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Anne-Monika Lauter, *Sicherheit und Reparationen: Die französische Öffentlichkeit, der Rhein, und die Ruhr (1919-1923)*. Vol. 74, Düsseldorfer Schriften zur Neueren Landesgeschichte und zur Geschichte Nordrhein-Westfalens. Essen: Klartext, 2006. 431 pp. Illustrations, appendices, notes, index. € 39.50 ISBN 3-89861-495-6.

Review by Christopher Fischer, Indiana State University.

In the aftermath of the First World War the occupation of the Rhineland, and later the Ruhr Valley, were the central concerns of French foreign policy. Despite a lack of sustained public interest in the occupation, Anne-Monika Lauter shows in *Sicherheit und Reparationen* that debates over the purpose, nature, and costs of the Rhineland occupation served as a focal point for broader French concerns over security and the enforcement of the Treaty of Versailles.

Examining the period between the Treaty's signing and the beginning of the occupation of the Ruhr, Lauter explores how national newspapers, regional dailies, pressure groups, and politicians articulated and argued over the meaning of French policy in the Rhineland. In this regard, Lauter self-consciously seeks to complement rather than revise the existing literature on the occupations of the Rhineland and Ruhr as well as Franco-German relations more broadly, not by looking at policy, but rather public discussions and representations of the French occupation, France's relation to the Rhineland, and French security.

Several conditions framed such public discussions. First, following the lead of her doctoral advisor Gerd Krumreich, Lauter stresses the importance of an enduring "war mentality" in France which underscored French weakness and the potential for a German resurgence, hence necessitating strong measures to guarantee French security. Second, debates took place before a French public that had learned during the war to pay greater attention to political affairs. Third, not surprisingly, Lauter demonstrates repeatedly that right and left took divergent stances on the issue of the Rhineland, with the right often pushing for a hard line to weaken Germany and expand French influence.

After briefly summarizing wartime debates over the importance of the Rhine, the first section of Lauter's study analyzes public discussions on the goals and policies of the French occupation. Paul Tirard, a former colonial official and French High Commissioner in the Rhineland, saw his task as trying to win over the local population with the unofficial hope of encouraging Rhenish separatism. A policy of a *pénétration pacifique* included a variety of cultural activities ranging from language lessons to artistic exhibitions to mending relations between French troops and German civilians. According to Lauter, Tirard also foresaw an important role for the press in carrying out the French mission. The French press could not only help the French mission by refraining from provocations (for example, simply not using the term "Boches" when referring to Germans), but also by positively reporting on the occupation as well as by promoting the historic, cultural, and economic links between the Rhineland and France.

In one of the more fascinating sections of the book, Lauter reveals that French officials under Tirard worked hard to cultivate positive coverage by inviting journalists to the occupied zone, urging papers to present the official line on the occupation, and submitting their own copy for distribution by Havas. Tirard experienced only fleeting success on this front, much as with the broader policy of *pénétration*

*pacifique*. The French public remained at best indifferent to forging closer ties to the Rhenish population. And as Lauter demonstrates, Tirard's most forceful push for publicity backfired. Attempts to bolster French tourism – and thus social, economic, and cultural contacts between France and the Rhineland – through a 1921 artistic exposition in Wiesbaden generated a backlash as editors, politicians, and lobbyists argued that French tourists should spend their money in France, and not in territory likely to revert to German control. Paris forced Tirard to scale back publicity for the event. Thus, both Tirard's policies in the Rhineland, and his attempt to sell them to the French public, fell short, the latter largely meeting not opposition but disinterest.

Part II dissects the public debates over the meaning of the Rhineland as an aspect of French security. Contrary to received contemporary German opinion, few in France advocated annexation of the left bank of the Rhine. Instead, discussions centered on how to use the occupation to enhance French security, especially as the prospects for a defensive alliance with Britain and the United States faded. Not surprisingly, Lauter shows that the voices on the French right called most loudly for support of Rhenish separatism: newspapers on the left, especially Communist papers, criticized any such efforts. Here Lauter also points to the importance of examining how regional papers wrote about the issues. National papers, Lauter argues, had to worry about international reception; regional dailies, in contrast, could more freely discuss French policy. Papers in the south and west of France in particular supported a hard line on the Rhineland, most notably by offering exposés on Rhenish separatists and occasionally calling for French support for the Rhenish separatist movement. Such calls, Lauter notes, were too diffuse to translate into any effective action.

