



Joggli Meihuizen, *Richard Fiebig en de uitbuiting van de Nederlandse industrie 1940-1945* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2018; 367 pp., ISBN 9789024419807).

Joggli Meihuizen, *Het Proces-Fiebig. Over exploitatie en plundering van de Nederlandse industrie in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2018; 448 pp., ISBN 9789024422555).

Richard Fiebig belongs to those National Socialists who skilfully worked for German attempts to nazify thoroughly politics and the economy of the occupied Netherlands during the Second World War. Up to now, only specialists among contemporary historians were familiar with the fact that this German businessman had been given the task of aligning Dutch industry and trade to the needs of the Greater German Reich's warfare. Fiebig's biography, however, remained in the dark. Thanks to long lasting research, this gap has now been largely filled by Joggli Meihuizen. In 2018 this legal historian, an associate of the Amsterdam-based NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies presented a biography as well as an annotated source edition on the trials conducted against Fiebig after the war.

The biography is structured along chronological lines. Whereas the first part deals with Fiebig's life and career until 1945, the second part is reserved to the post-war period. Compared with other biographies of National Socialist perpetrators, Fiebig's early political development remains rather vague. Especially his transition from the Imperial Navy and right-wing volunteer corps to the NSDAP might have deserved more attention. The same goes for the impact of the world economic crisis on his personal, domestic and commercial life. Readers are not even informed if these omissions are the result of a lack of historical sources or a deliberate choice by Meihuizen to focus on the 1940s and 1950s.

In contrast, it becomes very clear that Richard Fiebig played a substantial role in the exploitation of the Netherlands for the sake of the Greater German Reich. As representative of Fritz Todt and later of Albert Speer in The Hague, he efficiently administered the collaboration of Dutch business with Germany, be it voluntarily or by compulsion. Several administrative functions in the Netherlands and Germany alike made him a smooth and irreplaceable expert in occupation politics. In his sphere of influence, he even managed to eventually bridge the feud which, in the Reich, confronted Speer's purpose to relocate the armaments industry into areas relatively secure from Allied air raids, to Fritz Sauckel's efforts to bring to Germany as many forced labourers as possible from occupied countries. Specifically, from August 1944 onwards Fiebig was not only responsible for

the relocation of orders from Germany to the Netherlands but also for the forced deployment of Dutch workers in Germany. According to Meihuizen, his protagonist was more interested in economic than in political issues in his dealings with enterprises, trade associations or ministry officials of the occupied Netherlands. Although personally deeply rooted in National Socialist ideology, his administration was characterized by a pragmatic approach. In case of opposition or resistance, however, he did not hesitate to interfere directly with business management. In some instances, he was even involved in the detention and hostage-taking of entrepreneurs.

Particularly with respect to the post-war inquests and lawsuits in Rotterdam, The Hague, Amsterdam and Munich, Meihuizen is inclined to leniency towards Fiebig. He repeatedly emphasizes that his subject met with a widespread readiness to collaborate on the part of the business world of the occupied country and that the basis for this cooperation had been laid by the wing commander of the *Luftwaffe* Robert Leopold von Schrötter before Fiebig had arrived in the Netherlands. Meihuizen furthermore emphasizes that Fiebig was not present in the Netherlands when Germans started looting during the last months of the war, and that he himself was not in general an advocate of the destruction of infrastructure by the Wehrmacht in that phase of the war. Finally, he argues that individual prosecution witnesses during his trial lacked reliability.

Seen against the formal responsibility Fiebig bore for nearly five years and the activities he actually deployed in the Netherlands, not all of these arguments are compelling. Notwithstanding his partly physical absence, Fiebig remained responsible for directives issued by his subordinates. On a more general level, the serious power difference between occupier and occupied should be taken into account in the overall assessment of Fiebig's administration. And, as Meihuizen himself makes clear in chapter 8, Fiebig was involved in large-scale looting and – to say the least – approved of the politically provoked famine (known as the 'Hongerwinter') which in 1944-1945 drove up the death toll among Dutch civilians considerably.

Notwithstanding Fiebig's important functions and high degree of responsibility, however, it proved more than difficult for law enforcement in the post-war era to incriminate his administration in judicial terms. In fact, the Dutch Special Courts of Justice were confronted with a series of challenges. In the first months following the liberation, the Allied prosecution services were unaware of the important role Fiebig had played in the Netherlands from 1940 to 1945. In addition, relevant records were not available or had been destroyed by Fiebig towards the end of the war. Finally, the law courts not only judged an individual member of the German occupation regime, but the whole issue of enforced versus deliberate economic collaboration among Dutch entrepreneurs and enterprises was under consideration. The most serious threats to a judgment based on the rule of law of a democratic community, however, were caused by prejudice on the part of prosecutor and

judge, and by procedural errors that constituted a disgrace for the newly re-established constitutional state. Therefore the first, harsh verdict had to be reversed. In the end, prosecution was suspended. As Fiebig never was finally convicted, Meihuizen rightly emphasizes the ‘obvious discrepancy between Fiebig’s historical responsibility on the one hand and the criminal liability of his demeanor on the other hand’ (327). At least as annoying is the fact that Fiebig never sensed any regret about his participation in atrocities unique in the history of the Netherlands. Like many of his comrades, he considered himself a victim of victor’s justice up to the end of his life.

In sum, the two volumes on Richard Fiebig presented by Joggli Meihuizen enrich our knowledge on the exploitation of the Dutch economy for the sake of the Greater German Reich as well as on problematic aspects of post-war jurisdiction. This contribution is not gravely diminished by shortcomings with regard to content nor by a presumably faulty quotation from one of his historical sources (45-46). Although the latter part of the biography might have been condensed considerably in view of the separately edited minutes of the post-war trials, both volumes constitute a significant scholarly contribution for research on National Socialist perpetrators and Transitional Justice alike.

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