

Call for Papers

32. Academic Symposium of the Society for Business History (Gesellschaft für Unternehmensgeschichte), 8/9 October 2009, Vienna

Nationalization and Privatization

„Property“ has been the object of fundamental debates in business history not only since the studies of Berle/Means and Alfred Chandler Jr. Rather, the discussion on public and private ownership dates back to political and pragmatic disputes in the nineteenth century and earlier. The interwar period witnessed experiments with nationalization, and under the Nazi regime some state-owned enterprises (e.g., Hermann Göring Werke) grew to considerable size. After 1945, the trend in Europe went towards the nationalization of enterprises that so far had been the domain of private ownership, such as banks and industrial companies. Only in the 1970s, European countries began to follow in the wake of the USA and Britain and adopted a policy of privatization for economic as well as ideological reasons. With a certain delay, this “final victory of capitalism” also took hold of sectors that until that point had been the undisputed domain of public ownership, such as railways and postal services. The ongoing process of privatization adds relevance for today’s discussion to our historical topic.

The conference is to provide a broad framework for contributions on nationalization and privatization. Possible topics include debates on economic policy, problems of business management, social history (employees, business culture), and case studies of individual enterprises. The time frame is limited mostly to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, that is, “modern” business history since the beginning of industrialization. Assuming that there is a certain uniformity of business cultures in the German-speaking parts of Europe, the spatial focus is on Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Contributions should address three essential themes:

1. The causes of original nationalization, since virtually all state-owned enterprises had been founded as private firms. These causes are manifold and could consist in losses of enterprises that nevertheless possessed great importance for the political economy (market failure), but also in their profitability and thus a possibly substantial contribution to the state revenue. Historical problems (e.g., German property in Austria) played a role as well as basic political considerations.
2. The development of enterprises owned by the state. Nationalized banks and industrial companies after 1945 kept the form of ownership they had had as private enterprises (e.g., stock companies), and the state only was the major or single shareholder. From the nineteenth century on, railways and mail services, however, often were organized as enterprises governed by public law. The state determined business policy (staff, prices, services etc.), and if necessary accepted heavy losses for economic or social reasons. This “negative capital” could amount to hefty sums that had to be paid for by the public. The transformation to state-owned enterprises also led to previously dynamic joint stock companies being made into parts of the civil service. Staff policy therefore partly followed the logic of the civil service, with all consequences.
3. As late as the 1950s and the 1960s, state-owned enterprises still were regarded as indispensable and valuable parts of the political economy. Then, privatisation was associated with the loss of services that were of great economic importance, with narrow-

ing down business activities to a few profitable divisions, with lay-offs and a reduction of employees' social status, and a sell-out to foreign countries. In this part of the conference, the political discussion as well as the concepts and factual realization of privatization in the 1970s shall be addressed. Also, sales, acquisitions, and re-organizations of subsidiaries should be taken into consideration.

The Society for Business History (Gesellschaft für Unternehmensgeschichte) asks for proposals that should be sent (together with a draft of 2-3 pages) not later than **30 December 2008** to:

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The symposium will take place on 8 und 9 October 2009 in Vienna.

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