

H-France Review Vol. 9 (April 2009), No. 52

Christian Chevandier and Jean-Claude Daumas, eds., *Travailler dans les entreprises sous l'Occupation*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2007. 523pp. €15.00 (pb). ISBN 978-2-84867-211-3.

Reviewed by Kenneth Mouré, University of California at Santa Barbara.

The enduring fascination with the French experience during the German Occupation has left French workers at the margins of most historical narratives. If not for the STO--the compulsory labor service instituted in February 1943 that, with the Rélève begun in June 1942, sent 650,000 French workers to Germany and prompted young men facing labor conscription to opt instead for the *maquis*--workers might pass virtually unnoticed in many surveys of the Vichy years.[1] Yet paid employment dominates the daily lives, the location and the well-being of most adults, and in the circumstances of economic shortages and politicization of daily life in Occupied France, it deserves greater attention. Single-author books on labor during the Occupation are few, with works like Jean-Pierre Le Crom's *Syndicats, nous voilà!* yielding results as rewarding as they are rare.[2] Much of the new work has appeared in conference volumes,[3] most notably in two volumes published in 1992 and 2003.[4] *Travailler dans les entreprises sous l'Occupation* joins a new conference volume on unionized workers [5] as the latest contributions presenting the results of new research. It combines thirty papers from two conferences run in June and October 2006 by the CNRS research group on "Les entreprises françaises sous l'Occupation." [6]

The basic context for work experience is well established. Rearmament in the late 1930s increased industrial employment. Mobilization in 1939 and defeat in 1940 produced sharp convulsions in employment, with substantial employee turnover and then high unemployment as the chaos of exodus and defeat brought severe economic dislocation. Workers had been mobilized, and then as prisoners were unable to return to their homes and employment. The battle for France destroyed transport infrastructure and some productive capacity. The Germans seized raw materials, finished goods, fuel, vehicles, rolling stock and food supplies. The division of the country into zones with restricted access aggravated transport difficulties. German authorities showed no haste in trying to restore production, as the seizure of booty, for immediate consumption or for use in the war against Britain, initially took priority.

This produced a hiatus in production and substantial unemployment in 1940-41. Recovery took place in reorienting French production to meet German needs from limited supplies of raw materials. This amounted to a vassalization of the French economy, under a new regime of state controls working in German interest but implemented by French authorities. It included a serious effort to freeze wages and prices. Wages are easier to control than prices: real wages fell, food supply declined, and transport difficulties increased. Working for German firms, whether in France or in Germany, whether voluntary or conscripted, offered better wages and benefits. The Organization Todt in France offered high salaries and a combination of bonuses, perks and premiums that drew large numbers of French workers. The Vichy regime wished to make work the foundation of its program for national renewal (Dalisson). Female employment was to be reduced in favor of concentrating women's responsibilities in the home and family. But growing labor shortages and the desperate need for increased income to buy food required that women, especially mothers, return to work.

Travailler dans les entreprises offers case studies at three levels: individual firms, regions, and categories of enterprise or worker. The nature of available archival evidence makes it difficult to avoid a concentration on the role of the state (particularly in dealing with the STO, wage controls, and efforts to ameliorate working conditions) and the management level of decision-making in individual firms. The collection has particularly interesting contributions on the impact of STO and employers' efforts to protect their workers; on the degree to which French firms assisted in the vassalization of the French economy and contributed to German war production; and on the experience of work during the Occupation (productivity, the role of *comités sociaux*, and women in workforce).

