

H-Diplo

H-Diplo Article Reviews

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No. 360

Published on 29 June 2012

H-Diplo Article Review Editors: Diane N. Labrosse

Web and Production Editor: George Fujii

Commissioned for H-Diplo by Diane N. Labrosse

Talbot Imlay, "Democracy and War: Political Regime, Industrial Relations, and Economic Preparations for War in France and Britain up to 1940," *Journal of Modern History* 79 (March 2007): 1-47; and

Talbot Imlay, "Preparing for Total War: The Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale and France's Industrial and Economic Preparations for War after 1918," *War in History* 15: 1 (2008): 43-71.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/PDF/AR360.pdf>

Review by **Kenneth Mouré**, University of Alberta

It did not take long after the guns fell silent on 11 November 1918 for prescient observers to foresee that the 'war to end all wars' had ended in a truce. French Marshal Ferdinand Foch believed the truce would last at most twenty years; the satirical newspaper *Le Canard enchaîné* was talking about "the Next Last War" and publishing a notice for a reunion of the "Association des Futurs Combattants de la Prochaine Dernière Guerre" (war veterans were "anciens combattants") in January 1919.¹ Military preparations in France and Britain began in earnest only after the threat Hitler posed to Europe was incontrovertible, and much ink has been spilt in arguing the delays and defects in rearmament and planning for the next war, with France's rapid defeat in 1940 clinching the case that preparation there had been grossly inadequate.

In the two articles under review Talbot Imlay extends his examination of French and British planning and rearmament, the comparative dimension of which made his earlier book, *Facing the Second World War*,² a notable achievement in contrasting the politics and economic organization for rearmament in Britain and France in the period 1938 to May 1940. His book details three dimensions of the preparations for war in each country: strategic, domestic-political and political-economic. The most striking part of his analysis

¹ See Allen Douglas, *War, Memory, and the Politics of Humor: The Canard Enchaîné and World War I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 118-19.

² Talbot C. Imlay, *Facing the Second World War: Strategy, Politics and Economics in Britain and France 1938-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

covers industrial relations, and the manner in which governments, industry and labour were able to work together. In the book version, Imlay contrasts “planning” with “laissez-faire” models (238-353), the former defined by a stronger government role in planning and coordinating the rearmament effort, and acting as arbiter and moderator to lead a cooperative effort by industrialists and labour organizations. The latter model minimizes the role of government, even in a coordinating capacity, and in the case of France in the late 1930s, allows for strongly adversarial relations between owners and workers, the government siding with the owners. Unsurprisingly, the model with minimal direction and significant conflict produced fewer goods than the “planning” approach with more central direction and cooperative effort.

In “Democracy and War,” Imlay revisits and refines his analysis, presenting the alternatives as “coordinated” and “uncoordinated” approaches to rearmament (3-4). The material covered in two chapters of *Facing the Second World War* is deftly summarized in the article version. Imlay’s attention to industrial relations is revealing. In both Britain and France, strong employer associations and strong unions in the industries producing metals, vehicles and weapons, had strained workplace relations. The owners and unions differed on workplace conditions and control, but also on their foreign policy perspectives, with the unions being more consistently anti-fascist and pro-rearmament, and advocating stronger government direction to coordinate rearmament programs and to give them a stronger voice in the determination of output and working conditions. Industry owners were less belligerent and more concerned for their own independence and profits. Working from extensive research in the archives of ministries, ministers, employer organizations and unions, Imlay provides a detailed and convincing analysis of the views on each side in the workplace and their efforts to gain government support. It is the role of government that is really key: the government in each country had an opportunity to act as arbiter and work with both sides (coordination). The French government’s failure to do so, particularly when Paul Reynaud became Minister of Finance in November 1938 and Premier Édouard Daladier opted for a hard line in dealing with labor unrest, with greater freedom to industry owners, was a retreat from the power possible in acting as arbiter. The decision weakened the state in giving more power to the employers. Neville Chamberlain’s government in Britain was better off not so much in its choices as in its circumstances, with individuals in the unions, government and industry pushing for a more cooperative approach than Chamberlain wanted, and an acceleration of rearmament accomplished in part against Chamberlain’s will. But the cooperative relations provided Winston Churchill with better means to mobilize British production after May 1940.

Imlay develops his analysis in asking whether democracies suffered a “democratic handicap” in preparing for war (44); Daladier had called in April 1938 for a national rearmament effort along the lines of those in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Imlay argues that there were differences in organization for rearmament between France and Britain as great as those between fascist countries and the democracies. One of the marked differences between the fascist and democratic powers, however, lay in when they chose to engage in a serious rearmament effort, and how urgently they had to mobilize their economies once the decision was made. It is not only what happened after that decision was taken, but also when and how it was made, that provides the really interesting ground

for analysis. And here the French case, with the legacy of hostility in relations between the owners and the unions after the Popular Front strikes and the Matignon Accords in 1936, perhaps tells more of the story than Imlay provides in his analysis. The contrast with Britain, where cooperative relations in rearmament were built on a past history of tolerance and collective bargaining leading to legitimacy and respect for those on the other side of the table, is striking indeed. And it leaves the categories of “coordinated” and “uncoordinated” as being perhaps less subject to choice, for who, after all, would choose an “uncoordinated” approach to national rearmament? But the fundamental point remains, that industrial relations are a key area for understanding success in rearmament.

“Preparing for Total War” turns back the clock to the immediate aftermath of the First World War and the re-creation of the Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale in November 1921 to prepare France for the next “total war.” The Conseil had its origins in 1906 to advise the government on “all matters concerning national defence,” and played a very minor role during the Great War. Reorganized in 1931, the Conseil was intended to provide broad consultation, research and planning to coordinate French preparations for the next war. The ambitions exceeded its capacity to reconcile differences of opinion between the different services and ministries it sought to coordinate, and it rapidly yielded ground to their demands, allowing existing departments to retain control of planning for mobilization of sectors under their influence, and thus whittling back the coordinating role of the Conseil. Short on authority, it also suffered from lack of funding, further reducing its influence. By the 1930s it was meeting rarely and providing little more than an excuse for coordination. Control over rearmament planning and industrial mobilization returned to individual services and ministries, the latter often lacking the expertise, funding and authority for effective planning.

The CSDN, Imlay concludes, proved incapable of generating and implementing plans for effective and efficient rearmament, leaving France ill-prepared in 1939-1940 for the long war its military expected. His institutional approach to assessing the record of the Third Republic, examining its ability to build effective institutions, shows striking failure, not just in the CSDN, but in the political culture in which it lurched and foundered. Further exploration of the complex institutional factors to which Imlay draws attention, in terms of the institutions and their conflicted relations – between ministries, between services, between capital and labor in industry – can tell us much more about the lack of coordination in French rearmament planning and production.

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