

**Bronson LONG: *No Easy Occupation: French Control of the German Saar, 1944-1947*, Rochester, Camden House, 2015, 268 pp. ISBN: 9781571139153.**

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## **Military Occupation and Political Reconstruction in French-Occupied Germany after World War II**

In this book, Bronson Long illustrates both the means and envisioned ends of French occupation policy in the Saarland, an industrial region on the Franco-German border, in the aftermath of the Second World War. *No Easy Occupation* will be of interest to scholars studying military occupations, but also to those interested in how European politics were reconstructed after the terrible devastation wrought upon the continent by the Nazis.

Long shows that within the French political establishment there were conflicting visions about what to do with the Saarland, which was occupied by France in summer 1945. In general, however, France harbored two ambitions for it. First, it wanted to link the region's economy to the French economy. This would provide France with a much-needed boost to its postwar recovery at the same that it would deprive the German armaments industry with the coal and steel upon which it had depended. At the same time, the Saar was to be detached from Germany and given political autonomy of some sort, though France intended to exercise a decisive influence over it. Both of these aims were pursued by the energetic and capable military governor Gilbert Grandval. Descended from an Alsatian Jewish family, Grandval was a Gaullist veteran of the French Air Force and the French Resistance (Grandval was actually his nom de guerre; his real last name was Hirsch-Ollendorff). Much of Long's book is devoted to analyzing Grandval's cultural policies in occupied Saarland. These policies were endowed with major significance by Grandval, who saw France's "cultural penetration" of the region as the foundation on which its long-term political links to France would be built. Grandval's cultural policies included «bringing French artists, musicians, and actors to the Saar, sending Saarlanders on cultural trips to France . . . [and] promoting projects that involved Franco-Saar cultural collaboration.» (p. 60) However, Grandval astutely reasoned that he should focus on those areas of cultural policy that would reach the largest number of Saarlanders, and so concentrated on «religion, sports . . . and education.» (p. 60) Long's treatment of the issue of religion is somewhat cursory, but educational policies, which were at the center of Grandval's plans for the Saar, are explored in greater depth. Long shows that the French occupation regime took energetic measures to establish French influence in the region's schools, in which mandatory instruction in the French language was introduced and French



school inspectors were given rights of full access. Impressively, a new university, the *Universität des Saarlandes*, was also established; supported by the French state, the university's founders hoped it would become a site of Franco-German, and eventually pan-European, cultural collaboration.

Long's analysis of the role of football (soccer) in French occupation policy, as well as within postwar European cultural life in general, is fresh and engaging. In accordance with Grandval's policy, the French occupiers took sports seriously, banning those, such as gymnastics, that they associated with militarism and nationalism, while promoting soccer, which they deemed «unconnected to Germany's negative past» (p. 74). The re-establishment of soccer was greeted with enthusiasm by the locals, and so was in a sense a great success; but it also created problems, because one of the new teams, FC Saarbrücken, was quite good. In 1947, it beat a Paris team, which led to official French worries that the loss reflected poorly on France and therefore undermined the development of cultural and political ties. These fears also led to French resistance to suggestions that FC Saarbrücken join the French soccer federation, a matter that generated friction between Grandval and officials in France, especially Foreign Minister Robert Schuman (revealing a very different side to one of the European Union's founding fathers.) Both invested the question with great importance, Grandval arguing that it would facilitate the final settlement of affairs in the Saarland to France's favor, Schuman countering that the team would generate hostility in France. Schuman also worried that if «a Saar team became the champion of France it would breat serious psychological and political problems for the French government» (p. 124). Both parties' diagnosis of the psychological and emotional role played by soccer in postwar Europe seems to have been borne out by the events of the 1954 World Cup, which was won by West Germany. The teams' victory was enthusiastically celebrated there, celebrations that also spread to the Saarland, where, the French remarked, the inhabitants' «consciousness of belonging to the German community rose sharply.» (p. 179)

