



# Conference Papers on the Web

**The American Impact on Western Europe:  
Americanization and Westernization in Transatlantic Perspective**

*Conference at the German Historical Institute  
Washington, D.C., March 25–27, 1999*

Christian Kleinschmidt  
Comment

**Comment / Section Labor Relations and Mass Production**  
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If we concentrate on the terminology chosen by the authors of this section, on first sight we find three subjects and three different approaches. Julia Angster feels indebted to the term "westernization," while Wade Jacoby and Jonathan Wiesen display a similar distrust for the term "Americanization." What remains is a mutilated "ization" (Jacoby) or the defensive variant of "perceptions" by German industrialists and workers. As the opening reports have already shown, there is a general feeling of discomfort in connection with the term "Americanization." One essential problem in the approach to the concept of "Americanization" seems to be the normative power of the factual: it was on the basis of its conspicuousness that it was generally accepted. In the last couple of years there have been held worldwide numerous conferences and brought forth a great many publications on the subject and under the title of "Americanization". This conference, too, will be remembered as a meeting on "Americanization." A similar phenomenon can be witnessed in the case of "industrialization," "rationalization" and "modernization." As historians we are constantly discontent with such conceptions and keep busy working it out. Of decisive importance are here the empirical results, that--starting from a defined ideal type (Idealtypus), verifications, deviations--produce mixed forms, that in turn have to be marked terminologically as such. Surprisingly former events on Americanization have dealt very little with aspects of Industrial or Labor Relations, which means so far there are few empirical proofs for the impact of the USA on this field, especially on the micro level. In search for these and in the effort to grasp the found results terminologically, a term seems appropriate, which carries the USA in its name. This is what Maase considers by using the term "Americanism." In the case of Labor Relations "Americanization" stands for an American standard--and this is the view shared by Wade Jacoby--that the American occupying power tried to impose with the help of German allies on the German condition, which was, however, met with resistance and rejection. By the example of codetermination Jacoby points out, that neither the American model--or rather American models--, nor the German model with reference to standards recruiting from the time of the Republic of Weimar could succeed, but, so to speak, a third and new pattern, the mixed form of a modest codetermination turned out to be effective. The result was, according to Jacoby, a "hindered reorganization" („Verhinderte Neuordnung“) with a simultaneously hindered Americanization, I should add.

Though it is not really distinct, what the original American models and with it the alternative of a reorganization of German Labor Relations would have been like, resp. how American restrictions and sanctions would have looked like in case of a German resistance. Remarks on the first part of the question can be found in the reports of Jonathan Wiesen and Julia Angster. According to Wiesen,

German entrepreneurs orientated themselves by American models of Human Relations and Public Relations and imitated and adapted them in their own companies, as he shows in the example of Fritz Berg, Carl Hundhausen and Ludwig Vaubel. On the reception level there can indeed be discerned a turning towards American models, as can be pointed out in corresponding publications of these entrepreneurs. But what about their practical realization within the companies? This question also imposes itself with a view on the "westernization"-thesis of Julia Angster. (What it comprises is a complex intercultural transfer, through which on formal and informal ways and over networks between unions, political parties and occupying power western standards and values in the sense of a "consensus capitalism" held their entry in German firms.)

On this abstract level these models, standards and key-notes may have played an important role. In practical operation and on business level--and here lies the center of interest in the study of labor relations--the mentioned models did not succeed. Was not precisely the example of codetermination, especially codetermination in the coal, iron and steel industries, a German counter-model for example to the model of human relations--even granted the moderating American influences in accordance to Jacoby? The workers' movement in France and Great Britain cared likewise little about codetermination. In turn, the question of success or failure of American models arises, above all the "human relation" as mentioned by Wiesen as an expression of "Americanization." Here is of importance the view of the model itself--that is on the micro level of the firm,-- as well as the participating agents. My thesis is this, that in the course of the late Forties and Fifties it came to a transition from "Americanization"-tendencies to a voluntary orientation by American ideals through German entrepreneurs and finally to a compromise of the codetermination law, that had more to do with innerpolitical questions and power potentials of the unions, than with external American and Western influences.

If we turn to the lower sections of the firms something shows, which the acting parts on the American side, and here most of all the representatives of the Mutual Security Agency (MSA) resp. the Foreign Operations Organization (FOA) on the basis of the Marshal-Plan, especially the Technical Assistance and Productivity Program and others with the support of American associations like the NAM, urged strongly towards a realization of the "Human Relations Model" in German firms. The improvement of human relations in the firm, of the working climate, the formation of a consensusorientated way between employers and employees was a concern that Americans pursued almost with missionary zest. They regarded it as a sort of private lesson of development aid for German entrepreneurs and unionists, as a "Mission to Germany." Financial support on the basis of project applications of the Technical Assistance Program, which was aimed at small and average businesses, were largely granted only under the condition that, after a thorough

inspection of the company a committee formed of German and American experts came to the conclusion, that questions of "Human Relations" found sufficient consideration. (Pure investment programs were not to be sponsored. In the course of the judgement it came to a vote, in which the American side had the power to veto and not seldom overvoted the German expert. In this case the applied credit was not granted.) Berghans' wording of "hegemonic pressure" is quite to the point, likewise the term "export of the American model" in the state of "asymmetric dependences" chosen by Marie Djelic in her recently published book, that in my opinion also lets the term "tendencies of Americanization" seem justified, because it is a matter of a onesided and sanction-loaded process of transfer of a model of shaping industrial relations identified as American.

I speak of Tendencies, 1) because the process did not cover the whole ground and applied above all to small and average businesses, and 2) because it met above all in bigger companies with a voluntary orientation of German entrepreneurs, that did not exclusively align to American examples, but also to comparable German predecessors of a „Werksgemeinschaft“ or „Betriebsgemeinschaft“ from the Twenties and Thirties; and finally because Human-Relations-Arrangements in the course of the codetermination-law became more or less obsolete, were met by the resistance of the unions and in spite of the sympathies of the entrepreneurs survived only in rudimentary form in the companies. I am thinking here above all of Training-Within-Industry-Programs--that traininginstruction of foremen to a better approach to the workers--the forming of foremen working-teams, offers for an "internal discussion" to the workers, the improvement of internal information and communication (among others

through a company's publications, while the latter had already been part of the“Werksgemeinschaft“ - concept and thus corresponded to the Human-RelationsApproach.) It was by no means by accident that the discussion about Human Relations reached its peak in the surroundings of the codetermination-debate between the beginning and the middle of the Fifties. As „wirtschaftsfriedliches“ countermodel originating in the USA it failed on the passing of the codetermination-laws and on the model of a "cooperative counterpower". (As a supplementation, a few of the above mentioned aspects of Human Relations survived. They gained once more importance in the Seventies in the course of the "humanization of work/quality of work" [movement] or in the Eighties and Nineties in connection with the issue of business culture, in which the originally American models survived as mixed forms. Until then) the German model of codetermination was just **not** an expression of "Westernization," but rather of a "GermanSonderweg", while it is interesting to note that exactly the Anglo-American authors like Peter Lawrence or Robert Locke are talking here of a "German model of Management" or even of "Germanization", which itself was, since the Seventies, confronted with a "collaps of the American management mystique." But that is not our subject today.

In the case of the industrial and Labor Relations, attempts of an adaptation of American models parting from a defined ideal type of Americanization can be witnessed only in the early phase of the Federal Republic. Likewise in this case we cannot really talk of a "Westernization," because the specifically German model of codetermination has been too dominant up to the present.