The Politics of Industrial Collaboration during World War II

Ford France, Vichy and Nazi Germany

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Cambridge University Press
Introduction

In October 1944, two months after the Liberation of Paris, François Lehideux was arrested by the French police and charged with ‘intelligence avec l’ennemi’—with having collaborated with the Germans during the Occupation. A product of the elite École libre des sciences politiques with considerable experience in finance and industry, Lehideux had been at the centre of the Vichy regime’s economic policies, serving as commissioner for unemployment, delegate-general for national (industrial) equipment, and state secretary for industrial production. In each of these positions, he worked closely with the German occupation authorities. But it was Lehideux’s activities as the director of the professional organization for the French automobile industry, the Comité d’organisation de l’automobile et du cycle (COA), created in September 1940, that appeared the most damming. From 1940 to 1944, the automobile industry had worked overwhelmingly for the Germans, delivering some 85 per cent of its production to them. Collectively, French automobile companies had made a major contribution to Germany’s war effort, and as the industry’s political chief, Lehideux was deemed to be directly responsible.

Lehideux vigorously—and, ultimately, successfully—defended himself against the charge of collaboration. In 1946, he was released from prison and three years later the case against him was dismissed. As with many of those accused of collaboration, Lehideux pleaded a combination of patriotism and extenuating circumstances: he had defended France’s interests at a difficult time when choices were extremely limited. Lehideux, however, went much further in his defence. Rather than a collaborator, he insisted that he had been an active resister, citing several contacts with wartime resistance organizations. But the heart of Lehideux’s case rested on the claim that, under his guidance, the French automobile industry had systematically sabotaged the German war effort by deliberately underproducing. For evidence, Lehideux pointed not only to the considerable

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gap between pre-war and wartime production levels for the industry as a whole, but also to concrete cases, most notably that of the Ford Motor Company’s French affiliate, Ford Société anonyme française (Ford SAF). According to Lehideux, the COA had worked with Ford SAF to ensure that it produced relatively little for the Wehrmacht during 1943–4, a critical period in which the Germans pressured the company to participate in a European-wide truck production programme. Ford SAF, in short, became a centre-piece of Lehideux’s defence against the accusation that he and the French automobile industry had collaborated with the Germans.

Lehideux’s defensive strategy draws attention to one subject of this book: Ford SAF and its wartime activities. As a majority-owned American company operating in France, Ford SAF found itself threatened from several sides during the Occupation, and especially after the United States entered the war in December 1941. In addition to the danger of expropriation by the Germans as an enemy-owned company, it had to contend with a Vichy regime engaged in a policy of state collaboration with the occupiers as well as with powerful business rivals, most notably Ford-Werke (Ford Germany), which appeared bent on taking it over. Yet despite this threatening situation, Ford SAF not only survived but thrived in occupied France. The company’s wartime profits were sizeable, larger indeed than many of its counterparts. More significantly, Ford SAF went from being a relatively minor player in the French automobile industry during the 1930s to a major one in 1945, almost on a par with the Big Three – Citroën, Peugeot and Renault. Reflecting this transformation, the post-Liberation French authorities would assign Ford SAF a prominent role in their plans for reorganizing the automobile industry.

That Ford SAF worked for the German occupiers, or even that overall it had a good war, is not particularly revealing. Much the same could be said for any number of companies in occupied France and Europe. World War II was a large-scale industrial conflict that, in all belligerent countries, drew a wide variety of businesses into its vortex. Some companies participated more willingly and profitably than others, but almost none could resist the war’s pull. In the case of France, Annie Lacroix-Riz recently castigated the automobile company Renault for producing considerable amounts of war matériel for the Germans, describing Louis Renault in particular as an enthusiastic collaborator. In response, Laurent Dingli downplayed the company’s contribution to the German war economy while also painting a more sympathetic portrait of its director. But for all the attention it attracted, the exchange between Lacroix-Riz and Dingli has generated more heat than light. The question is not whether French companies worked for the occupiers or not, since outright refusal was all but impossible; nor is it whether industrialists were villains or saints, as most were neither. Instead, the more interesting question concerns the conditions under which companies operated: how much room for manoeuvre they possessed; how they understood their interests; and what choices they made. It is in these terms that the claim to deliberate under-production is intriguing, suggesting as it does that Ford SAF had options beyond that of simply collaborating with the Germans. One purpose of this book is to explore these possible options.

In examining the activities of Ford SAF during the German occupation, this book draws on the burgeoning field of wartime business history. Much of this scholarship focuses on Nazi Germany, with scholars generally agreeing that German companies enjoyed some room for manoeuvre, even if they disagree on precisely how much. If companies had little choice but to work for the regime, the extent to which they did so could not simply be dictated. Their participation in the war effort was shaped by a complex and shifting array of incentives, constraints and calculations. As always, companies sought to make money and, more basically, to ensure their short-term and long-term survival and prosperity. At the same time, they faced new and considerable constraints, among them: massive
ments. Companies had to consider all these factors, assessing as best they could their short-term and long-term interests.

To be sure, Nazi Germany was not Vichy France. The first was a nation engaged in an colossal war of racial and territorial conquest, the second a defeated country partially and then fully under foreign occupation. For all its desire to remake France, Vichy’s ambitions and scope for action paled beside those of the Nazi regime. Nevertheless, as Marcel Boldorf convincingly argues, the guiding principles of France’s economy under German occupation resembled those of Nazi Germany. In seeking to harness the productive capacity of French companies, the Germans generally favoured the use of incentives rather than coercion. Leaving aside the question of whether or not the economy of occupied France (or of Nazi Germany) can be described as capitalist, it is clear that French companies enjoyed some freedom in determining the conditions under which they worked for the Germans.

Questions remain, however: how much freedom did companies have and how did they use it? For answers, one needs to turn to concrete cases. In doing so, scholars can benefit from a wave of recent work on wartime France. Indeed, thanks in large part to Hervé Joly’s multi-year research project on ‘French firms during the Occupation’, the subject is now a well-established research field. Yet this does not mean that there is nothing left to say. Each company has its own story, and that of Ford SAF, as this book will show, contains more than its share of colourful personalities, gripping drama and even intrigue.

But there are other reasons for singling out Ford SAF. Unlike other companies in occupied France, it was not French – or at least not completely French. Indeed, thanks in large part to Hervé Joly’s multi-year research project on ‘French firms during the Occupation’, the subject is now a well-established research field. Yet this does not mean that there is nothing left to say. Each company has its own story, and that of Ford SAF, as this book will show, contains more than its share of colourful personalities, gripping drama and even intrigue.


attract the attention of the Germans from the beginning of the Occupation. The fact that Ford SAF principally produced trucks would further stoke the interest of the occupiers. For as the war lengthened and the Wehrmacht’s need for transport grew desperate, exploiting Ford SAF’s productive capacity became a priority for the German authorities.

For all these reasons, then, Ford SAF was a site of considerable interaction between various French, German and (to a lesser extent) American actors during the Occupation. This extensive interaction, in turn, makes the company’s wartime history a valuable instrument for exploring the second and larger subject of this book: the politics of industrial collaboration in occupied France. The chapters on the wartime years devote considerable space to the overall political and industrial situation, discussing in detail German and French policies. At first glance, this might seem excessive, distracting the reader’s attention from Ford SAF. Yet the space allotted is justified for two reasons. One is to provide the larger context for Ford SAF’s activities. The German occupation created a highly charged political environment, which makes it impossible to examine Ford SAF’s choices, calculations and decisions in isolation.

The second and more ambitious reason for expanding beyond a focus on Ford SAF is that it allows us to highlight some of the underlying dynamics at work in the industrial realm during 1940–4. Most scholars would probably agree that industrial collaboration was not simply a matter of German dictation but one of Franco-German negotiation, even if the two sides were not equal partners. More concretely, this meant that French companies had some say in working out the precise terms of their collaboration with the Germans. But the wartime history of Ford SAF suggests more than this – that the say of French companies actually increased over time. Helpful to understanding how this worked are what economists call ‘information asymmetries’. Despite several attempts, the occupation authorities failed to devise a system of oversight that would enable them to scrutinize the activities of French companies. Thus, from the start the Germans found themselves dependent on French companies, which were far better placed to know what they could or could not do, to make the efforts needed to maintain and even increase production. As the war dragged on and as France’s economic situation deteriorated, this information asymmetry widened, reinforcing the dependence of the Germans while increasing the ability of French companies to determine the extent of their efforts on behalf of the occupiers. During the course of the Occupation, in short, the balance of power between the German authorities and French companies shifted in the latter’s favour. This simple but important dynamic influenced the policies of all the actors concerned.

Collaboration and resistance

In exploring the politics of industrial collaboration, the book offers new perspectives on several historiographical themes related to wartime France. One theme is that of collaboration and resistance. Generally speaking, historians are far less willing than before to use either term. It is not that collaboration and resistance (or collaborators and resisters) did not exist; rather it is because the terms fail to capture the complexity of life under occupation. For this reason, Philippe Burtin’s concept of ‘accommodation’ has proven attractive. According to Burtin, most French men and women had little choice but to adapt to the German occupation, a reality they could neither change nor completely evade, even if they could sometimes influence the terms of adaptation. Significantly, Burtin found it easy to apply his framework to the industrial realm: French industrialists were neither committed resisters nor collaborators but instead worked with (and for) the Germans chiefly for lack of alternatives. Up to 1942 at least, it appeared that Germany had won the war, and commonsense dictated the acceptance of this reality. After all, factories had to be run, profits made and workers paid.

Burtin’s argument that industrialists accommodated themselves to the Occupation, however, has been challenged. In some ways, this is a predictable result of further research. As case studies multiply, the concept of accommodation becomes vulnerable to the same criticism of catch-all terms such as collaboration and resistance: they lump together the concept of accommodation becomes vulnerable to the same criticism of catch-all terms such as collaboration and resistance: they lump together a diverse variety of activities and intentions. Accordingly, in an influential article François Marcot proposed a classification for the behaviour of industrialists that went well beyond accommodation to include indifference, reticence and opposition as well as resistance and collaboration.

9 For more on information asymmetries, see Inés Macho-Stadler and J. David Pérez-Castillo, An Introduction to the Economics of Information: Incentives and Contracts (Oxford, 2001); and Adam Przeworski, States and Markets: A Primer in Political Economy (Cambridge, 2008), 69–73.


11 Ibid., 233–66.

12 François Marcot, ‘La direction de Peugeot sous l’Occupation: pétainisme, résistance, opposition et résistance’, Mouvement social, 189 (1999), 27–46; also see his ‘Qu’est-ce qu’un patron résistant?’ in Dard, Daumas and Marcot, eds., L’Occupation, l’État français et les entreprises, 277–92.
Marcot explained that these categories were neither exclusive nor fixed but could be overlapping and changing, depending on the circumstances. The classification is certainly useful, and if Marcot had simply stopped here there would be little more to say. But he did not. Instead, examining the case of Peugeot he argued that the automobile company had systematically manifested ‘bad faith’ towards the Germans, doing all it could to hamper cooperation and even engaging in sabotage—or in what he termed a ‘deliberate strategy for the reduction (fréinage) of production’. Casting his gaze more widely, Marcot suggested that industrialists should be seen not just as businessmen defending the interests of their firms but also as resisters moved by patriotism to thwart the occupier.

Marcot’s argument concerning the sabotage of production in the French automobile industry has received growing support from scholars. In his recent study of Peugeot, Jean-Louis Loubet, the leading historian of the French automobile industry, describes various delays in fulfilling German orders, all of which, he maintains, were intentional. Echoing Lehideux’s post-liberation defence, Loubet also points to the significant drop in output: in the nine months preceding France’s defeat, Peugeot produced almost 24,000 vehicles, but only 27,415 during the following four years of occupation. These figures, he tellingly remarks, ‘speak for themselves’. A similar argument has been made for Renault. Gilbert Hatry and Emmanuel Chadeau both contend that the company deliberately under-produced, though Hatry attributes this to Renault’s determination to develop vehicles for post-war markets while Chadeau invokes a general ‘weariness’ and a ‘je m’en foutisme’ that supposedly afflicted workers, cadres and directors alike. In his biography of Louis Renault, Laurent Dingli goes further, insisting that Renault and, indeed, all the major automobile companies embarked on a deliberate and sustained ‘policy of reduction’.

