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**BELGIAN BUSINESS IN THE
NAZI NEW ORDER**

Gent, 1977, ca. 240 p., BF 510.

paraîtra dans la série de la *Fondation Jan Dhondt* et sera disponible dès le 15 août 1977.

Ceux qui commanderont l'ouvrage avant le 13 juillet 1977 bénéficieront d'une remise de BF 90, soit net BF 420, à virer au CCP de la fondation.

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verschijnt in de reeks van de *Jan Dhondt Stichting*, verkrijgbaar vanaf 15 augustus 1977.

Zij die het werk bestellen vóór 13 juli 1977 genieten van een korting van BF 90, hetzij netto BF 420, te storten op de PCR van de stichting.

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Abstract

This book explains how the industry of nazi-occupied Belgium was harnessed to the German war economy. It is a study of both German economic policy towards, and activities in, Belgium and Belgian economic collaboration with the Occupying Power.

Hitler lacked long-term economic plans for Western Europe and Belgium in particular. Nor did he delegate to any agency or person the necessary powers to enforce a consistent line of policy there. The Economic New Order that emerged was shaped by the tension between the forces of orderly exploitation and disruption. The onset of occupation brought frantic plundering of raw materials stocks and numerous attempts, some of them successful, to seize financial assets. The same months also witnessed the set up of the Military Government of Belgium and North France, which attempted to provide Belgium a civilized form

of occupation rule. Its position was undergirded by strong, new Belgo-German economic bonds. Businessmen-officials from the victorious Reich promoted the cartellization of Belgian industry, initiated the formation of long-term supplier relationships, instructed Belgians in the intricacies of the German system of raw materials rationing, and generally furthered the organization of Belgian industry. In the course of the war, the German need for Belgian production gradually outweighed other policy considerations. As the Reich's position became desperate, however, economic vagabondage became more frequent. Thanks, in brief, to the profligate spending habits of the occupation forces, the social unrest generated by the deportation of labor, and the spiraling inflation set off by massive black market purchasing, Belgium was on the verge of economic collapse by Spring 1944. German economic policy towards occupied Belgium must nonetheless be considered successful. The Belgian economy was effectively oriented to the requirements of the German market. Her production, both of specific items and in bulk, was of great importance to the German war effort. The conquest of Western Europe in fact provided the Reich with the economic equivalent of a major ally for the rest of the war.

The policy of economic collaboration was devised by the established leaders of Belgian business acting with royal approval, set in motion by its main employers' association and central bank, implemented with the cooperation of the civil service, and followed the length of the occupation by industry as a whole. The rest of Belgian society, numerous egregious individual instances of opportunism notwithstanding, found itself an unwilling accomplice in the Nazi war effort. The animating principle of the business policy was that Belgium needed to export industrial goods to the Reich in order to obtain the foodstuffs required to sustain the population and prevent the deportation of labor. Neither of these aims was achieved. The Germans would not so much as consider providing reciprocity in foodstuffs. The labor deportations began in the months of Belgium's maximum production effort. In addition, the inflation brought on by the Belgian financing of German purchasing eroded wage and salary earnings and wrought misery on the population. Policy was not, however, changed. This fact can be traced back in part to the fears of businessmen that a social upheaval would follow any cessation of production but also to a desire on their part to operate at a profit as well as a reluctance to forfeit the quasi-official powers gained during the occupation. Motives of material and political self-interest, while important, were not, however, the only ones that prompted the collaboration of the business leadership. The occupation also presented it with an unexpected opportunity to introduce long-overdue and fundamental changes in industrial organization and economic thinking, in short to modernize Belgian industry along lines already followed in Germany. The Nazi occupation was not, as often thought, an empty parentheses in Belgian history but an episode with far-reaching implications for her future development.

Bestellingen – Commandes :

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P.C.R. – C.C.P. 000-0347439-82.