Support for Rhenish separatism, however, merely reflected one potential method of keeping Germany weak. The occupation itself was another facet of French discussions over security. Indeed, though control of the Rhineland offered the French a potential means of coercing the Germans to pay reparations, debates over the costs and duration of the occupation often centered on the issue of security. Here Lauter is at her strongest, demonstrating the connections between wartime mentalities and interwar foreign policy; French commentators feared French weakness and German revanche. The occupation therefore became an extension of war by other means. As evidenced by debates in national and regional papers, as well as in numerous *conseils généraux*, many in France were willing to countenance a possible extension of the occupation to compel German compliance with the Treaty of Versailles and guarantee French security more generally, though little thought was given to a potential endgame. The occupation did, however, generate criticisms, most notably about its costs and about its viability in forcing German reparations payments.

Part Three examines the place of the Ruhr in French public discourse. In particular, Lauter demonstrates that the idea of forcing German reparations payments through an occupation of the Ruhr had been debated publicly, if intermittently, between 1920-23. The administrations of Millerand, Briand, and Poincaré indeed had weighed this option, often with the urging of the political right. The left, in contrast, favored negotiation. And the broader public, Lauter argues, supported the idea of forcing payments, but not at the cost of an increased occupation force or loss of funds for French reconstruction. It was only over the course of 1922 that a fragile consensus formed over the necessity of an occupation as the Germans apparently schemed to avoid their treaty obligations and the British remained willfully callous to French concerns. Lauter here also stakes a claim about Poincaré's Ruhr policy. Though as early as April 1922 Poincaré had argued that France had the right to take unilateral action in the Ruhr, he only slowly embraced the idea of actually occupying the Ruhr. Thus, Lauter argues, Poincaré, like Briand before him, sought to use the Ruhr to prod Germany to action; the occupation, then, was a consequence of a combination of continuing German recalcitrance and the creation of sufficient public support for the move in France.

Lauter then backs away from the narrow debates over whether to occupy the Ruhr to offer an engaging view of how newspapers and politicians presented the potential costs and duration of an expanded

French presence. Much coverage on the subject stressed the relatively short duration of occupation for relatively high gains to be had in the Ruhr; some even went so far as to argue that an occupation of the Ruhr would help further France's mission in the Rhineland. Though Radical-Socialist and Communist papers cast doubts on such rosy estimates, it was only once the Ruhr occupation turned tumultuous that the broader public first became cognizant of the difficulties of the operation. According to Lauter, the failure of the Ruhr occupation ended hopes for a peaceful penetration of the Rhineland, and more importantly, by demonstrating the limits of both French power and the Treaty of Versailles, prodded the French government to pursue a new, less aggressive, more conciliatory course on the issues of security and reparations.

By moving away from a focus on politics and policy in favor of examining French public opinion, Lauter has offered an able addition to the history of French involvement in the Rhineland and Ruhr. On several points, however, one wishes that Lauter had been a bit more expansive. For example, it is never clear how much time foreign policy questions occupied in one Lauter's favorite sources, the debates of the *conseils généraux*. Lauter might have also delved a bit deeper into the regional press. While non-partisan papers give a taste of regional coverage of foreign policy, debates in regional papers might have been even more revealing, especially as Lauter repeatedly points out that regional papers demonstrated less restraint in discussing issues of security than their Parisian counterparts. Finally, the conclusion, largely a summation of the work as a whole, raises a tantalizing, but unfilled, argument, one that hints at the importance of the deliberately avoided issue of reception. Lauter concludes that politicians so often sought out public venues for discussing foreign policy because the public was interested. What remains unclear from this suggestive conclusion is not only the question of how the public received such speeches, but how politicians shaped their message to fit their audiences.

Written in very accessible German and full of well-chosen political cartoons, Lauter's work offers a workmanlike, welcome complement to other recent works on French policies in Germany after World War I, most notably Conan Fischer's *The Ruhr Crisis, 1923-1924*.<sup>[1]</sup> Lauter has demonstrated, if not consistently throughout the text, the enduring weight of the war in shaping French interwar debates, and the resultant importance of security as an ill-defined but key component of public discussions. Lauter should also be lauded for not overestimating the importance of her subject to the French public; indeed she underscores that only selected groups demonstrated sustained interest in the Rhineland and Ruhr. Foreign occupations, then as now, failed to occupy public life consistently other than as an aspect of domestic concerns.

## NOTES

[1] Conan Fischer, *The Ruhr Crisis, 1923-1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

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