

Unternehmer und Regime im Dritten Reich

Seminar veranstaltet von Henry A. Turner
19.-21. März 1987*

Teilnehmer: Curtis W. Bajak (San Diego), Avraham Barkai (Israel), Knut Borchardt (München), Peter Hayes (Evanston), Harold James (Princeton), Alan S. Milward (London), Gerhard Thomas Mollin (Bielefeld), Hans Mommsen (Bochum), R.J. Overy (London), Hans Pohl (Bonn).

The purpose of the seminar was to bring together scholars currently conducting basic research on topics within the purview of the seminar and thereby facilitate an exchange of findings and relevant information, including the availability of source materials.

By way of experiment, the seminar began with a panel discussion on the evening of March 19 to which Fellows and guests were invited. After each participant gave a brief oral summary of his written contribution, a general discussion ensued which raised a wide variety of issues.

The three working sessions of the seminar were presided over by Professor Knut Borchardt of the University of Munich. The written contributions had been circulated to participants in advance and copies made available to interested Fellows as well. This arrangement obviated the necessity of having the papers read aloud and made possible a maximal use of the time for critical discussion.

At the first working session, on the morning of March 20, three papers were discussed: "The *Gleichschaltung* of German Corporation Law", by Dr. Curtis W. Bajak, Counselor for the United States Court of Appeals, San Diego, California; "Hjalmar Schacht in the Third Reich: Between Government, Party, and Business" by Harold James, Assistant Professor of History, Princeton University; and "Der Konflikt zwischen den 'Vereinigten Stahlwerken' und den 'Reichswerken Hermann Göring', 1937-1944" by Dr. Gerhard Thomas Mollin, Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter, Fachbereich Geschichtswissenschaft, University of Bielefeld.

The second working session, on the afternoon of March 20, also dealt with three papers: "Die deutschen Unternehmer und die Judenpolitik im Dritten Reich" by Dr. Avraham Barkai, Research Associate at the University of Tel Aviv; "Die Unternehmensführung der Daimler-Benz AG und die NSDAP (1933-1945)" by Professor Hans Pohl of the University

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of Bonn; and "Friedrich Flick and the Nazi Regime" by H. A. Turner of Yale University and the Wissenschaftskolleg.

The final working session, on the morning of March 21, covered four papers: "Fritz Roessler and Nazism: The Observations of a German Industrialist, 1930-37" by Peter Hayes, Associate Professor of History, Northwestern University; "The Post-War Trial and Judgement of Nazi Industrialists" by Alan S. Milward, Professor of History, London School of Economics, University of London; "Das Volkswagenwerk and seine Arbeiterschaft im Dritten Reich" by Professor Hans Mommsen of the Ruhr University, Bochum; and "Krupp in the Third Reich" by Dr. R. J. Overy, King's College, University of London.

During the seminar, a broad consensus developed on several major points. Most basically, there was general agreement that most existing theoretical formulations of the business community's role in the Third Reich do not hold up in the light of research in the rich documentation now available, particularly in corporate archives. Theories that assign a primacy to economics, and therefore to the wielders of economic potency in the Third Reich have proved especially faulty. Repeatedly, the findings of the seminar papers contradicted the notion that the business community determined, or even had a voice in, the formulation of basic government policy, domestic or foreign. But the other pole of the traditional discussion, which asserts an unqualified primacy of politics, now also seems inadequate in light of the regime's delegation of sweeping authority over many aspects of the economy to business associations during the war in an effort to lift output. In short, there was widespread agreement among participants in the seminar that the relationship between the business community and the regime needs fundamental reassessment and theoretical reformulation in the light of further research.

Another area of consensus developed with regard to the extreme adaptability demonstrated by business firms in response to radically altered economic and political circumstances. The seminar papers suggest that this was in part a by-product of the priority executives accorded to the economic interests of their firms. This priority made it difficult for business executives to withhold support, or at least acquiescence, from a regime that suppressed their chief social adversary, organized labor, and adopted policies that rapidly restored prosperity after a catastrophic depression. The assignment of priority to economic advantage led as well to a narrowed perception of social reality that left leading businessmen unable to grasp the moral implications of the regime's policies. Operating within the framework of an almost wholly instrumental rationality, many eventually became implicated to various degrees in such criminal policies of the regime as aryazation of Jewish businesses and the ex-

exploitation of slave labor. There was general agreement among seminar participants that this behavior on the part of those who bore responsibility for some of Germany's leading business firms needs further scrutiny within the larger context of corporate behavior in general, for which it appears to have disturbing implications. The participants also agreed that the response of the business community to the Third Reich needs to be compared to that of other components of the German elite, such as professors, physicians, jurists, and civil servants.

The seminar papers will be published separately in appropriate scholarly journals.

Henry A. Turner