

Immoral Money and War Profiteurs (1870-1945)

29-30 May 2018

Maison de la Recherche (Sorbonne University), Paris

Call for Paper

The conference on “Immoral Money and War Profiteurs (1860-1945)” is part of a series of scientific events focusing on the topic of political corruption, organised by a Franco-German research partnership (project POCK2, ANR-DFG) between Paris-Sorbonne University, the University of Avignon, Darmstadt University of Technology and Goethe University Frankfurt. The collaborative project is also supported by research groups from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, the New Europe College of Bucharest, the Free University of Amsterdam, and is part of the International Scientific Coordination Network « Politics and Corruption » (GDRI 842 CNRS).

The conference will explore the emergence of immoral money and war profiteurs in times of war or in the post-war period in Europe (1870-1945). The “economic cleansing” that occurred in France after the Second World War is an example of war profiteering that has been studied by the CNRS research team (GDR) 2539 “Companies under the Occupation”. By contrast, the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 and the Great War have not been given much attention. This conference aims to analyse the allegations of corruption levelled against companies that were thought to have turned high profits in wartime or immediately thereafter. A special but nonexclusive focus should be given to French and German cases. Examples found in other European countries, from the last third of the XIXth century to the first half of the XXth century, may also be addressed.

While it is superfluous to stress the importance of wars as historical highlights, we shall emphasize how decisive wars are in defining public norms systems. Indeed, the potential contradiction between individual benefits and collective interest is increased during such conflicts. In this context, great sacrifices are made on behalf of community and national safety as patriotism is required from all, while unique economic dynamics emerge: hasty decisions are made in times of great uncertainty; public spending increases substantially and huge funds are injected in the war system. High profits may thus be made at a low cost by individual stakeholders, particularly in such sectors as military supply and army logistics. Influence networks prove to play a crucial role in such circumstances. It is mainly when wars have been lost that the gains achieved by war profiteurs are seen as unacceptable. Profit margins considered as unreasonably high, as well as speculative profits, are on the radar and deemed all the more scandalous since they have been made against a backdrop of general shortage. The topic of "immoral money" invites us to assess the importance of post-war periods rather than just focus on the conflicts themselves.

Topics could include but are not limited to:

- public debates on immoral money and hidden practices/malpractices during the 1870-1871 War, the Great War or World War II and their aftermaths – not only in France. Other conflicts may also be examined. Proposals that deal with the issues of war debts and reparations, especially in terms of the polemics they led to, will be welcome.

- the institutions that have dealt with this question in judiciary, political and parliamentary terms: focus may be placed on the parliamentary inquiry committees that have been established at the time.

- efforts should be made to put a figure on the profits made by specific firms as well as by entire industry sectors, however delicate the task may be – especially in the case of France, given the lack of a standardized business accounting programme until 1941, which is when the national chart of accounts was created.

Please send proposals (1500 characters max.) in either English or French before 1st March 2018 to frederic.monier@univ-avignon.fr and olivierdard@orange.fr

The scientific board (composed of Olivier Dard, Jens Ivo Engels, Silvia Marton, Cesare Mattina, Frédéric Monier and Gemma Rubi) will examine and select the proposals.

The organizing committee (composed of Olivier Dard, Frédéric Monier and Marie Levant : marie.levant.ehne@gmail.com) will be willing to answer any questions.

Please consider that transport and accommodation will be provided to participants.