The STO (decreed on 16 February 1943) marked a seismic shift in the balance of accommodation/resistance.^[7] The threat of being sent to Germany for compulsory labor service for men born between 1920 and 1922 created an immediate sense of crisis. The program had initial success, over-fulfilling an initial quota of 250,000 men, but results then fell precipitously. Raphaël Spina provides a concise overview of the impact of STO on French firms, taking into account the variation in patron response (from resistance to cooperation), workers' reactions, means of evasion, and the effects on productivity through the employment of extra and untrained workers and the increased manpower shortage. Other contributions assess the impact on workers in Lorraine, Haute-Savoie and the Bourgogne, and on the Société Schneider and the SNCF. Particularly notable are the consequences in increased accidents at work and declining productivity and worker morale. The result was to weaken production in France, alienate workers from the Vichy regime, and increase the workplace need for women, whom Vichy declared it wished to keep in traditional roles of housekeeping and childrearing.

French workers in Germany were treated as forced labor rather than "ambassadors of French quality," hardly a strong recommendation for work in Germany, voluntary or conscript. When Schneider sent "missions" to German factories it found its workers living in barracks, short of food and clothing, and working sixty-hour weeks (Berger, p. 76). Managers in France developed strategies to keep their workers at home, transferring workers to protected sectors and arguing they could not meet German orders on time without keeping qualified workers in France. In the automobile sector, Peugeot employed workers in repainting offices, planting trees and redecorating factory canteens; Citroën kept workers employed making *marmites norvégiennes*, broad-brimmed hats, shoes, and even swaddling clothes (Loubet, p. 182). Although French workers were promised better wages in Germany, they were paid less than their German counterparts, and their most frequent complaint was that they were not paid the wages promised (Arnaud, p. 329). When paid, there was little for them to buy. In 1945, workers had their Reichsmark savings confiscated when they returned to France, a source of lasting bitterness (Arnaud, pp. 335-8).

Working for the Germans in France offered better prospects: German firms promised higher wages, greater employment security (they had better access to raw materials), and significantly better benefits including access to more food. After February 1943, they also offered protection from the STO. Working for firms under contract to the Organisation Todt [OT] building German defenses was often remunerative, especially in 1940-41, but the workers forced to live in OT camps were subject to ill treatment regulated in accord with the Nazi racial hierarchy, and a large number of OT workers were drawn from foreign forced labor, POWs, and concentration camp internees. At its maximum in the spring of 1944, the OT in France employed more than 200,000 workers (Gaida, p. 243), perhaps as many as 290,000 (Lemmes, pp. 219-20), of whom more than half came from other countries.

French firms cooperated in the vassalization of the French economy, but they generally did so under duress. German controls on finance, raw materials, transport and markets and their oversight of Vichy economic policies allowed little space for resistance before encountering German suppression, and many firms chose to work with the Germans in order to be able to work at all. The contributors do not address the issue of collaboration directly, but many do offer examples of resisting work for the German

war effort. The Usine de ressorts du Nord produced springs for German railways (Laloux); workers for the Marine française in Brest worked at harbor repair after the Armistice and then on repairing German warships, but they worked as slowly as possible (Hellwinckel). Schneider, working directly for the Germans, found many ways to reduce output: concealing raw materials, filling order books with French orders, slowing production through elaborate schemes to order parts from distant firms, and allowing workers to slow their pace, have high rate of absenteeism and facilitate sabotage. Not surprisingly, the director of the Creusot factories, H.-C. Stroh, and many managers and workers suspected of sabotage were arrested and deported in 1944 (Capuano). Strikes and sabotage slowed production. Neither form of resistance receives much attention here; neither was recorded well in company archives. As the editors point out, resistance activity had little impact on output, but after all its primary purpose was political.

In terms of work experience, aside from the convulsions of employment and labor conscription, falling real wages and declining productivity, already well-known, these essays offer further information on changes in the workplace to accommodate increased women's employment and the impact of food shortages. The latter took a toll in the form of absenteeism, illness, depleted worker strength and the need to compete for scarce labor. The Vichy government encouraged the creation of *comités sociaux* to supplement its *Charte de Travail* in October 1941, with these *comités* taking a notable role in dealing with food supply problems. Employers adopted various strategies to retain workers and maintain output: workers' canteens, subsidizing workers' gardens, supporting workers' cooperatives for food acquisition. Fabrice Grenard focuses specifically on "La question du ravitaillement," which also takes a central role in Michèle Blondé's account of the *comité social de la Société nationale de la viscose*, and figures repeatedly in essays on other firms. As Grenard points out, *ravitaillement* efforts at the level of individual firms increased inequities within the working classes and increased animosity on the part of those excluded from workplace benefits.

