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## Coal, Steel, and the Rebirth of Europe, 1945-1955: the Germans and French from Ruhr Conflict to Economic Community

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Coal, Steel, and the Rebirth of Europe is a history of America's involvement in Europe during the immediate post-war years, written on the basis of primary sources. The main contribution of the book is the American perspective on the early European integration process it offers the reader. John Gillingham's introductory chapter, however, deals with the issue of coal and steel during the inter-war years. The author shows how protectionism and punitive tariffs, on the one hand, and foresight and diplomatic and political attempts to heal the wounds inflicted by a divisive economic struggle, on the other, are rooted in national politics. All politicians, even the conciliatory ones, were faced with the dilemma that it was almost impossible to find constructive ways out of the self-centricity which was the prevailing ethos in the nation states and in particular the European world powers and those aspiring to world-power status.

Subsequently, Gillingham covers the period of the Second World War. The second chapter analyses the German (under Nazi rule), the French and British economies at war. Thus, it inevitably deals with the war-important industries of coal and steel and shows that the war was waged not only on the battlefield, but also in the pits, the factories and the workshops. In this struggle the Nazi war economy, managed in the later years by the wily and talented Albert Speer, held out with remarkable tenacity and flexibility (pp. 52-64), while the French were exploited under Nazi occupation (pp. 65-77); and the British lost blood, face and treasure, and ultimately their claim to empire (pp. 78-85). The United States, not for the first time, were called in to redress the balance of the old world, with a decisive military and economic contribution to the defeat of Nazi Germany – one gets a glimpse of the Cold War when from this American perspective, the contribution of the Soviet Union to the defeat of Nazi Germany is forgotten.

The third chapter reviews the surprising change of attitude of the Americans towards the Germans after World War II, exemplified in the switch from the Morgenthau Plan to their support of the Schuman Plan. In the example of the International Ruhr Authority (IAR), Gillingham shows, first, that the Americans came to accept that the idea that a defeated Germany could be reduced to mere self-subsistence – as planned by Morgenthau – stripped of all its heavy industry so that it would never again pose a threat, was entirely impracticable. Second, he highlights the major problems the other two western Allies, Britain and France, had in running German heavy industry in their zones of occupation, both endeavouring to extract as much as possible in order to reduce their costs of occupation, which, in the French case, was a policy reinforced by old fears of the arch-enemy Germany. Their problems came to a head on the microeconomic level when strikes, sabotage, machinery failure and lagging investment reduced the output of Ruhr coal pits to an all-time low, which led to the Americans taking over control from the British. On the macroeconomic level, the British problems with the cost of occupation can be seen in the establishment of the Bizone, which put the American and the British zone of occupation under common economic direction, so that effectively the Americans were paying most of the bills and therefore, in their own jargon, 'calling the shots'. In third instance, Gillingham shows with his analysis of the IAR a growing American reluctance to micro-manage the German economy.

The situation created conditions extremely propitious to the concepts underlying the Schuman Plan, which combined checks and balances on German economic power with necessary emancipation from occupation rule. The Schuman Plan also added the bonus of a type of compulsory Franco-German reconciliation. For the Americans, this offered good prospects for peace and stability in the future, a marked improvement on the occupation regime. The following chapter adds a good deal of practical detail fleshing out the overall picture of American involvement. It also gives the perspective of the miners, of the pit managers, and of the impact of dismantlement policy (relatively short-lived in the West) on their lives, and it shows their keenness to circumvent the restrictions imposed by the occupation regime.

The fifth chapter then makes it clear that the IAR was in fact the first step away from this occupation regime and hence also the first step towards emancipation for the Germans, in that they recovered some real influence over their coal and steel industries. Particularly among SPD supporters in Germany, the IAR was, however, judged to be a betrayal of German interests. Theoretically, in terms of considerations of national sovereignty, this judgment was not entirely unfounded, and the issue was close to the heart of the SPD because of the fate of the miners. Germany, of course, was not at any rate an equal partner. Konrad Adenauer – dubbed by the SPD the ‘Chancellor of the Allies’ because he agreed to the IAR – had few illusions on this score and therefore preferred the path of cooperation with the Allies to that of confrontation. For him this was a necessary compromise in his step-by-step approach to the goal of full German sovereignty.

Adenauer would never agree to any plan except on a basis of parity, but when the Schuman Plan came in May 1950 it was clear that his goal was in sight. However, in its eventual outcome, Gillingham calls the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) the “success of a failure”. The ingredients of this failure were Monnet’s stubborn attitude and unwillingness to compromise (in his role of first president of the ECSC’s High Authority), matched by the obstructionist views adopted by the representatives of heavy industry. ECSC regulations on national coal and steel industries were constrained, in particular due to the remnants of the occupation regime. For example, Law 27 required that the decartelisation of the Ruhr should be completed as part of the ECSC process (p. 301). Gillingham concludes that the ECSC overall achieved only very few concrete results. It became a ‘success’ because it set a precedent – emblematic and practical – for further European integration. The ECSC was an example how European integration could work in the future. The author believes this was exactly what the Americans – consistent supporters of European integration thereafter – wanted and Monnet delivered to them (p. 369). It was also a success, because it transformed the French policy of holding Germany down into a real partnership between the two countries, and hence eliminated the main reason for conflict in Europe (p. 368).

For Gillingham, rigorous analysis of the early years of integration will not provide an answer to what Europe is today. After almost 400 pages of detailed analysis he readily concedes that there is more than meets the eye in what is the present-day European Union (p. 370). There are, he believes, transcending motivations driving the integration movement and holding the EU together today, e.g. “(...) the often remarked and all too easily trivialised deep longing for unity felt to some extent by all Europeans.” (p. 371) Concessions by Germany in order to press European integration forward also figure here – notably Germany’s acceptance of permanent net-contributor status to the EU budget. Another important factor is the learning process as part of integration and which has completely changed statecraft in Europe – one may say it has established trust between the nations where once the ‘default’ attitude in the various foreign offices was one of innate suspicion (p. 371). European integration is also more open than any other international organisation and hence it is more available to public participation and more sensitive to the people’s interests. It is also more concrete, because its purpose is not academic debate of political constructs such as federalism, but the solution of concrete economic problems (p. 372). Lastly, Gillingham concludes that only in the shadow of the Cold War, when Berlin and Paris were no longer centre-stage, and because of the threat of nuclear apocalypse which reduced Europe’s ancient feuds to relative insignificance, could European integration succeed (p. 372).

Coal, Steel, and the Rebirth of Europe was written for an academic audience or patient readers ready to cope with a mass of historical detail. For experts in the field of European integration it remains an essential reading, because of its analysis of one of the most important players in this process, the United States, not least because the American role is usually considered as marginal to European integration studies. Thus, Gillingham’s study – though published some time ago – must rank as one of the standard works in the field of early European integration analysis.

**BIBLIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

Coal, Steel, and the Rebirth of Europe, 1945-1955: the Germans and French from Ruhr Conflict to Economic Community

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