By 1948 many of France's economic aims had been achieved; the region's mines were under French control and the Franc was used as currency. Regional political life, in the form of an elected Landtag and a Prime Minister, had also been successfully re-invigorated, though real power still lay with the French. But within a few years, French hopes for some sort of cultural-political union with the Saarland were decisively thwarted. Long sees the results the results of a 1955 referendum, in which Saarlanders emphatically rejected a plan to “Europeanize” the Saarland and establish various pan-European institutions there, in the manner of Brussels today, as a defeat for the French. The plan to Europeanize the Saar was, by that time, widely perceived in the region as «a discreet way of dressing up objectives and ambitions that were entirely French» (p. 226). Explaining this defeat is the key analytical ambition that Long sets himself in this book, and his central argument is that French cultural policies failed to produce lasting results because they were guided by a fundamentally flawed view of Germany and German history. In the view of Grandval and many others, the key to Germany's turn towards aggressive militarism and nationalism was the ‘colonization’ of Germany by Prussia, which exercised a malign influence on the cultural and political life of the other states and regions of Germany after unification. The key aim of French policy, then, was do ‘undo’ this process of Prussianization and the same time that regional culture

was supported. Long argues that this view underestimated the profound and deep rupture created by the devastation of the war and Germany's defeat, at the same time that it overestimated the existence of a robust and distinct Saarland culture and identity.

Long gives additional reasons for the Saarlanders' rejection of closer cooperation with France, including the increasing sense that the French were meddling, self-interested outsiders, coercive occupiers rather than sympathetic and helpful allies. He also notes that French political legitimacy in the region was sapped by its entanglements in shabby wars in its overseas colonies, especially Indochina. Ultimately, however, it is difficult to weigh the importance of such factors, in part because we hear so little from Saarlanders themselves in this book. Long's focus is primarily the political elites who structured the regime and negotiated over the region's future; his source material consists, to a large degree, of diplomatic files and correspondence. This is a valuable view, and one worth reading about, but it means that popular sentiment, while not absent, remains in the background. When we do hear from the Saarlanders, it is highly suggestive of the complex political and cultural forces at work in the region. In the years after the war, for example, Saarlanders voted in large numbers for both Christian Democratic and Socialist parties that were strong supporters of European integration, suggesting popular support for such a measure. Another telling example of the failure of 'cultural penetration' is the result of a 1947 French poll asking elementary school students in the town of Mittelbexbach where they might like to go on vacation someday; most said the United States, not France (though there were students in other towns who did chose France). Finally, Long tells us that the 1955 referendum should not be seen as a vote in favor of Germany, and neither feelings of German national identity nor a strong desire to join the rest of (West) Germany were strong in the Saarland. He does not really show this, however, and there is some evidence to the contrary, such as the enthusiasm with which Germany's World Cup victory was greeted. Having resisted French attempts to create an identity for them (resistance that stands as a rebuke to the more radical constructivist theories of identity creation), why would the Saarlanders not have wished to join a Germany in which they could feel at home and which was, by the 1950s, prosperous and stable?

Long also does not do quite enough to develop a theme that surfaces sometimes in the book, but which seems to hover constantly just outside of the margins of his argument: the link between colonialism and state-building occupations of this sort. French cultural policies in the Saar smack of a *mission civilisatrice*, and subsequent historians have noted the strong family resemblances between some French plans for the Saarlands' future with the way France ruled its colonies, arguing that France wanted «a protectorate [in the Saarland] similar to Tunisia or Morocco.» (p. 85) (indeed, Grandval briefly served as a colonial official in Morocco after leaving the Saar region). But historians of military occupations, which, in the course of the twentieth century, became ever more intricate, demanding, and involved affairs, would have been interested to know if the administrative machinery of colonial administration provided a blueprint for French rule in Germany after the war, and, if so, how it compared to the American occupation government. *No Easy Occupation* also implicitly raises the question of how the absence of violence—the Saar is largely peaceful in this period—affects the way occupation regimes develop. These are promising avenues for research on a topic that is drawing increasing attention from scholars of warfare and military institutions.