Two essays focus on women's employment; Marie-Claude Albert on women in armaments factories in Vienne, and Fabrice Virgili on French women in Germany. Albert examines the changes in women's employment in an arms factory in Châtellerauld, the moral terms in which the management worried about women's behavior, and the changes in policy under German administration, ignoring French "humanitarian" concerns in order to increase production. Virgili provides an overview of women's part in voluntary French labor in Germany (Pétain refused to extend the STO to include women in 1943). Women were only a small part of the French labor force in Germany; somewhere between 50,000 and 70,000 of 1,500,000 French workers during the war. They volunteered in seeking employment opportunities and to escape various problems in France; they were unimpressed by the low pay, working conditions, long hours, barracks life, and shortages of food and clothing they found in Germany. So many tried to find any way they could to return home that French authorities altered policy, ending pregnancy as a valid reason for returning to France. When they did return, women were treated as collaborators and subject to greater violence than returning men. The state also worried more about women in its concern for contagion of venereal disease and TB.

As one would expect in a collection of conference papers, quality is not consistent, but it is generally high in this collection. There are repetitions in analysis and the basic history of the period. Many of the tables are poorly reproduced, and there is a scattering of mid-line hyphens throughout the text that seems to be the product of an imperfect transition between word processing programs. The contributions on non-French topics, covering social relations in the Belgian national railways and Czech unions, are tacked on the last section with no effort to integrate them into the collection. The volume has no index, a regrettable omission in a volume of this size with strong common themes. But the book demonstrates the vitality of new research in labor history during the Occupation and its importance in understanding the social impact, the inefficiencies, and the inequities of the German occupation. The fact that so much new work is available in conference volumes, and that so little of it has been taken up in surveys of the Vichy years, offers a great opportunity for a synthesis covering French work experience during the Occupation.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Jean-Claude Daumas, "Introduction"

Jean-Pierre Harbulot, "Les travailleurs lorrains face aux contraintes en matière de main-d'oeuvre (1940-1944)"

Jean-Claude Daumas, "Prélèvements de main-d'oeuvre et segmentation du marché du travail sous l'Occupation. Le cas de la région Bourgogne / Franche-Comté (1942-1944)"

Isabelle Raynaud, "Lutte contre le chômage et politiques de l'emploi en Seine-Inférieure de 1940 à 1944"

Françoise Berger, "La société Schneider face au travail obligatoire en Allemagne"

Raphaël Spina, "Impacts du STO sur le travail en entreprises : activité productive et vie sociale interne entre crises, bouleversements et adaptations (1942-1944)"

Pierre Judet, "Le travail et le retournement des valeurs sous l'Occupation. L'exemple d'un système productif localisé : la vallée de l'Arve (Haute-Savoie)"

Laurence Bour, "La réquisition des cheminots pour le travail en Allemagne. L'apport des archives de la SNCF"

Georges Ribeill, "Entre effectifs réduits et besoins accrus, quelques aspects de la gestion du personnel à la SNCF (1939-1945)"

Marie-Noëlle Polino, "La réquisition des cheminots pour le travail en Allemagne. Une étude de cas"

Jean-Louis Loubet, "Le travail dans quelques entreprises automobiles françaises sous l'Occupation"

Christophe Capuano, "Travailler chez Schneider sous l'Occupation. Le cas des usines du Creusot"

Ludovic Laloux, "L'Usine de ressorts du Nord sous l'Occupation : les contraintes du travail pour l'Allemagne"

