

The Postwar Challenge: Cultural, Social, and Political Change in Western Europe, 1945–58. Edited by Dominik Geppert. The German Historical Institute, London (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003; pp. ix + 402, £60.00).

This wide-ranging volume is concerned with recovery and reconstruction after the Second World War in Germany, Britain, Italy and France. Contributions have been assembled from national specialists into four sections: the integration of wartime experience into national memory; ideology and economic policy; foreign policy and European integration; and US economic and cultural intervention. 1958 is chosen as a cut-off point because it marks the Treaties of Rome, the fall of the Fourth Republic in France, acceleration of growth in Italy and changing attitudes to the Nazi past in Germany.

The first section is particularly strong with the similarities between the German, Italian and French experiences clearly apparent. Germany's *vergangenheitspolitik*, or 'policy of the past', involved amnesty and integration on an anti-Nazi basis. This meant that justice was sacrificed so that the German public could be reassured that their sacrifices had been worthwhile. By the late 1950s this was leading to some disquiet among the young with increasing calls for a more complete public acknowledgement of the Nazi past – and its personal and institutional persistence. The Italian surrender to the Allies in 1943, followed by German occupation, meant that Italians could perceive themselves as having been 'liberated' rather than defeated. There was at first a policy of rehabilitation to validate those who had 'defended national honour' before the armistice. However, prosecution of neo-fascist writers in 1953 reasserted the anti-fascist basis of the Republic; the whitewash of Italian participation in the Axis war was not revised, and the Italian fascist past not fully acknowledged.

France also found it difficult to create an official version of the war; the Résistance had not been broadly based, and collaboration had been widespread. Neither could liberated France cope with criminalizing a large number of civil servants, who were instead 'deprived of civil rights' while many prison sentences were suspended as an act of 'clemency'. Furthermore, there was considerable debate between the Left and the Gaullists on how honours should be allocated, and whether prisoners of war, forced labourers and civilian victims were as 'heroic' as combatants. Nevertheless, a fragile consensus was created and parliamentary democracy survived.

Even in Britain, official validation of wartime sacrifices was problematic. Popular demand was for memorials that would be useful rather than glorifying. However, by the late twentieth century, when landmark anniversaries arose, the lack of stone memorials was questioned and many constructed retrospectively. While this discussion is interesting, it is slight; it would be useful to extend it to popular demands

for housing and economic security, for real rather than symbolic acknowledgement of wartime sacrifice.

The similarity of experience between Britain, France, Germany and Italy is also striking in the cases of economic and foreign policy. In Germany, the ideological directions of the main political parties were forged from 1945 to 1947, with liberal parties advocating Hayekian free competition tempered with a strong social policy in the quest for mass parties which overcame the Weimar class and religious divisions. In Italy, the traditional economic structure led to the dominance of vested interests; the Christian Democrats were ambivalent towards state intervention and modernisation, while the Communists called for interventionist industrial policy. The Institute for Industrial Reconstruction (IRI), the holding company for state enterprises, attempted to take leadership but vested interests were too strong. While productivity did increase by the mid-1950s, it was on the basis of a low-wage economy. In France, modernisation was also technocratic, engineered by the Monnet Plan. Radical action was necessary; in 1945 industrial production was 38 per cent of its 1939 level, and opening the economy to international trade without modernisation would have resulted in the destruction of French industry. Monnet prioritised six basic sectors, with a liberal rather than socialist blueprint, and helped France secure US aid totalling \$2458.2 million. This encouraged banks to make medium-term loans, and saved the steel industry in particular.

For postwar Britain, José Harris finds that war socialism led to economic thought, if not action, being far more radical and interventionist than often realised. However, the Right ultimately won the ideological battle because ‘their theorists and ideologues took the intellectual debate more seriously’, exemplified by Friedrich von Hayek and Michael Oakeshott (p. 188). While her contribution is beguiling and extremely well-written, again, for the purposes of the collection an explicit comparison with reconstruction programmes in France, Germany and Italy would be useful. The fact that economic thought in Britain could be extremely radical was not ultimately important in itself if divorced from action.

In the field of foreign policy, pursuit of national interest was paramount. In Germany, the idea of a united Europe as a ‘Third Force’ between the US and the Soviet Union had a broad appeal, especially among the young, the middle class and the labour movement. However, Adenauer led a competing movement for the integration of the western zones and alliance with the US. The blockade of Berlin in 1948 was the death knell of the ‘Third Way’, and German unification was abandoned in favour of Western integration. For Italy, two competing interpretations of European integration are outlined: a federalist approach highlighting its noble ideals, and a diplomatic approach emphasising *realpolitik*. The armistice had discredited Italian expansionism, but the US, with its Italian-American lobby, was Italy’s most important ally and its

only source of aid, and so Italy supported American calls for German rearmament via the European Defence Community (EDC).

In France, after July 1948 it was clear that the greatest threat came from the Soviet Union rather than Germany, which spurred the creation of the Atlantic Alliance in 1949. France also negotiated the EDC in 1952, stipulating that rearmament be via a European-controlled army with Germany soldiers. However, the National Assembly did not accept the political integration aspects of the EDC and refused to ratify it; the Western European Union was used instead to provide a framework for inter-governmental co-operation. In the British case, late entry into the European Economic Community was less ‘the price of victory’ and more due to the UK’s interests lying outside Europe. Once the payoff to European integration had strategy accordingly changed, reaffirming the pragmatism of British foreign policy.

The final section, loosely grouped as covering ‘the Transatlantic dimension’, is less coherent. An essay on Marshall aid, which found that its success lay in averting political rupture and economic crisis, specifically monetary crisis, would sit more comfortably in the sections on economic or foreign policy. The remainder of the section concentrates on US ‘cultural diplomacy’ in Europe as a whole, and is the weakest part of the book. Two essays focus on cultural initiatives by public and private American bodies, which is perhaps excessive, and neither really demonstrates their success or importance. Geppert focuses on West Berlin’s ‘Freedom Bell’ and its symbolic and real political power. While the paper is fascinating, its subject matter is simply too slight compared with the rest of the collection.

How far does the collection succeed? The sheer number of brief contributions means that methodological coherence is lost, belying its origin as the proceedings of an academic conference. Geppert criticised the *Sonderweg* approach – namely interpretations based on national particularism – but assembling contributions from national specialists is more likely to highlight national differences and make meaningful comparison difficult. For example, the section on economic ideology is interesting, but the German and British accounts are concerned with economic thought, while the papers on Italy and France are concerned with policy. In the foreign policy section, it is unclear why the French and Italian accounts should end in 1955 with the failure to ratify the EDC rather than 1958 and the establishment of the Common Market. The collection aimed to trace ‘intercultural transfer’, but consumption of American popular culture, which really was central to the period, is not discussed.

Furthermore, the aim to cover ‘political, social, and cultural changes’ in early post-war Europe may simply be too ambitious. Two separate collections – an intellectual history of political culture, and a traditional political economy approach to European

reconstruction – would enable coherence and a fuller discussion of many of the interesting issues which do not receive full consideration here.

Finally, the elegant introduction to the collection should be noted; Geppert integrates the disparate contributions to build a subtle and assured analysis of Europe's 'common, but diversified' early post-war history, which does much to overcome the disparateness of the various essays.

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