Meanwhile, the argument of under-production has also been applied to other sectors of the economy, among them, the steel, electrical and aircraft industries.

Interestingly, for all its popularity, the case for deliberate under-production has received little critical scrutiny. All too often, scholars appear to accept at face value the declarations of the automobile companies regarding their activities. Yet more scepticism is surely needed. Many of the claims originated in the immediate post-Vichy period, when industrialists as a group stood accused of collaboration. Barely one month after the Liberation of Paris, Renault began to rehearse the argument that it had consistently worked to reduce the quantity and quality of output for the Germans. The self-justificatory impetus of the exercise was obvious.

Another cause for scepticism is that under-production is extremely difficult to demonstrate. For obvious reasons there is no smoking gun in the form of contemporary and clear-cut instructions. But a more basic problem is that the claim itself is often vague. Who are the principal actors involved: individual workers; groups of strategically placed workers; or the workforce as a whole? When does sabotage occur: before, during and/or after the manufacturing and assembly processes? Equally pertinent, the notable drop in wartime production cannot be attributed to a single factor. Growing shortages of manpower, raw materials, semi-finished goods, energy and transport during 1940–4 created a new and profoundly different economic situation. Simply to compare production figures before and after 1940 is misleading, since even with the best of intentions no automobile company could have attained anything near its pre-war output during the Occupation.
Given the grounds for scepticism, it is tempting to reject entirely the argument of deliberate under-production. Yet this would be a mistake, for there are reasons to take the claim seriously. One of them is the changing nature of the war. If powerful incentives existed in 1940–2 for cooperating with the Germans, this was less so afterwards. As the possibility (and then likelihood) emerged that Germany would lose the war, companies were compelled to reconsider the short-term and long-term benefits of collaboration. Another and related reason concerns the state of France’s wartime economy. Here, some of the scholarship on the Stalinist Soviet Union is suggestive. The Soviet economy was in permanent crisis, a situation generated by a combination of urgent pressure to produce, unrealistic targets and shortages of various materials. To get anything done, companies were forced to go outside official channels to procure what they needed, engaging in endless rounds of negotiation with various authorities and suppliers – a process well-oiled by blat (influence and bribes). A premium, in short, was placed on resourcefulness. Although Vichy France was obviously not the Soviet Union, its economy suffered from mounting and debilitating handicaps, which meant that resourcefulness (or débrouillardise) became an element of increasing importance to economic activity. But because débrouillardise is difficult for outsiders to measure, in wartime France possessed considerable latitude in determining just how resourceful they would be. Indeed, as the overall economic situation worsened during the Occupation the room for manoeuvre of companies grew larger. In this situation, companies could in theory decide to produce less than they could.

But what happened in reality? The wartime history of Ford SAF provides an opportunity to assess the claim that French automobile companies deliberately under-produced. Using a variety of sources, The Politics of Industrial Collaboration weighs the evidence for and against under-production, attempting to distinguish what is plausible from what is not. The task is far from straightforward: much of the evidence is ambiguous and can be interpreted in more ways than one. Nevertheless, the book builds a circumstantial case that Ford SAF did under-produce, particularly in terms of its participation in the European-wide truck production programme during 1943–4. Yet, just as importantly, it contends that under-production of this type did not constitute resistance since Ford SAF was not opposed in principle to working for the Germans.

Germany’s exploitation of France

Much of the existing scholarship gives the impression that the Germans were remarkably successful in exploiting France. In his classic study of the new economic order in France, Alan Milward indicated the multiple ways in which the Germans extracted wealth and resources: through massive occupation costs; a highly distorted exchange rate; the manipulation of clearing arrangements; the widespread pillaging of materiel; the placing of contracts with French companies and the conscription of French men and women for work in Germany. Subsequent scholarship has largely confirmed Milward’s portrait of extensive exploitation. A trio of economic historians recently calculated that the transfer of French wealth to Germany amounted to one third of GDP in 1941–2, and continued to increase thereafter – levels they term ‘stunning’. In those sectors of the economy that the Germans deemed particularly important to their war effort, the proportion could be even greater, ranging from 45 per cent to 100 per cent of French production. At roughly 85 per cent (as already noted), the automobile industry easily figured among the most thoroughly exploited.

There is no doubt that France became a major contributor to Nazi Germany’s war effort. At the same time, however, recent scholarship points to the need to nuance the overall picture of a successful exploitation. In his study of the Nazi economy, Adam Tooze concluded that occupied Europe remained an economic ‘basket case’ during the war, utterly incapable of providing Germany with the resources needed to match those of the global coalition of powers

arrayed against it. More precisely, Tooze argued that the Germans failed to mobilize the economic potential of Western Europe in particular—a failure underscored by the yawning gap between pre-war and wartime production. The figures for German exploitation might be striking when considered in isolation; but they are less impressive when set against the fact that the economies of Europe shrank considerably under the Occupation. If Tooze considers occupied Western Europe as a whole, the research of Jonas Schemer suggests that it is worthwhile to examine more closely the situation of individual countries. Using revised statistics on German imports, Schemer re-calculated the yearly value of occupied Europe's wartime production for the Wehrmacht, revealing in the process intriguing differences. Contrary to the widespread belief that France constituted the single largest foreign contributor of industrial production to Germany's war economy, it appears that it was rivalled and even exceeded in absolute terms by the Protectorate (Bohemia and Moravia), despite the latter's smaller pre-war industrial capacity. No less significantly, while the value of the contribution of most occupied countries in Western and Northern Europe witnessed considerable increases during the second half of the Occupation, that of France stagnated and even declined beginning in 1942. It would seem that Germany's failure to exploit occupied Europe more fully was greater in France than elsewhere.


24 Hein Klemann recently questioned the extent of this shrinkage, arguing that the GDP figures frequently used do not take account of clandestine production. But even if one accepts Klemann's 'educated guesses' for the latter, France's GDP markedly declined during the Occupation. See Hein Klemann and Sergei Kudryashov, Occupied Economies: An Economic History of Nazi-Occupied Europe, 1939–1945 (New York, 2012), 324–35.


26 For the Protectorate, see Jaromir Balcar and Jaroslav Kucera, 'Nationalsozialistische Wirtschaftslenkung und unternehmerische Handlungsaprioritäten im Protokonter Böhmen und Mähren (1939–1945)' in Buchheim and Boldorf, eds., Europäische Volkswirtschaften unter deutscher Hegemonie, 147–71. They describe the Protectorate as the 'armoury of the Reich'.

If so, there is no simple answer to why the exploitation of France posed particular problems. A fully satisfactory answer would require a wide-ranging and multi-level analysis of the evolving political-economic situation in both France and the rest of occupied Europe. While such an analysis is beyond the scope of this study, The Politics of Industrial Collaboration does address one question that is vital to any effort to assess the relative success and failure of Germany's efforts to exploit France: the ability of the occupiers to compel French industries and companies to work for them. As already noted, Ford SAF's wartime history suggests that French companies not only enjoyed some say in determining the extent to which they collaborated with the Germans, but also that this say grew larger over time. As the overall military situation worsened, the Germans urgently needed French industry to work wholeheartedly for them; at the same time, having almost no means of verifying whether this was in fact the case, the Germans were forced to rely on the self-interest of French companies. With good cause, however, the occupation authorities suspected that French industrialists and workers were losing interest in industrial collaboration. Companies such as Ford SAF would continue to work for the Germans, but as the Occupation wore on they had more and more reasons to limit their efforts. The interests of French companies increasingly diverged from those of the occupiers, and this divergence can help in understanding why Germany failed to mobilize more fully France's industrial potential.

The nature of the German Occupation

Since the appearance in 1972 of Robert Paxton's ground-breaking study, Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940–1944, scholars have framed the history of Vichy largely in Franco-French terms. Regardless of the type of history (political, economic, social, cultural), the Occupation years are presented as belonging first and foremost to French history. The emphasis is on the continuities and discontinuities of Vichy with both the pre-war and post-war periods. This perspective has proved remarkably fruitful, producing a rich body of scholarship that convincingly demonstrates the French origins of many of Vichy's policies as well as the regime's enduring legacy after 1945. Yet for all its benefits, this perspective has fostered a tendency to neglect the Germans, who all too often are cast in the role of secondary actors.

when not serving as mere stage props. The occupiers, it is generally accepted, were too few in number to run occupied France, which forced them to leave much of the administration to the French authorities. At most, the Germans exercised some limited oversight of French activities but little more.

In recent years, there has been a renewal of interest in the German occupation, which challenges the view of the occupiers as largely passive and even absent actors. Driven by the question of whether the German military authorities, often grouped under the title Militärbefehlshaber in Frankreich (MbF), waged a Nazi racial-ideological war in France, several scholars have investigated the MbF’s involvement in the crimes of the Nazi regime. Their collective conclusion is that the Germans were far more active than previously thought. During 1941–2, the MbF took the initiative not only in the use of mass reprisals against the French population for attacks on occupation personnel, but also in the introduction of the Final Solution to France. In a painstaking study, Gaël Eismann showed that German military and security forces were very engaged at the local level throughout the Occupation, working closely with their French counterparts in tracking down Nazi Germany’s various ‘enemies’. Somewhat similarly, Michael Mayer maintains that the occupation authorities exercised considerable ‘indirect’ influence on Vichy’s anti-Semitic policies.

If this renewal of interest in the German occupation offers a welcome counterpoint to the Franco-French perspective that has dominated Vichy historiography, its focus on the security realm has come at the expense of the economic aspects of the Occupation. This is unfortunate because the

German military authorities viewed security not as an end in itself but as a precondition for their principal task, which they defined as harnessing the French economy to the German war effort. ‘Our primary goal’, asserted a high-ranking German officer in September 1942, is to use ‘all the resources of the French people (der gesamten französischen Volkskraft)...in favour of an increase of our armaments potential.’ If anything, this priority increased in importance over time as Germany’s overall military situation deteriorated and its need to mobilize French industrial capacity correspondingly grew more pressing.

Reflecting this priority, the Germans built an extensive economic administration in occupied France. If the MbF was initially responsible for this administration, beginning in 1942 the military authorities would be increasingly pushed aside by Albert Speer, Nazi Germany’s armaments tsar, who was eager to expand his economic and industrial empire into France. As is well known, Speer encountered considerable opposition, especially from Fritz Sauckel, Hitler’s plenipotentiary for labour recruitment. Whereas Speer maintained that French workers could be best used in French factories working for the Wehrmacht, Sauckel insisted that French workers were more urgently needed (and would be more productive) working in Germany. In typical fashion, Hitler avoided choosing between his two paladins, allowing each one to pursue his own course. The result of this clash was a good deal of confusion and chaos, which hampered German efforts to exploit France.

The wartime history of Ford SAF, however, draws attention to a less-well-known aspect of the German economic administration: its presence at the local and factory levels. The size of the German occupation forces in France was admittedly small, numbering a mere 20,000 military personnel in March 1942; the MbF’s administrative staff fluctuated between 1,200 and 1,600. The German presence was consequently spotty, concentrated in urban centres and in the coastal regions. But in the economic and especially industrial realms one did not have to search very long to discover traces of the occupier. In several regions of France, the Germans established Rüstungskommandos (armaments

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30 It is worth noting that Meyer and Delacour in particular were reacting not to Vichy scholarship but to earlier work on the MbF, which they viewed as apologetic. For earlier work, see Hans Umbreit, Der Militärbefehlshaber in Frankreich, 1940–1944 (Boppard am Rhein, 1968); and Eberhard Jäckel, Frankreich. Die deutsche Frankreichpolitik im 2. Weltkrieg (Stuttgart, 1966).