Fabian Lemmes, "Les conditions de travail dans les entreprises françaises du bâtiment et des travaux publics enrôlées dans l'Organisation Todt"

Peter Gaida, "Les camps de travail de l'Organisation Todt en France 1940-1944"

Lars Hellwinckel, "Les arsenaux de la Marine française sous l'Occupation : l'exemple du port de Brest (1940-1944)"

Marie-Claude Albert, "Les femmes et le travail dans les usines d'armement de l'Ouest occupé : le cas de la manufacture d'armes de Châtelleraut"

Pierre Martin, "Le travail dans les services de l'Occupation : l'exemple de trois entreprises d'assurances"

Patrice Arnaud, "Rémunérer le travail forcé : réalités salariales et enjeux mémoriels"

Sébastien Durand, “Politiques de rémunération dans les entreprises de la Gironde occupée. contraintes allemandes et stratégies patronales”

Fabrice Virgili, “Les travailleuses françaises en Allemagne”

Mark Spoerer, “La dureté des conditions de vie et de travail des Français en Allemagne pendant les deux guerres mondiales : une comparaison des taux de mortalité”

Fabrice Grenard, “La question du ravitaillement dans les entreprises françaises sous l’Occupation : insuffisances et parades”

Patrick Mortal, “La vie ouvrière et syndicale dans les Manufactures nationales d’armes du centre de la France à l’époque des «Usines mécaniques de l’Etat » : Tulle, Saint-Etienne, Châtellerault”

Michèle Blondé, “Le comité social de la Société nationale de la viscose à Grenoble, aspects politiques et syndicaux”

Steven Zdatny, “Le travail dans les salons de coiffure sous l’Occupation”

Rémi Dalisson, “Représenter le travail sous Vichy : Mise en scène de l’entreprise et persistance d’une subversion ouvrière en France, 1940-1944”

Paul Van Heesvelde, “« Vous considérant, M. le directeur général, comme le père de la grande famille du rail » – les relations sociales à la Société nationale des chemins de fer belges (SNCB) pendant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale”

Jaromír Balcar and Jaroslav Kučera, “Les syndicats tchèques sous l’Occupation allemande (1939-1945). Entre intérêts nationaux et sociaux”

Christian Chevandier, Denis Peschanski and Jean-Louis Robert, “Travailler sur le travail dans les entreprises en France sous l’Occupation”

NOTES

[1] One notable recent exception is Richard Vinen, *The Unfree French: Life under the Occupation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). The link between the STO and joining the Resistance was not direct; most men evading STO went into hiding. See H. Roderick Kedward, “STO et maquis,” in *La France des années noires* vol. 2, *De l’Occupation à la Libération* dir. by Jean-Pierre Azéma and François Bédarida (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1993 and 2000), 309-32.

[2] Jean-Pierre Le Crom, *Syndicats, nous voilà! Vichy et le corporatisme* (Paris: Les Éditions de l’atelier, 1995).

[3] See the special issues of *Le mouvement social* no. 158 (1992), and *La Revue d’histoire de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale* no. 57 (1965).

[4] Denis Peschanski and Jean-Louis Robert, eds., *Les ouvriers en France pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Paris: CNRS, 1992) and Bernard Garnier and Jean Quellien, eds., *La main-d’oeuvre française exploitée par le IIIe Reich* (Caen: Centre de Recherche d’Histoire Quantitative, 2003).

[5] Michel Margairaz and Danielle Tartakowsky, eds., *Le syndicalisme dans la France occupée* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2008).

[6] See the group's internet site at: <http://gdr2539.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr>

[7] In this context, Philippe Burrin's preference for "accommodation" rather than "collaboration" is helpful; see Philippe Burrin, *France under the Germans: Collaboration and Compromise*, trans. by Janet Lloyd (New York: The New Press, 1996).

Kenneth Mouré
University of California, Santa Barbara
moure@history.ucsb.edu

Copyright © 2009 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for redistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172