



November 15th 2013

Wartime and post-war public works: Administration, policies and expertise about a mobilized civil ministry (1914-1929)

This international scientific conference is organized as part of the Excellence Laboratory (LABex) project called *Writing a new history of Europe*, supported by Irice UMR 8138, the "Identities, international relations and civilizations of Europe" unit (Paris 1 and Paris 4 Universities, National Centre for Scientific Research as CNRS), with a support from the History Committee at the French Ministry of Territorial Equality and Housing and the French Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy

June 19th-20th 2014, Paris, France, Grande Arche de La Défense

Call for Papers

This project of international scientific conference is organized as a part of the World War I commemorations.

Since the nineteenth century, the French Ministry of Public Works had been a tool for the structuring of the State and the presence of the nation across territories in the long term. Between 1914 and 1918 and during the 1920s, its projects and its actions made a significant contribution to the building and the recovery of a State and a nation that had been immersed in what some scholars have called a "total war". For the past two decades, a major component of World War I historiography has been probing the conflict in the light of the concept of *the cultures of war*. This approach tends to assert that the footprint of the war was not restricted to military aspects as it affected both the front and civilian society behind the lines. It shows that the conflict impacted the populations' daily lives and perceptions in the belligerent nations and thrived on it. This idea has paved the way for a global understanding of total war and the representations put forward both in France and in other belligerent countries.

The purpose of this conference is to understand the directions and the actions of the Ministry of Public Works during this period in the light of these thoughts, with fruitful comparisons about what happened in other belligerent countries.

"Public works" are to be understood in the context of an "exuberant growth" of State powers and of shifting ministerial authorities as a way to support the war efforts and later on to organize the reconstruction. The papers will address the relationship between the central administration and local authorities, the policies implemented with their goals and perceptions as well as the technical abilities, expertises and cultures involved. The papers will take into account the fact that ministerial powers were included in a larger set of relations with the players and the representatives of public and private interests involved in



activities that were disrupted in wartime and in the years following the war.

The main activities were the following ones:

- The control of mining activities and the importation of energy resources;
- The requisition of infrastructures and services for rail, road and maritime transportation to ensure the mobility of people and goods;
- The contribution to the industrialization of the war;
- The supervision of postal services and telecommunications networks;
- The reconstruction of a territory and of civil engineering works that had been destroyed or damaged during the war.

The great variety of responsibilities which were assigned to the French Ministry of Public Works and were often shared with other administrations and military authorities provided a set of noticeable links between the front line, the rear and the Allies. The ministries, as territorial and civil services, were supporting the armies while being involved in the wartime economy. Their areas of activities were in direct contact with the living conditions of the French people during the conflict. Major technical developments outlined the features that were to become long-lasting changing components of French society later on with regards to mobility and energy use behaviours.

Yet, the studies covering public policies linked to Public Works during this period remain surprisingly scarce and scattered with no overview. This conference will primarily deal with a set of themes such as territorial planning disrupted by the war and restructured by post-war reconstruction policies, or the changing relationship between military and civil authorities. It will also address the development of new governmental structures generated by the war and by the reconstruction policies and marked by technically-minded ministers such as Étienne Clémentel, Albert Thomas, Louis Loucheur, Marcel Sembat or Albert Claveille. Besides, the commitment of staffs, from engineers to road menders, the changes in technical cultures, the industrialization of war and, later on, the conversion of a wartime economy towards the development of new industrial activities will be addressed.

Lastly, communications which suggest a comparison between the French situation and that of other belligerent countries, as part of a comparative or cross-national history, will get particular attention. The war situation as well as the diversity of state organizations lead us to consider multiple foreign expressions of wartime public works in various territories.

The first day will cover the actual wartime period:

- A mobilized and motivating administration: the ministry of Public Works during the war,
- The challenges of civil and military mobility during the war innovations, practices and coordination.

The second day will cover a period including the 1920s:

- Industrializing a conflict: the social and technical challenges for a “total war”,
- With reconstruction, a new landscape emerges: from territory to remembrance.



The proceedings of the conference will be published in *Pour Mémoire*, the journal of the History Committee of the French Ministry of Territorial Equality and Housing and of the ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy as well as on the Internet.

The Scientific Committee is composed of Alya Aglan-Wismann (Professor in Contemporary History at Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University, UMR Irice LabEx EHNE), Pierre Chancerel (Temporary Lecturer at Picardie-Jules Verne University), Corine Defrance (Research Director at CNRS, UMR Irice LabEx EHNE), Clotilde Druelle-Korn (Associate Professor in Contemporary Economic and Social History at Limoges University), Mathieu Flonneau (Associate Professor in Contemporary History at Paris 1 Panthéon –Sorbonne University, UMR Irice LabEx EHNE, P2M), André Guillerme (Professor at the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers), Léonard Laborie (Researcher at CNRS, UMR Irice LabEx EHNE), Philippe Nivet (Professor in Contemporary History and Head of the History and Geography UFR at Picardie-Jules Verne University), Arnaud Passalacqua (Associate Professor in Contemporary History at Paris-Diderot University, P2M).

Proposals (one page maximum) should be submitted, along with the author's qualifications and positions, a mention of their latest publications, as well as their mail and e-mail contact details, by January 25 2014 to: contact.travauxpublics.publicworks.1914-2014@planete-tp-plus.com.

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