31 BA-MA RW 24/38, 'Niederschrift der Ansprüche des Chefs des Deutschen Beschaffungsamtes in Frankreich Generalmajor Thoenissen...', 1 September 1942, emphasis in original.


teams), whose chief purpose was to work with companies producing matériel for the Wehrmacht. Although the teams lacked the resources to monitor every factory, they did offer the occupiers a worm’s eye perspective on companies deemed especially important to the war effort, Ford SAF among them. Equally pertinent, in addition to the armaments teams an array of Germans were active at the local level, including procurement agents from the various military services and from other state organizations as well as representatives of German industries and companies. In many ways, this local presence was a response to a basic problem that bedevilled the occupation authorities: how to ensure the effective oversight of French companies? Ultimately, as The Politics of Industrial Collaboration shows, the Germans never found a satisfactory solution. For now, though, it is the persistence of the problem that is noteworthy, for it highlights the potential value of a bottom-up approach to the history of industrial collaboration. By itself, a focus on high politics – on the Speer–Sauckel clash, for example – can all too easily obscure the local dynamics at work that helped to shape German attempts to exploit French industry.

No less significantly, the extensive German economic administration in France suggests the need for a more Franco-German as opposed to simply French or German perspective on the subject of industrial collaboration. As we shall see, the German role in Ford SAF’s wartime history was as prominent and important as that of the French. And what was true for Ford SAF was almost certainly so for the industrial realm in general – and perhaps for other realms as well.

Ford SAF, American business and occupied France

The active presence of American business abroad during the inter-war years has prompted scholars to revise earlier descriptions of US international policy as isolationist after 1918. Regardless of the sector – banking, insurance, advertising, manufacturing – American companies were operating on six different continents, exporting a wide variety of goods, skills and ideas. In this vein, Victoria de Grazia has spoken of an American ‘market empire’ that fostered mass consumer democracies across Europe. 34 One notable element of this expansionist American capitalism was Fordism. As Mary Nolan among others has shown, inter-war Europeans were fascinated by the Ford company not only as a business enterprise but also as a potential model for society. 35 Scholars have thus used contemporary understandings of Fordism as a window into European debates about the nature of modernity. During the inter-war period, writes Egbert Klautke, Fordism became a ‘leading concept’ and ‘marker of the times’ in both Germany and France. 36

Such a broad concept of Fordism, however, risks losing sight of its more limited application at the industry and factory levels. Although the definition and significance of Fordism were always contested, during the inter-war period the term conjured up images of modernized and rationalized production. 37 In France, these images had an especially strong hold on the automobile industry, which was widely viewed as artisanal and even antiquated compared to its American counterpart. Recently returned from a trip to the United States in 1931, which included a visit to Ford Dearborn, Louis Renault warned that the French automobile industry was ‘gravely menaced’ and that ‘everything must change’. 38 The belief that the French automobile industry needed to be transformed along Fordist lines persisted beyond the inter-war period and would influence Vichy’s approach to industrial collaboration with the Germans. As head of the automobile industry, Léhideux initially considered collaboration as an opportunity to overhaul the industry. But Fordist images of mass production also had a direct effect on Ford SAF. Fearful of American competition, French automobile companies during much of the 1930s successfully lobbied governments for discriminatory measures that were chiefly aimed at Ford SAF. Ironically, this discrimination eventually persuaded Ford SAF to begin building its Poissy plant, whose modern (American) design and equipment were meant to represent the state-of-the-art in automobile

34 Victoria de Grazia, Irresistible Empire: America’s Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe (Cambridge, MA, 2005).


37 On the contested nature of Fordism, see Klautke, Unbegrenzte Möglichkeiten; and von Saldern and Hachmann, ‘Das fordistische Jahrhundert. Eine Einleitung’. On modernized and rationalized production, see Steven Tolliday and Jonathan Zeitlin, eds., The Automobile Industry and its Workers: Between Fordism and Flexibility (New York, 1987).

production – or Fordism in concrete practice. Hoping to give a Fordist jolt to rearmament, the French government in 1939–40 awarded large contracts to Ford SAF, helping to convert the company into a producer of war materiel. Afterwards, it would be the turn of the Germans to chase the Fordist dream by exploiting Ford SAF’s potential for Nazi Germany’s war effort.

The Germans would enjoy decidedly mixed results in this endeavour, a point which draws attention to the wartime period. Generally speaking, the scholarship on American business in Europe views the war as something of a hiatus. Much more attention is paid to the inter-war years and to the 1920s in particular, while the decade after 1945 until the collapse of Bretton Woods and the first oil shock in the early 1970s are also relatively well researched. To the extent that the wartime period is considered, the focus is often on the complicity of American companies with the crimes of the Nazi regime, most notably the use of slave labour and the Holocaust. If some of this work is sensationalist, for example Edwin Black’s book on IBM, more balanced studies highlight the complexity of the situation facing American companies while also avoiding apology. Especially pertinent among the latter is the extensive research report on the activities of Ford-Werke, Ford Dearborn’s German subsidiary, which was sponsored by Ford and overseen by Simon Reich. In many ways, the report is a tour de force, offering a richly documented analysis of Ford-Werke under the Nazis that details the extent of the company’s use of forced labour.

But for all its worth, in concentrating almost exclusively on Germany the research report represents a missed opportunity to further our understanding of American business in wartime Europe. As The Politics of Industrial Collaboration shows, the history of Ford-Werke was deeply intertwined with that of Ford SAF. This point is noteworthy for two reasons. One reason concerns American business in general. American companies in Nazi Germany faced a different situation from their counterparts in most of occupied Western and Northern Europe, where slave labour was not an issue. Largely freed of direct involvement in Nazi crimes, American companies outside of Germany could focus more single-mindedly on the benefits and risks of producing war materiel for the Germans. Because the ethical stakes were less acute, the choices and decisions of companies were less extraordinary – but perhaps for that reason also more revealing of business calculation in wartime. The second reason to underscore the intertwined nature of Ford-Werke and Ford SAF’s wartime histories is that it provides a different perspective on Ford’s European empire. Studies of the latter tend to consider each European company in isolation, with the emphasis on its bilateral relations with Ford Dearborn. Yet during much of the Occupation, Ford SAF and Ford-Werke were engaged in a struggle over the future of Ford Europe. Just as importantly, this struggle was part of a larger story of efforts to remake France and to refashion Europe under German aegis.

Chapter outline

Chapter 1 traces the history of Ford SAF from its creation in the 1920s to the eve of France’s defeat in 1940, emphasizing the company’s struggles to survive and prosper; only with French rearmament in the late 1930s was Ford SAF placed on a secure footing. Chapter 2 focuses on the effects of France’s defeat and on the efforts by Ford-Werke to take control of Ford SAF. With the help of the COA, Ford SAF managed to preserve its autonomy in return for a promise to work wholeheartedly for the Germans – a promise the company initially at least did its best to fulfil. Chapter 3 discusses the critical year of 1942, the first full year of American belligerency and also the moment when the course of the war began to turn against the Germans. If Ford SAF came under increasing pressure to meet German needs, it also faced the wrath of the Allies as Poissy became the target of British air raids in the spring. Chapter 4 addresses the efforts of the German occupation authorities in early 1943 to mobilize all the economic and industrial resources of occupied France, which included a renewed attempt by Ford-Werke to take control of Ford SAF. The latter managed to preserve its independence once more but only by pledges.
Introduction

itself to participate in a European truck programme directed by Ford-Werke. Chapter 5 tackles the question of industrial collaboration and resistance in 1943–4 through an examination of Ford SAF's contribution to the truck programme. The chapter builds a circumstantial case that Ford SAF probably did deliberately under-produce for the Germans, but also suggests that this outcome did not constitute resistance. Chapter 6 briefly surveys the years from the Liberation in 1944 to the sale of Ford SAF in 1953. The abandonment by Ford Dearborn of the French market is a reminder that the American business model was not always triumphant in Europe.

1 Ford SAF: 1929–1940

On 8 March 1942, twelve Royal Air Force Boston bombers attacked the Ford SAF plant at Poissy. The damage was negligible. Several weeks later, the bombers returned. The raid on the night of 1–2 April also caused little damage, as the Whitley and Wellington bombers despatched on this occasion by RAF Bomber Command missed the target. The raid of 2–3 April, undertaken by forty Wellington and ten Stirling bombers, was much more destructive. A message from Ford SAF passed through the American embassy at Vichy to Ford Dearborn confessed that Poissy had been 'badly damaged'. Edsel Ford, son of Henry Ford and the de facto head of Ford Dearborn for European matters, commiserated, telling Maurice Dollfus, the managing director of Ford SAF, that he was sorry that your 'fine new plant' had been bombed, but that it was perhaps 'inevitable'. Edsel Ford concluded that he hoped production would soon resume normally. Such a sentiment was striking, given that the United States and Germany were at war and that Edsel Ford was well aware that production at the Poissy plant consisted of trucks and truck components for the Wehrmacht. As the raids demonstrated, the British appreciated Poissy's activity. In March 1942, a British intelligence report surveying the French motor industry described the Poissy factory as the 'most modern and efficient in France'. Ford SAF was perceived – rightly – by the British as a major player in the French automobile industry. A company with a plant of this stature could not be allowed to continue to produce unmolested for the Germans.

Such status was novel for Ford SAF. In 1929, when Ford SAF was created, Poissy did not exist and the idea of a new Ford manufacturing plant in France seemed risible. Ford SAF was a minor competitor in an industry dominated by Renault, Peugeot and Citroën. For much of the

1 BFRC, FMC, ACC 6, Box 74, Georges Lesto to Ford Dearborn, 3 June 1942. Lesto was the assistant manager of Ford SAF.
2 BFRC, FMC, ACC 6, Box 74, Edsel Ford to Maurice Dollfus, 17 July 1942.
3 TNA, FO 837/15, report #6, 19 March 1942.
In the scholarly literature on Franco-German wartime industrial collaboration, the final phase of the Occupation is dominated by the Speer-Bichelonne agreement, signed in Berlin in September 1943.\(^1\) In return for Bichelonne's promise of Vichy's wholehearted cooperation in the joint effort to increase France's contribution to the German war effort, Speer consented to maintain production within the country, protecting French workers (and machines) from being sent to Germany, principally by designating factories as S-Betriebe (Speer factories). Presenting themselves as apolitical technocrats, the two men wrapped the agreement in a vision of future European cooperation. But its core amounted to a short-term gamble by Speer and Bichelonne born of urgency. As Germany's prospects of military victory rapidly faded and as its industrial inferiority relative to its enemies became painfully evident, the call for more radical measures coming from Fritz Sauckel among others grew louder. For Speer, however, the experience of Sauckel's labour drafts suggested that radical measures were counter-productive, arousing the resistance of the French and undermining production. Now more than ever, a more efficient and thorough exploitation of France's capacity required French cooperation. If this logic swayed Speer, it also shaped Bichelonne's thinking. For Vichy's minister of industrial production, a renewed commitment to industrial collaboration offered the best means of keeping at bay Sauckel and the chaos his activities represented. Speer thus gambled that more could be gotten out of France in the upcoming critical months by persuasion than by coercion, while Bichelonne calculated that collaboration would have a moderating effect on the German authorities.

If the nature of the Speer-Bichelonne agreement is fairly clear, there is considerable disagreement regarding its results. In his landmark study of France's economy under German occupation, Alan Milward concluded that the agreement had little effect on developments, partly because of crippling shortages and partly because Germany's exploitation of French resources had already reached high levels.\(^3\) More recently, Arne Radtke-Delacor challenged this conclusion, arguing that the agreement should be seen as a success for the Germans, who expanded their share of French output during 1943 and early 1944 to perhaps 45–50 per cent. Similarly, not only did the number of German contracts rise, but so too did their fulfilment rates (increasing by some 30 per cent), which suggests that France was being exploited more efficiently. For Radtke-Delacor, these figures also discredit the later claims by French industrialists that they had engaged in deliberate under-production (formage).\(^2\) The economic historian Hein Klemann provides an interesting comparative perspective on the competing views of Milward and Radtke-Delacor. Klemann has calculated that overall French production measured in GDP (1938=100) dropped from 80 in 1943 to 66 in 1944, a drop which distinguished France from other occupied countries in Western and Northern Europe whose output either increased, remained stable or declined far less steeply. Indeed, France's fall in GDP exceeded that of Greece, a country for which the Occupation is generally viewed as an economic catastrophe. Although Klemann has little to say about the Speer-Bichelonne agreement itself, his figures call into question the success of efforts to increase France's contribution to the German war effort during 1943–4.\(^4\)

Notwithstanding their differences regarding the success of the Speer-Bichelonne agreement, the scholars mentioned all adopt a macro-approach focusing on overall industrial production for the Germans. But if a global picture is valuable, it is less useful for understanding how industrial collaboration worked in practice. To answer this question, one also needs studies of developments at the industry and company levels. In examining Ford SAF's contribution to Ford-Werke's European truck programme, this chapter offers a case study that is particularly pertinent due to the prominent role of the French automobile industry. In many ways, the Speer-Bichelonne agreement did not constitute a new departure so much as it did the continuation of industrial collaboration, the terms of which had been worked out between the COA and the

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The extent and limits of industrial collaboration: 1943–1944

Hauptausschuss Kraftfahrzeug in the spring of 1943. Ford-Werke’s programme did not merely prefigure the Speer–Bichelonne agreement; it was its practical embodiment.

But this is not all. The history of Ford SAF’s participation in Ford-Werke’s truck programme offers an opportunity to examine more closely the issue of freinage. Following the Liberation Lehideux and Dollfus both contended that under their guidance Ford SAF had resisted the Germans by deliberately under-producing during 1943–4. As mentioned in the introduction, the argument that French companies under-produced has been gaining scholarly ground, especially but not solely for the automobile industry. Yet the concept of ‘deliberate under-production’ has received surprisingly little critical scrutiny. How does it work? Who are its principal actors? How can its effects be measured? This chapter will discuss these and other questions. In doing so, it will highlight the difficulties involved not only in establishing deliberate intent but also in distinguishing under-production from the other factors influencing production, most notably those rooted in an economy characterized by a growing penury of resources. That said, the chapter argues that a circumstantial case can be made that Ford SAF did not do all it could have to contribute to the truck programme. In this sense, one can speak of deliberate under-production. Just as importantly, however, this freinage did not constitute resistance because it was largely devoid of political motives.

The Speer–Bichelonne agreement

Before examining Ford SAF’s activities programme during 1943–4, it is worth considering more closely the Speer–Bichelonne agreement because it highlights the limits to German authority – limits that would severely handicap the efforts to integrate Ford SAF into Ford-Werke’s production programme. The initiative for the Speer–Bichelonne agreement came from Vichy, which sought to reenergize industrial collaboration in order to protect French workers and factories from Sauckel’s labour drafts. To help persuade the occupation authorities of France’s potential contribution to Germany’s war effort, Bichelonne in early 1943 urged French companies to accept every German contract. The shortage of almost all factors of production, however, made this a risky policy: additional contraction would exacerbate the fierce competition for scarce resources, with debilitating effects on overall production. A more organized approach was therefore needed. In a series of meetings with German officials in the summer of 1943, Bichelonne discussed the idea of integrating French industry more thoroughly into a larger and German-led European production programme – an expanded version of Ford-Werke’s truck

programme. In mid-July, he formally handed a memorandum to the MbF which outlined a programme to increase French armaments production by 50 per cent. In addition to exploiting state-controlled factories, Vichy proposed to mobilize the capacity of the southern zone, which before November 1942 had been unoccupied and thus free from Germany’s direct control. While the memorandum spoke of the aircraft, electrical and mechanical industries, it also held out the possibility of extending the programme to other industries. That Bichelonne’s overriding aim was to keep French labour in France is clearly evident from the proviso that the programme would require an additional 215,000 workers. Shortly after submitting his memorandum, Bichelonne asked for a meeting with Speer to discuss its contents.

It was far from certain that Speer would agree to a meeting. In an assessment of Bichelonne’s memorandum in July 1943, Speer’s staff in France responded with considerable scepticism. The Germans had no illusions about Vichy’s primary motive, which was to prevent further transfers of French workers and machines to Germany, even if they acknowledged Bichelonne’s goodwill towards them. But for Speer’s staff, the chief concerns involved resources and authority. The proposed programme required ample supplies of labour, raw materials and energy, none of which were readily available. Even if resources might be found, it was uncertain that they could be exploited. Speer’s staff openly questioned whether the French government possessed the authority to direct several hundred thousand workers into armaments production. If it did not, Vichy could be expected to pressure the German authorities to agree to return French workers from Germany. And this pointed to a larger danger: that the German economy would be disadvantaged without any corresponding production gains in France. At the same time, the Germans were too desperate for production results simply to reject the offer. Accordingly, the assessment concluded on a cautious note, recommending that Berlin seek ‘to fundamentally reduce’ Bichelonne’s programme before accepting it.

The pessimistic assessment by Speer’s staff was no exception. Throughout the second half of 1943, the occupation authorities manifested a good deal of scepticism regarding the prospects of increased production from French industry. At a meeting of German armaments

5 BAL R 3/1821, Bichelonne (MbF) to Michel (MbF), 15 July 1943. Also see BA-MA RW 24/31, Aktenvermerk über die Besprechung bei Minister Bichelonne (Produktionsministerium) am 1.7.43, 5 July 1943.

6 AN AJ 72/1926, Bichelonne (MbP) to Stulpnagel (MbF), 26 July 1943.

7 BAL R 3/1821, Chef des Rü- und Be Fr to Michel (MbF), 30 July 1943.
officials in Paris in November there was much talk of rampant shortages of coal and energy among other materials. The presiding officer warned the participants that French industry would have to live from 'hand to mouth' over the coming winter. Although he hoped that 'much could be achieved' through improvisation, it was taken for granted that shortages would greatly hamper production. Improvisation, in any case, depended on French goodwill, which appeared to be far from assured. In September, the armaments team for Paris-East reported on the 'strong reservations of [French] factory directors' towards working for the Germans. 'More than before', the report added, 'were formal objections as well as hesitation advanced when it came to accepting new [German] contracts'. The armaments team attributed the attitude of factory directors to a combination of Allied propaganda and the vanishing belief in a German victory. The following month, the armaments team for Paris centre remarked that French industrialists increasingly feared for their personal security if they worked for the Germans; several of them had received miniature coffins from the resistance with their names inscribed on them. More generally, the team discerned a growing unwillingness among French industrialists to cooperate with the Germans that manifested itself in a return of 'individualist attitudes'. Faced with the 'difficulties associated with a planned economy', the Fr[ench] industrialist...allows himself all too quickly to become discouraged and to gradually abandon the initiative. By the second half of 1943, it seemed, neither Vichy authorities nor French industrialists could be relied upon to work effectively for the Germans.

Notwithstanding the scepticism of German officials in France, Speer had no choice but to invite Bichelonne to Berlin for a series of meetings in mid-September 1943. At the first meeting, Speer indicated that the German government was prepared to accept Bichelonne's plan subject to several conditions. Speer wanted the French to concentrate on consumer goods and some military equipment, thereby freeing capacity in Germany for armaments production. Reflecting the scepticism of his own officials, Speer also insisted on 'a guarantee' that French industries would agree to work effectively for the Germans. In subsequent meetings with German officials (but not Speer), Bichelonne discussed a variety of subjects: the goods that French industry would make; supplies of raw materials; labour needs; and the designation of S-Betriebe. As so often, the two sides preferred to avoid details, skating over rather than tackling critical issues. In a revealing comment, one German official assured Bichelonne that a 'total confidence' between the French and Germans would overcome any difficulties. Not surprisingly, considerable confusion existed concerning the basic terms of the agreement. On the question of raw material supplies, the French delegation left Berlin with the impression that the Germans would make good

fulfil their production programmes under the prescribed terms and time limits. Although Bichelonne welcomed the prospect of a wave of German contracts, he resisted the idea of a 'general guarantee', maintaining that the issue 'should be treated case by case for each contract [and] for each production good'. Speer accepted Bichelonne's argument without protest, implicitly reconfirming the reality - already well established for the automobile industry - that the terms of industrial collaboration would be determined at the industry and factory levels. In return for what his own staff viewed as a doubtful promise of French cooperation, Speer offered to protect the workforce of all factories working for the Germans against Sauckel's labour drafts.

Interestingly, both sides acknowledged that the Comités d'organisation constituted a vital element in the overall plan. By 1943, the German authorities viewed the COs with considerable distrust, convinced that for many of them the priority was on maintaining the business activities of all their member companies rather than increasing output for the Germans. Yet the Germans also realized that they could not bypass the COs, since the latter were often the best placed to know how individual industries and sub-industries operated in practice. For Bichelonne, the COs offered a means to retain some say in industrial collaboration as the MPI lacked the authority and resources to oversee production in the different industries. As a result, there was simply no getting around the COs. Problems at the local level, Bichelonne remarked to Speer, 'will be resolved by each Comité d'organisation'.

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most shortages, while the Germans continued to hope that sizeable quantities could be squeezed out of France.

Overall, then, the Speer–Bichelonne agreement contained little that was new. To be sure, the agreement did help to rein in Sauckel and thus protect French workers. Thanks to an expansive definition, the number of factories designated as S-Betriebe rose quickly from 3,301 (employing 720,000 workers) in December 1943 to some 13,000 (employing 1.4 million workers) in March 1944. Much to Sauckel’s fury, moreover, more than a few of these factories contributed little if anything to the German war effort. Yet in terms of the workings of industrial collaboration, the Speer–Bichelonne agreement largely confirmed existing trends. One trend was the decentralization of authority: the agreement provided a framework whose detailed contents would be worked out at the industry and company levels. Another and related trend was the dependence of the Germans on the French. Speer himself highlighted this point in his emphasis on goodwill and cooperation. As he expounded to Bichelonne:

We are aware of the difficulties and [that] optimism is needed to overcome them. We can implement the programme and achieve success. I believe that one should not go too much into the details but instead should get to work. What is decisive is the will! We don’t want overly precise written commitments. We want to see through working where the difficulties lie...Difficulties can be overcome through effective cooperation. We have the desire for this cooperation and when it is realized [then] France will make a fundamental contribution [to the common effort] and we will be grateful when this has occurred. I want you to promise that you will carry out your tasks [and I don’t need] detailed written commitments.14

Speer’s comments certainly echoed Nazi ideology: determination and effort and we will be grateful when this has occurred. I want you to promise that...We can implement the programme and achieve success. I believe that one should...


15 On the importance of local expertise in production, see Charles F. Sabel, Work and Politics: The Division of Labour in Industry (Cambridge, 1982).

16 NARA T 77/1254, ‘Protokoll über die Besprechung am 2 April 1943 im Deutschen Beschaffungsamt’, undated.

As the previous chapter showed, the round of meetings in the spring of 1943 between French and German officials produced a tentative accord. With strong backing from Lehideux and the COA, Ford SAF managed to remain independent of Ford-Werke in return for its promise to cooperate wholeheartedly in the European truck programme. The programme called on Ford SAF to deliver 6,000 engines (plus various parts) per month by the end of 1943, with output rising from 2,000 in the second quarter of the year, to 4,000 in the third quarter and to 6,000 in the last quarter. To be sure, several participants harboured doubts about the programme’s feasibility, which is understandable given that important questions remained unanswered. Where were the considerable quantities of raw materials and labour to be found? How could the production targets for 1943 be reconciled with the idea that Ford SAF needed a transitional period of several months to shift from making French trucks to German trucks? Yet, however vague it might be, the accord reached between French and German officials did mean that work on the truck programme could begin in earnest.

Much of the initiative now lay on the French side. Neither the COA nor Ford SAF, however, appeared particularly committed to the truck programme. In early April 1943, an internal COA memorandum openly expressed its disbelief that the German authorities would succeed in according the Ford programme priority; and without this priority, the likelihood of receiving adequate supplies of matériel and manpower was practically nil. Revealingly, the memorandum went on to outline a truck production programme for the French automobile industry as a whole for 1943 which excluded Ford. Although admitting that a ‘measure of prudence’ was necessary regarding the Ford programme, the message...
was clear: Ford SAF would produce little if anything for the remainder of the year. Not surprisingly, COA officials were more circumspect in their dealings with the Germans. In May, L'Epine, one of the COA's experts assigned to Ford SAF, expressed to Ford-Werke's representative his reservations about the production schedule. Considerable delays would be needed before the company could meet its targets. But in private, COA officials were far more outspoken. Thus, at the beginning of July a COA document dismissed the Ford truck programme as 'a considerable waste of time'. Recent experience, it continued, indicated that any potential results would be completely disproportionate to the effort required.

To some extent, the COA's bleak assessment was well founded. In the current economic situation the question of priority was absolutely crucial. Without a privileged access to scarce supplies, the programme was illusory. Initially, things looked promising. In May 1943, the Hauptausschuss Kraftfahrzeug requested that the needs of the Ford programme have first call on the resources of the French automobile industry, which encompassed both the major automobile companies and their various suppliers. In reply, Speer's armaments staff in France assured the committee that it would pursue the programme 'with all its energy and [that it] would also do everything imaginable in support'. The various armaments teams were accordingly instructed to do all they could to help Ford SAF. Yet, in reality, the situation was more confused. Only two days after its positive reply to the Hauptausschuss Kraftfahrzeug, armaments officials in France demoted the Ford programme to second on the priority list, behind Wehrmacht orders for replacement parts. A more general problem was that the priority applied solely to the automobile industry. The frontiers between industries and sub-industries were often porous, especially in the case of suppliers, many of whom worked for companies in more than one industry. In this context, Ford SAF's priority risked losing much of its value if it could not be extended beyond the automobile industry. As one armaments team caustically observed in May 1943, the Ford truck programme was strangely silent on the critical issue of suppliers and sub-suppliers.

But perhaps an even greater problem was that Speer's armaments staff never managed to gain complete control of the process of placing German contracts with French companies. Imposing central control over the industrial exploitation of France had been a major aim of Speer's reorganization of the German economic administration in 1942 and again in 1943. Yet these efforts enjoyed only partial success. During 1943-4 German agencies (army, navy, air force, Organisation Todt) and companies would continue to place orders with French companies, ignoring the strictures to operate through Speer's staff. Each contract was deemed as urgent as the next, with the inevitable result being that scarce resources were diverted away from the Ford programme. In June 1943, for example, the COA learnt that the French automobile company Sauer had recently accepted a contract from military authorities in Vienna, notwithstanding the understanding that its capacity would be put at Ford SAF's disposal. Similarly, the automobile company Berliet informed the COA the same month that it had nothing to offer Ford SAF, having recently received a German order for 2,500 tractors. Ironically, the Speer–Bichelonne agreement likely exacerbated this problem by encouraging an increase of German contracts with French companies. Yet, even before the autumn of 1943, the COA realized that Ford SAF's priority was more notional than real.

The responsibility for ensuring that the Ford programme received priority, however, did not belong to the German authorities alone. At the meetings in April 1943, Lehindeux had promised that the COA would do all in its power to privilege Ford SAF's needs. There is evidence that the COA made some effort to prod French automobile companies to contribute to Ford-Werke's truck programme. Responding to the COA's request for information, Ford SAF in April 1943 drew up a list of monthly output that it needed from the automobile industry as a whole, which included 2,000 gear-boxes, 2,000 rear axles, 1,500 parts of various sorts and 1,000 transmissions. Armed with this list, the COA approached various companies, indicating to Renault, for example, that it attached considerable importance to the Ford programme. In the case of Citroën, Lehindeux directly instructed the company to make gear-boxes, setting a target of 4,000 for the third quarter of 1943. Interestingly, the COA simply attached this task to Citroën's existing production programme, providing no indication of where the additional machines and
raw matériels were to come from. Not surprisingly, Citroën would soon report delays in meeting its assigned schedule.\(^{24}\) Another sign of Lehideux’s efforts to mobilize the French automobile industry behind the Ford programme was his appointment of Dollfus to head the COA’s advisory committee made up of leading company directors. If the appointment testified to Ford SAF’s prominent place within the industry, it also amounted to a statement of support for the company.\(^{25}\)

The most noteworthy element of the COA’s efforts on behalf of Ford SAF, however, was their limited nature. With rare exceptions, the COA did not insist when automobile companies refused to help Ford SAF, readily accepting the claim that they had nothing to offer. The COA would continue to solicit automobile companies during much of 1943, but its requests appear to have been largely pro forma, aimed not at producing results but at confirming the futility of the endeavour. COA officials certainly wasted little time in informing the Germans of the fruitlessness of their efforts. Just as significantly, the COA sought to shift the blame for its lack of success, insisting that it was up to the occupation officials to take the measures needed to make Ford SAF’s priority a reality. At the same time, COA officials never once asked German authorities to cooperate in applying pressure on French automobile companies. Admittedly, such a request would have contradicted one of the Lehideux principles, namely that the COA alone should be responsible for the French automobile industry. Yet enforcing Ford SAF’s priority also presented a potential opportunity for Lehideux to consolidate his authority over the automobile industry during a critical period when the COA’s influence was being challenged. That Lehideux made almost no attempt to exploit this opportunity is telling. Whatever the reality might have been for the Germans, for Lehideux at least ensuring the success of the Ford programme was clearly not a priority.

The COA’s perfunctory approach to Ford-Werke’s truck programme was also evident in its attitude towards Ford SAF’s requests for resources. During the spring of 1943, German and French officials as well as representatives of Ford-Werke and Ford SAF met several times to discuss the latter’s requirements for manpower, matériels and machines. Ford SAF consistently presented imposing demands: in mid-May, the company insisted that it needed 1,900 additional workers (among them 1,600 skilled workers) to start up production, a figure that amounted to almost three-quarters of its current workforce and one the Germans deemed to be completely unrealistic in the present situation. The COA predictably endorsed Ford SAF’s demands.\(^{26}\)

An even more striking example concerns machine tool hours. To convert Ford SAF’s factories from making French trucks to making German trucks (and truck parts) required a certain amount of retooling of existing machines, not to mention the acquisition of new ones. Retooling machines, however, demanded machine toolists, who were a skilled category in very short supply. Before long, Ford SAF and Ford-Werke were bickering about how many machine toolists and machine tool hours were needed. Whereas the Germans maintained that 100,000–150,000 hours would be sufficient, Ford SAF estimated its needs at 300,000–350,000 hours, which was enough to keep 400 machine toolists busy working nine hours a day for four months. Challenged by the German authorities, Dollfus admitted that his estimate was “notably too high.”\(^{27}\) Yet this admission in no way deterred Lehideux from fully backing Ford SAF’s initial demand. In doing so, Lehideux pursued his strategy of shifting responsibility for the Ford programme’s failure to the Germans. Meanwhile, the greater the number of machine tool hours needed the more dependent became the programme on the French automobile industry. Since Ford SAF itself had only about sixty machine toolists available, it would have to look elsewhere if the conversion process had any chance of being completed. Earlier, in April 1943, Lehideux had assured Schmidt that the COA could get at least 120,000 hours from other automobile companies by temporarily transferring machine toolists to Ford SAF. But the COA did little to fulfil this promise, and as early as May 1943 Lehideux told Hauptausschuss Kraftfahrzeug officials that the French automobile industry could provide almost nothing. Instead, in typical fashion he insisted that the Germans must find machine toolists for Ford SAF.\(^{28}\)

Ford SAF appeared to be no more committed to the truck programme than the COA. From the beginning, Dollfus viewed the entire subject as one more attempt by Ford-Werke to take over his company. The tentative accord arrived at in April 1943 to maintain Ford SAF’s independence assuaged but did not eliminate his suspicions. Fending off any attempt by

24 For gear-boxes, see AN 3W/234, L’Épine to Lehideux, 5 May 1943; and 3W/228, Lehideux to Citroën, 10 May 1943; for delays, see 3W/228, Citroën to Ford SAF, 13 July 1943; and Ford SAF to Citroën, 10 February 1944. For Renault, see AN 3W/228, Norroy (COA) to Renault, 27 May 1943.

25 Loubet and Hatzfeld, Les 7 vies de Poissy, 43.


27 AN 3W/228, Dollfus to Kentler, 17 May 1943. Soon, Ford SAF would increase its estimate to 700,000 hours. See AN 3W/229, “Copie de la note adressée par M. Schnellbächer à M. Behr”, 4 August 1943.

28 AN 3W/234, Lehideux to Kentler, 17 May 1943.
Ford-Werke to interfere in Ford SAF’s activities thus remained a prominent goal. To be sure, Ford SAF had promised to cooperate fully in the truck programme; but it was determined to cooperate on its own terms. For Dollfus, this meant securing the best financial conditions possible. Once again, it is worth emphasizing that Dollfus was not opposed in principle to producing for the Germans. In May 1943, for example, he pleaded with the COA to be allowed to sell French trucks to the German authorities rather than to French customers because the former paid more. In any case, Ford-Werke’s truck programme proved to be a financial boon for the company. Although the programme entailed considerable expenses, Ford SAF received a 30 per cent advance from the Germans, which amounted to 175 million FF; with backing from Major Tannen, its enemy assets administrator, the company was soon pressing the occupation authorities to increase the advance to 50 per cent. If the success of this pressure is unknown, German officials did offer to reimburse Ford SAF for all expenses involved in converting its production capacity. Similarly, Ford-Werke agreed to guarantee the company against any losses it might incur. Dollfus also managed to negotiate a substantial rise in the price of parts shipped to the Ford companies in Belgium and Holland, favourably resolving a long-standing issue of dispute with Ford-Werke. The French government, meanwhile, also provided financing. Consistent with Vichy’s general policy of encouraging French companies to accept as many German contracts as possible, Bichelonne in May instructed Ford SAF to contribute to the truck programme, offering in return significant aid. Soon afterwards, Ford SAF received a credit of 60 million FF, which Dollfus viewed as a first instalment.

Flushed with cash, Ford SAF was under considerably less pressure to throw itself wholeheartedly into the truck programme. Indeed, with its potential losses covered, the company could afford to procrastinate. In addition to financial factors, the desire to avoid centralizing production provided another incentive to adopt a leisurely pace. To recall, during the meetings in April 1943, Schmidt had repeatedly insisted on the importance of concentrating engine production in one factory in order to ensure sufficient quality and quantity. Dollfus had resisted this demand, citing the menace of air bombardment if production was centred in one site. The bombing of Ford SAF’s Bordeaux plant in May 1943, despite causing minimal damage, only heightened his awareness of the dangers involved. If the Poissy plant was subject to renewed Allied air raids, Ford SAF risked emerging from the war without its chief productive facilities. Thus, while Dollfus continued quietly to repair the Poissy plant, he insisted that it would be the height of folly to concentrate engine production there. Tellingly, he counselled Tannen in May 1943, it was wiser to disperse production among several factories even if this meant that output was ‘a bit reduced’.

Dollfus had little trouble in resisting the pressure from Ford-Werke to concentrate engine production at Poissy. After all, it was the occupation authorities who had ordered Ford SAF to disperse its capacity following the March–April 1942 air raids. German officials, however, were interested in finding another site for making engines. In May 1943, Lehideux told Dollfus that finding an appropriate location in the Paris region would be extremely difficult and would result in additional delays getting the truck programme underway. Yet, as Lehideux almost certainly realized, it was precisely these reasons that made the project attractive to Dollfus. Accordingly, rather than opposing the Germans head on, Ford SAF made a show of working with them in the search for a new site. The upshot was a lengthy series of consultations and meetings regarding various possibilities, all of which consumed considerable time without leading to any concrete results. Indeed, as late as January 1944, German armaments officials were considering confiscating a location at La Courreneuve, on the outskirts of Paris. In the meantime, the Germans had no choice but to allow Ford SAF to continue to disperse its productive capacity among several factories. Afterwards, Dollfus claimed that decentralization had spared Ford SAF from further Allied air raids. Whether this factor

30 AN 3W/227, Dollfus to COA, 21 May 1943.
31 BFRC, ACC 606, Box 2, ‘Ford S.A.F. Board Meeting Held on 2nd June 1943’, undated.
32 AN 3W/228, ‘Memento’, 21 May 1943. For Bichelonne, see ibid., Ford SAF to Secrétariat d’état à la production industrielle, 23 April 1943; and Bichelonne’s response, 5 May 1943.
influenced the Allies in their selection of bombing targets is unclear. But what is clear is that the dispersal of Ford SAF’s production offered a convenient excuse for prolonged delays and disappointing results.

If neither the COA nor Ford SAF could be said to be enthusiastic about Ford-Werke’s truck programme, this attitude was not rooted in any political commitment to resisting the occupiers. Rather, neither perceived wholehearted cooperation to be in its immediate interests. By 1943, Lehideux and Dollfus sought to avoid major disruptions to the French automobile industry and to Ford SAF—disruptions that a vigorous pursuit of the truck programme risked bringing about. That said, Lehideux and Dollfus could not openly oppose the Germans as this would likely provoke retaliatory measures ranging from the arrest of individuals to the despatch of workers and machines to Germany. And so the two allies and friends adopted a two-pronged strategy. One prong consisted of trying to reduce German expectations concerning the scope of the truck programme; the lower the expectations, the less would be the disappointment with the results. Dollfus, for example, repeatedly suggested to Tannen that production targets would have to be cut and the schedule prolonged.35 The second and related prong was to procrastinate, exploiting the very real difficulties as an excuse for doing little if anything.

Not surprisingly, the Germans quickly grew frustrated with the COA and Ford SAF’s tactics. As early as June 1943, the armaments team in regular and direct contact with Ford SAF strongly recommended that the company be placed under German direction if any progress with Ford-Werke’s programme were to be achieved.36 If the seeming inability to start the programme provoked irritation, so too did Ford SAF’s output levels. In June 1943, the company was notably behind on its production schedule for French trucks, having delivered to the Germans only a little over half of the 1,314 it had been contracted to provide.37 By then, the Hauptausschuss Kraftfahrzeug had decided to take matters into its own hands: at the end of May, it appointed Carl Wiskott, a long-time manager at Opel (GM), as a special delegate charged with energizing the truck programme. Wiskott immediately and peremptorily informed Lehideux of his intention to bypass the COA and to deal directly with Ford SAF in order to speed things up. Indeed, the same day Wiskott sent a letter to Ford SAF containing twenty-nine questions covering a wide range of subjects, including the make-up of its workforce, the number and types of its machines, its various suppliers and its most pressing requirements. Wiskott demanded not only a rapid response to his questionnaire but also that it contain precise figures. He was uninterested, he tersely remarked, ‘in information of a general nature or in fantastical numbers’. Following a personal visit to Dollfus’ offices in Poissy two days later to prod Ford SAF into action, Wiskott waited another week before complaining that he had not yet received answers to his questions. Evidently, the Hauptausschuss Kraftfahrzeug’s delegate was determined to impose a new pace on developments.41

Predictably, Lehideux responded with unconcealed anger at Wiskott’s activities. In a lengthy letter to Schaaf on 1 June, he expressed surprise that Wiskott had sent a questionnaire without consulting him in advance. Lehideux contended that this violated the April 1943 protocol which stipulated that Ford-Werke and Ford SAF would cooperate with one another ‘en bonne harmonie’ under the joint control of the COA and the Hauptausschuss Kraftfahrzeug. Maintaining that the COA had made every effort to advance the Ford programme, including assigning its own technicians to Ford SAF, Lehideux denounced Wiskott’s appointment as ‘incomprehensible and anti-business’. Wiskott, he explained, was completely ignorant of conditions in the French automobile industry and his meddling meant restarting the programme from ‘zero’, which would result in a further delay of several months. Lehideux characteristically framed the stakes in terms of the future of industrial collaboration. Proclaiming his continued commitment to close cooperation with the Germans as well as his own ‘appetite for responsibility’, Lehideux asserted that ‘no reorganization can succeed if it is not assured of a continuity of effort and direction’. Concluding on a threatening note, Lehideux told Schaaf that the Hauptausschuss Kraftfahrzeug must decide if it wanted him to continue on the path of Franco-German collaboration.42

Lehideux’s rebuke had no effect on Wiskott who continued his efforts to jump-start Ford-Werke’s truck programme. In June 1943, he visited Ford SAF’s various factories, drawing up a lengthy list of complaints that left few actors untouched. Wiskott charged Ford SAF with gross incompetence in almost all areas of production, including the rational use of machines and labour, relations with its sub-suppliers and quality control.

35 For example, see AN 3W/234, Dollfus to Tannen, 18 May 1943.
41 For Wiskott’s appointment, see BA-MA RW 24/30, Rü Stabes Frankreich, Kriegstagebuch, 28 May 1943. For the questionnaire, see AN 3W/227, Wiskott to Lehideux, 29 May 1943; 3W/226, Wiskott to Ford SAF, 29 May 1943; and 3W/228, Wiskott to Ford SAF, 6 June 1943.
42 AN 3W/228, Lehideux to Schaaf, 1 June 1943.
Meanwhile, he deplored what he described as the torpor and technical ignorance of German officials assigned to Ford SAF, Tannen included. Even Ford-Werke came in for criticism. Wiskott accused Schmidt of condoning the chaos supposedly reigning at Ford SAF in order to force the occupation authorities to get rid of Dollfs, thereby allowing Ford-Werke’s director to ‘become the dictator and thus the king of Ford in Europe’. If the present state of affairs persisted, he reported the same month, the truck programme would be ‘unrealizable’.

Wiskott’s report arrived at a moment when the German authorities in both Paris and Berlin were reassessing the wisdom of placing confidence in the COA and Ford SAF. Mention has already been made of the armaments team’s recommendation to place the company directly under German control. Perhaps more revealing is the fact that hard questions were being asked about Lehideux. In June 1943, the German embassy in Paris felt it necessary to defend the latter’s continued commitment to collaboration. To buttress its case, the embassy not only pointed to Thoenissen’s warm endorsement of Lehideux, but also maintained that the COA’s chief was too closely identified with collaboration to change course. Since the beginning of the Occupation, the embassy argued, Lehideux ‘had made many concessions to Germany, making his conversion to opposition (Dissidenz) appear to be effectively impossible’. That the German embassy could only conceive of Lehideux’s position in dichotomous terms (either collaboration or opposition) is noteworthy; it left no room for another and more ambiguous possibility lying somewhere between ‘limited cooperation’ and ‘limited non-cooperation’ – a possibility that arguably better captured both the COA and Ford SAF’s response to the European truck programme. But for now, the more important point is that some Germans at least had begun to question Lehideux’s commitment to industrial collaboration and, by extension, to the truck programme.

Taking stock: the July 1943 meetings

Wiskott’s damning report, coming at a time of growing doubts about Lehideux’s and Ford SAF’s participation in Ford-Werke’s truck programme, prompted Schaaf to hold a round of meetings with key French and German actors in Paris in early July 1943. Optimism concerning the programme’s immediate prospects was in short supply among several of the participants. Speaking to Ford-Werke’s board of directors at the beginning of the month, Schmidt reported that the integration of the different European companies into the German war economy was ‘developing satisfactorily’, praising in particular Ford Holland (Amsterdam) and Belgium (Antwerp and Luttich). With Ford SAF, by contrast, progress did not ‘correspond to expectations’, a situation he attributed to several factors including shortages of labour as well as competing priorities among the occupation officials. Schmidt warned that Ford-Werke would be blamed for the ‘difficulties of the [truck] programme’ by the Wehrmacht and the Hauptausschuss Kraftfahrzeug. Ford-Werke, accordingly, must take steps to ensure that it did not become a ‘scapegoat’ for failure. For Schmidt, this meant demonstrating that the company was doing all it could to make the programme work and that the problems stemmed from others – on both the German and French sides. Yet, if Schmidt broached the possibility of failure, he did not abandon the possibility that Ford SAF might be prodded into making some contribution. As he concluded:

[Ford-Werke] has in any case made it clear that there is no point in discussing the question of responsibility but rather that it is more important to establish what needs to be done in order to change the situation and to limit the deficit of production to a minimum. Ford-Werke is determined now to work in this sense with the competent authorities.

The COA also reviewed its position in light of the meetings organized by Schaaf. In an internal memorandum, COA officials identified three problems affecting the truck programme: the shortage of machine toolists; the absence of clear priorities; and lingering questions regarding the quality of Ford SAF’s output. The memorandum left no doubt that the COA intended to maintain its strategy of underscoring the extent of its own efforts as well as those of Ford SAF while blaming Ford-Werke and the German authorities for most of the problems. Only on the issue of quality did it appear to be flexible. Ford SAF, the memorandum admitted, must show greater ‘will’ on this score, even if it added that Ford-Werke’s standards were unrealistically high. Significantly, COA officials argued that the truck programme should be maintained, but only in considerably reduced form. Rather than aiming at 2,000 engines/month, the memorandum recommended an initial target of 1,000/month, rising eventually

43 Lepmann, ‘Ford Paris im Zugriff von Ford Köln 1943’, 227–9. Lepmann’s valuable article is partly based on the wartime records of the Verband der deutschen Automobilindustrie (VDA). Unfortunately, these records appear to have been lost during the VDA’s move from Frankfurt to Berlin following Germany’s reunification.

44 AN 3W/220, Paris embassy to AA (Berlin), 26 June 1943.
to perhaps 1,200/month. Lehideux was thus advised to seek what amounted to a 50 per cent reduction of Ford SAF’s contribution to the truck programme.\(^{46}\)

The first encounter between French and German officials occurred at the COA’s premises on 2 July. Opening the proceedings, Wiskott chastised Ford SAF for its inadequate efforts in all spheres of activity, though he surprisingly exempted Ricq (the COA’s technician appointed to the company) from criticism. Getting down to specifics, he rejected Ford SAF’s estimate for machine tool hours as grossly inflated – a rejection reinforced by the recent jump in the figure from 300,000–350,000 to 720,000. Schaaf supported Wiskott on this point, citing the experience of the German automobile industry which suggested that far fewer hours were required to convert production. Interestingly, Lehideux traded his typically amenable demeanour for a less cooperative stance. When asked what French automobile companies could provide in terms of machine toolists and machine tool hours, he replied that he had no idea of the industry’s capacity, which amounted to a startling admission of ignorance. Similarly, Lehideux offered little help on the issue of transferring workers to Ford SAF, arguing that no additional labour could be found in France and that the Germans should consider returning French workers sent to Germany. Reflecting the advice of his advisors, Lehideux ended the meeting with the suggestion that the truck programme be scaled back, aiming at a maximum output of 1,200 engines/month by the end of the year.\(^{47}\)

Not surprisingly, the meeting the following day opened with a lengthy exchange regarding the truck programme’s feasibility. Alfons Streit, representing Ford-Werke, insisted that an output of 2,000 engines/month could be achieved with Ford SAF’s current park of machines. Echoing Schaaf’s remarks the day before, Streit noted that Ford-Werke managed to produce 50 per cent more than Ford SAF with the same number of machines. Effectively conceding the point, Ricq asked Streit directly if he believed that Ford SAF and the COA had ever endorsed the programme’s monthly production targets for engines and parts. If Lehideux remained silent, Dollfus reacted more cautiously, suggesting that the current target of 6,000 engines during the first trimester of 1944 was simply impossible and that a figure of 1,200–1,400/month would be more reasonable. Pretending to be taken aback, Schaaf exclaimed that he did not understand why Dollfus was talking of reducing the programme, before adding that any proposed reductions would have to come from Ford-Werke. A leading Ford-Werke official in France, H. W. Lückmann, rejected any idea of altering the programme established during the April 1943 meetings. Instead, Lückmann directed the discussions back to the practical problems facing Ford SAF, most notably shortages of labour, materiels and machines. After further exchanges, everyone agreed that greater cooperation was needed to mobilize the resources of the French automobile industry as a whole behind Ford-Werke’s programme. Careful to avoid details, Lehideux declared that success in an ‘endeavour so difficult’ would depend on ‘an honest collaboration’ between the COA and the Hauptausschuss Kraftfahrzeug.\(^{49}\)

The following day, delegates from Ford-Werke and Ford SAF met with Wiskott to consider practical measures. On the issue of labour, it was decided that the COA would identify where workers could be found after which German armaments officials would be responsible for arranging their transfer to Ford SAF. Although this approach possessed at least one basic weakness, namely the COA’s professed ignorance of conditions within the French automobile industry, the participants assumed that something similar would apply for the supply of machines, machine toolists and raw materiels. On the fraught issue of the programme’s size, the participants eschewed any clear-cut conclusions. Instead, they merely agreed that Ford SAF’s projected output over the coming months (based as it was on current results) was unacceptable.\(^{50}\)

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\(^{46}\) AN 3W/228, ‘Memento pour Monsieur Lehideux’, 1 July 1943.


\(^{48}\) AN 3W/228, ‘Compte-rendu de la réunion du 3 juillet 1943’, undated.

\(^{49}\) Ibid.

\(^{50}\) AN 3W/228, ‘Procès-verbal définitif sur le résultat de la réunion chez Ford SAF, le 5 juillet’, 8 July 1943.
In his valuable article on Ford-Werke's attempt to take over Ford SAF, the historian Peter Leßmann argued that the July 1943 meetings amounted to an admission of failure, after which the Germans effectively abandoned the Ford truck programme.51 The situation, however, was arguably more complicated. That the Germans were discouraged is beyond question. Following the first meeting with the French, Speer's personal representative in France remarked that 'the impression is gaining ground that [Ford-Werke's] programme exists only on paper and that in reality it is impracticable'.52 Three days later, Schaaf remarked that German officials in France had painted an over-optimistic view of Ford SAF's productive potential and that the truck programme appeared to be heading towards failure. Yet the Hauptausschuss Kraftfahrzeug's chief nevertheless felt that the programme should be maintained for 'tactical reasons'. That Schaaf thereby hoped to get some production from Ford SAF is evident from his argument that the Germans needed to take a more hands-on approach in the running of the company. He therefore recommended that Schmidt replace Tannen as the enemy assets commissioner at Ford SAF with full authority to oversee the truck programme.53 Everyone (including Schmidt) presumably agreed with this change, for they reduced significantly their expectations. Although neither Ford SAF nor the GOA appeared enthusiastic about the programme, both had to be careful in light of German suspicions that they were not doing enough. Both sides tacitly recognized that Ford SAF's production targets were overly ambitious. But this left open the question of what Ford SAF's contribution would be to the truck programme. No less uncertain was the meaning of Schmidt's appointment as enemy assets commissioner. If German officials clearly viewed it as a means to galvanize their French counterparts, Dollfus and Lehideux could be expected to do everything they could to fend off this renewed threat to Ford SAF's independence and to the GOA's authority.

Schaff's letter had little chance of appeasing Lehideux. Indeed, the latter had already expressed his 'stupefaction' on learning of Schmidt's appointment. In a letter to Schaaf, Lehideux complained that he had not been consulted, which he predictably presented as a violation of the Luxembourg accord, before going on to affirm that any attempt to exclude the COA was a violation of their agreement on Ford SAF's authority.54

Lehideux emphasized that he could never accept that a foreign company (Ford-Werke) could become the 'real boss' of a company belonging to the COA. As always, he insisted that larger stakes were involved, threatening to withdraw the COA's collaboration if Schmidt were appointed Ford SAF's enemy assets commissioner.55 When Schaaf refused to reconsider, however, Lehideux backed down somewhat, grudgingly accepting Schmidt's appointment while maintaining that the COA remained a vital intermediary between Ford-Werke on the one hand and Ford SAF and the French automobile industry on the other. The danger, he explained, was that the two companies would place orders pell-mell with French suppliers and sub-suppliers, creating chaos. Echoing Schaaf's wry tone, he commented that this would 'not be a very business-like way of working'.56

By July 1943, the fate of Ford-Werke's truck programme appeared uncertain. Despite their doubts, Ford-Werke and the Hauptausschuss Kraftfahrzeug remained interested in the programme, even if privately they reduced significantly their expectations. Although neither Ford SAF nor the COA appeared enthusiastic about the programme, both had to be careful in light of German suspicions that they were not doing enough. Both sides tacitly recognized that Ford SAF's production targets were overly ambitious. But this left open the question of what Ford SAF's contribution would be to the truck programme. No less uncertain was the meaning of Schmidt's appointment as enemy assets commissioner. If German officials clearly viewed it as a means to galvanize their French counterparts, Dollfus and Lehideux could be expected to do everything they could to fend off this renewed threat to Ford SAF's independence and to the GOA's authority.

German efforts to reanimate the Ford programme: July–November 1943

Rather than abandon Ford-Werke's truck programme, the Germans sought to reanimate it in the summer and autumn of 1943. Writing to Lehideux at the end of July, Schaaf framed the principal problem in terms of disagreements between Ford SAF and Ford-Werke on technical issues. In addition to insisting that such disagreements were a normal part of the production process and could easily be resolved by an exchange of experts, Schaaf issued a broader appeal for collaboration between the two men and their two organizations:

52 BA-MA RW 24/31, 'Aktenvermerk über Besprechung betreffend Ford S.A.F. – Programm am 2.7. 1943'.
54 AN 3W/228, Schaaf to Lehideux, 9 July 1943.
55 AN 3W/227, Lehideux to Schaaf, 7 July 1943.
56 AN 3W/227, Lehideux to Schaaf, 9 July 1943.
Nothing is more trying than to resolve the difficulties which appear between two parallel industries, which is the case with Ford SAF and with Ford Cologne[,] and I believe that you, like me, have better things to do than to be constantly caught up in this conflict. I really cannot believe that the quarrel separating two companies that are related is more important for you than the national problems with which you and I must occupy ourselves.

Schaaf also reiterated that Ford SAF’s needs had priority within the French automobile industry, asking for Lehideux’s cooperation in translating this principle into practical measures.57

While Schaaf sought to reassure Lehideux, German officials in France redoubled their efforts on behalf of Ford-Werke’s truck programme. Wiskott, who remained as the Hauptausschuss Kraftfahrzeug’s special delegate, embarked on a new round of direct meetings with various French automobile companies to consider how they might contribute.58 Meanwhile, at a conference in late August, Schaaf reminded armaments officials that Speer had insisted on increasing French truck production and that Ford-Werke’s programme took precedence. Over the next several days, the Germans discussed among themselves and with COA officials how to ensure that Ford SAF received the supplies of labour and matériel that it required.59 At the local level, armaments teams were kept busy scouring France for available machine tools and workers as well as for sub-suppliers that could work for Ford SAF. In early September 1943, for example, Speer’s armaments staff reported that fifty-four leading sub-suppliers had been identified and attempts under­taken to integrate them into the Ford programme.60 To facilitate these endeavours, Schmidt replaced Tannen, who was thought to be too sympathetic to Ford SAF, with Major Herbert Beckers as his representative as enemy assets administrator.61

This renewed effort, however, quickly ran into familiar difficulties. In his talks with German officials in France, Schaaf had pointed to shortages of steel as a particularly pressing problem. With no German sources available, Schaaf could only hope that French companies would somehow find adequate quantities – an extremely dubious hope by 1943.62 The Germans were markedly less sanguine regarding machines tools and manpower. Although they continued to accuse Ford SAF of exaggerating its need for machine tool hours, German officials nevertheless evaluated the company’s needs to be around 175,000 hours, which amounted to 500 machine toolists working forty hours/week for almost nine weeks.63 As for manpower, in August 1943 Ford SAF claimed that it urgently needed 2,863 additional workers, which included 263 machine toolists and 728 skilled workers. Speer’s officials believed this figure to be inflated, but they also admitted that Ford SAF was short of workers, especially skilled workers. The armaments team for Paris-West thus estimated Ford SAF’s immediate needs at 1,820 (skilled and unskilled) workers. Exacerbating matters were labour shortages among Ford SAF’s numerous suppliers and sub-suppliers.64 Given the paucity of skilled and unskilled labour in France at the time, it was simply impossible to meet these demands. Instructed in July to locate machine toolists for Ford SAF, the armaments team for Paris-East could only identify twelve. Several months later, the armaments teams for the Paris region were collectively ordered to supply Ford SAF with 1,000 workers and its suppliers with another 500. Commenting on the order in its war diary, the team for Paris-Centre tersely remarked that “it is certain that the Ford programme will not be 100 per cent fulfilled.”65

Another and related difficulty concerned the non-cooperative attitude of the French automobile industry as a whole. At the July 1943 meetings, Schaaf had reiterated the importance of mobilizing the productive capacity and resources of other French companies behind Ford-Werke’s programme. With this goal in mind, in early September German armaments officials organized a meeting with representatives of leading French companies at which the latter promised to provide the ‘necessary support

57 AN 3W/228, Schaaf to Lehideux, 29 July 1943.
58 BFRC, FMC, ACC 713, Box 7, Wiskott to Becker, 12 October 1943 (English translation); and AN 3W/228, Ford-Werke to COA, 22 July 1943.
59 BA-MA RW 24/31, ‘Besprechung am 27.8.43, 8 Uhr vormittag, bei Major Graf’, 1 September 1943; also see in the same file the report on a meeting with the Heereswaffenamt, 30 August 1943.
61 BAL R 87/9335, MbF to RkHv, 19 October 1943; and BA-MA RW 24/109, Rü Kdo Paris-West, Kriegstagebuch, 24 August 1943.
63 AN 3W/229, ‘Copie de la note adressée par M. Schnellbächer à M. Behr’, 4 August 1943. A German visit to Ford SAF’s Bourges factory in September 1943 revealed that the shortage of machine toolists meant that only 200 of its 500 machines were working. See BA-MA RW 24/109, Rü Kdo Paris-West, 13 September 1943.
64 AN 3W/228, Tannen to Graf (Rüstungsobermann in Frankreich), 10 August 1943; NARA T 77/1263, Rü Kdo Paris-West, Kriegstagebuch, 7 August 1943; and BA-MA RW 24/31, Rüstungs- und Beschaffungsstabs Frankreich, ‘Aktenvermerk’, 14 September 1943.
to Ford SAF. But this promise was largely honoured in the breach. Renault, for example, had initially agreed to transfer an unspecified number of workers to Ford SAF as well as to make parts for rear axles, only to renounce on the agreement: Ford SAF, Renault now insisted, would have to supply it with workers, machines and matériels. Similarly, Citroën had contracted to make gear-boxes but by early 1944 the accumulated delays were so great that Ford SAF asked for the return of the unfinished parts it had supplied as part of the terms – a request that prompted Citroën to respond snidely that most parts were of such poor quality as to be unusable.66 With some justification, Dollfus could complain to a Ford-Werke official in September 1943 that 'roughly speaking, we have received no help from the French Automobile Industry'.67

German officials in France had no means of compelling companies such as Renault and Citroën to contribute to Ford-Werke’s truck programme. In some way, this powerlessness reflected the hands-off approach that the Nazi regime adopted towards (non-Jewish owned) companies both in Germany and in much of occupied Europe.68 But it was also rooted in the administrative chaos that continued to reign in France in the industrial realm. Throughout 1943, a confusingly large number of German organizations (Wehrmacht, army, air force, Organisation Todt, etc.) as well as German companies placed orders directly with French firms, viewing one another more as rivals for scarce capacity and resources than as allies committed to a common cause. Thus, if Renault and Citroën could leave Ford SAF in the lurch without any fear of sanction, it was because they either possessed or were in the process of acquiring German contracts.

Ironically, during the summer and autumn of 1943, German armaments officials in France unwittingly aggravated the chaos in the industrial realm to the detriment of Ford-Werke’s programme. In response to mounting German frustration with the delays at Ford SAF, COA officials in early August proposed that the Germans could ‘catch up’ to their schedule by increasing the truck production of other French automobile companies. Although well aware that the major French companies had little spare capacity, given that most already possessed outstanding German contracts, the COA nevertheless contended that Citroën could make 2,600 3.5-ton trucks per trimester, Renault 3,800 3.5-ton trucks and Berliet and

66 For Renault, see AN 3W/228, ‘Commandes de ponts arrière de Ford à Renault’, undated; and ibid., Ford to Citroën, 10 February 1944, and response, 21 February 1944.
67 AN 3W/229, Dollfus to Léch Xuân (Ford-Werke), 5 October 1943. The letter is translated into English.
68 On this point, see Buchheim, ‘Unternehmen in Deutschland und NS-Regime 1933–1945’.

Saurer together 1,000 5-ton trucks. The COA’s intentions are not difficult to divine.69 In underscoring the potential support of French companies, the COA hoped to appease the Germans while at the same time preventing the industry from being turned into a mere auxiliary of Ford-Werke’s programme.

Its motives aside, the COA had no trouble in interesting the Germans. In late August 1943, Wiskott met once again with the representatives of various French companies, asking whether they could boost their production of trucks in the short term, rather than helping Ford SAF. Renault, Citroën and Berliet all answered that they could do so, though adding that they would require considerable supplies of labour and matériel. All three companies also mentioned delays, which Renault estimated at nine months and Berliet at six months.70 That French automobile companies responded favourably (albeit cautiously) to Wiskott’s inquiry is hardly surprising: they had little desire to subordinate their production programmes to Ford SAF’s needs. Citroën, for example, had reacted violently to Dollfus’ suggestion that it should become a ‘manufacturier’ (fabriquer) for Ford SAF.71 More surprising, however, is the German response, which was to plunge forward. By early September 1943, German officials had drawn up a tentative truck production programme for the French automobile industry. Running through to October 1944, the programme called for Ford SAF to make 24,000 trucks, Renault 12,000, Citroën 7,100, Berliet 2,980 and Saurer 1,500, for a total of over 47,000 trucks.72 In early December 1943, the Hauptausschuss Kraftfahrzeug handed an updated programme to the COA covering 1944 as a whole. Omitting Ford SAF’s contribution, the new programme foresaw the production of some 25,000 trucks, with Renault and Citroën to deliver 19,600 3.5-half-ton trucks, Berliet and Saurer to deliver 4,480 4.5-half-ton trucks and Peugeot to deliver 1,165 2-ton trucks.73

69 AN 3W/227, Norroy (COA) to Kentler (Hauptausschuss Kraftfahrzeug representative in Paris), 4 August 1943. For evidence that the COA knew these figures were unrealistic, see AN 3W/229, untitled note, 10 June 1943.
70 For example, see AN 3W/228, ‘Compte-rendu de la réunion du 26 août 1943 à 17 heures dans le bureau du Major von Guillaume à l’Hôtel Astoria (Rüstungs- und Beschaffungsamt)’, which concerns Renault; and ibid., ‘Compte-rendu de la réunion du 26 août au Rüstungs- und Beschaffungsamt avec les Usines Citroën’, both dated 27 August 1943.
71 AN 3W/228, Dollfus to Lehideux, 25 September 1943.
72 For the programme, see BA-MA RW 24/101, Ru Kdo Paris-Mitte, Kriegstagebuch, 30 August – 5 September 1943.
73 The updated programme is included in AN 3W/229, ‘Note pour Messieurs Champmier [and] Norroy’, L’Epine, 7 December 1943.
These targets were entirely unrealistic in the straitened economic circumstances of 1943-4. If the Hauptausschuss Kraftfahrzeug had doubts about the feasibility of Ford-Werke's programme, expanding it to encompass other companies was certainly odd. With good reason, the armaments team for Paris-Centre commented on the new programme that production results would "in reality be considerably lower." But even more remarkable is the fact that the German authorities pretended that the new programme would have no effect on the original one. Armaments teams were thus instructed to push French automobile companies to the "limits of their capacity" to produce trucks while at the same time making sure that Ford-Werke's programme was "not affected." But this was nonsense. The expanded truck programme effectively stripped Ford SAF's priority of any meaning it might have had. The possibility that companies might help Ford SAF entirely vanished. More generally, it sounded the death-knell for the initial plan to wind down the production of other automobile companies, thereby freeing capacity and resources for Ford SAF. Rather than a more organized exploitation of the French automobile industry, the enlarged truck programme was almost certain to achieve the opposite.

Why did the Germans create another programme at the very moment that they sought to invigorate Ford-Werke's programme? One reason stemmed from the disorganized nature of the German economic administration in France. Despite his best efforts, Speer never succeeded in forging the industrial dictatorship that he sought either in Germany or in occupied Europe. Other power centres remained. Even within Speer's staff the lines of authority were confused. In October 1943, the armaments team for Paris-West, which was supposedly responsible for overseeing Ford SAF's activities, complained that it remained excluded from the planning for the Ford-Werke programme: it knew almost nothing about the programme's overall goal or even its own tasks. In this situation, a single coherent strategy on the part of the Germans was always unlikely.

That said, deliberate calculation also factored into the decision to expand the truck programme: an expanded programme requiring significant increases in manpower would place Speer's staff in a better position to counter Sauckel's insistent demands to deport French workers to Germany. But if the decision was deliberately calculated, it was a calculation born of desperation. While the Wehrmacht urgently needed trucks, the prospects of getting them in significant numbers from Ford-Werke's programme appeared increasingly uncertain. And so armaments officials turned to other companies in the hope that they might be able to provide something in the near future. Although the contending priorities and competition for resources between the various automobile companies risked creating chaos, in the short term at least the strategy was perhaps no more risky than putting all of one's eggs in the Ford SAF basket.

The response of the COA and of Ford SAF

Despite the increasing sense of urgency on the German side, the COA continued to procrastinate. In August, it curtly informed the Germans that it would take six to eight months before production targets could be met, a time-frame that was made conditional on the supply of considerable manpower to Ford SAF and its suppliers. Meanwhile, still bitter over the appointment of Schmidt as foreign assets administrator for Ford SAF, Lehideux continued to insist that the company could not be blamed for the lengthening delays. Ford SAF's directors, he wrote Schaaf in July, have committed 'no mistakes nor serious acts of negligence', adding that 'on the contrary I must admit that they have expended very large efforts and have furnished a considerable activity in order to surmount difficulties which confront them, particularly in the area of supplies'. The principal cause of the tension between Ford SAF and Ford-Werke, Lehideux continued, were the unreasonable demands and bad faith of the latter — a problem, he remarked, that Schmidt's appointment would only exacerbate. Notwithstanding Schaaf's pleas for cooperation, Lehideux held this line. Thus, in August he informed Schaaf that it was up to the Germans alone to supply Ford SAF with the machines and machine tools it required. Interestingly, the COA privately expressed doubts about Ford SAF's good faith. In an internal memorandum in November, one COA official reported that Ford SAF's failure to respond to queries about its activities had become "systematic". For Lehideux, however, the COA's task was not to prod Ford SAF to contribute more to Ford-Werke's programme but to defend the company against German criticism. By the autumn of 1943, in any case, Lehideux's attention was firmly riveted on the post-occupation period, which he believed to be close at

74 NARA T 77/1264, Rü Kdo Paris-Mitte,'Lagebericht', no. 625/43, 18 October 1943.
76 NARA T 77/1263, Rü Kdo Paris-West to Rüstungs- und Beschaffungsstab Frankreich, 11 October 1943.
77 On this point, see BA-MA RW 24/31, 'Aktenvermerk' regarding a meeting on 13 August 1943, dated 14 August 1943.
78 AN 3W/227, COA (Norroy) to Kentler, 4 August 1943; 3W/228, Lehideux to Schaaf, 22 July 1943; and Lehideux to Schaaf, 9 August 1943.
79 AN 3W/234, 'Note pour Monsieur Lehideux', Charles de Bailliencourt, 10 November 1943.
The response of the COA and of Ford SAF

Another indication of Ford SAF’s limited commitment to the Ford programme is the company’s effort to increase its stocks of raw matériels. After the Liberation, Raoul Desombiaux, a high-ranking official in the COA’s raw matériels section, claimed that while French companies during the Occupation generally inflated their raw matériel requests by 10 per cent, Ford SAF did so by 80 per cent. This claim is certainly questionable. Indeed, Desombiaux admitted that Ford SAF’s practice aroused the suspicion of the German authorities, who could compare the company’s demands with those of Ford-Werke which employed similar production methods – and thus had similar needs. Equally pertinent, Ford SAF was under German observation. Throughout 1943, a large number of Germans (from Ford-Werke, from the armaments administration and from the Hauptausschuss Kraftfahrzeug) visited the company’s various factories, sometimes for extended periods. Indeed, one Ford SAF official remembered that during 1943 ‘there were German controllers in every one of its decentralized plants’ and that ‘all decisions on personnel and matériels had to go through German authorities’. Needless to say, this German presence made it difficult to hide large amounts of matériels.

That said – and despite the post-war statements of German armaments officials that the amount of supplies was carefully calculated in each case – it does seem that Ford SAF succeeded in squirelling away sizeable quantities of raw matériels. According to an undated COA report, at the end of March 1944 Ford SAF possessed 2,210,452 tons of (unspecified) raw matériel stocks, which represented a jump of almost 150 per cent from the end of 1940. Only two automobile companies, SIMCA and Peugeot, showed a comparable or greater increase. Although the two dates span almost the entire occupation period, it is not unreasonable to assume that the growth in Ford SAF’s stocks occurred primarily during 1943–4 when the Germans were desperately trying to animate the Ford-Werke programme. If so, Ford SAF appears to have seized this opportunity to begin preparing for the post-war period by building its stocks, which would facilitate a faster conversion to peacetime production when the time came. Such a strategy necessarily came at the expense of current production.

If Ford SAF was surreptitiously increasing its stocks of raw matériels during 1943, it also sought to free itself from German oversight. At a

Hand. Indeed, at the end of the year, he drew up a peace-time ‘construction programme’ to run for five years and which foresaw hefty increases in the overall production of trucks in particular. Thus, while the programme called for the production of automobiles to rise progressively from 55,000 to 250,000, with the final figure representing an increase of 25 per cent over that of 1938, the output of ