finally, most of the tables and graphs are almost illegible which is an irritation for the reader. Nevertheless, Asbeek Brusse's book will be of use to graduate students and other scholars trying to disentangle the complexities of post-war tariff diplomacy.

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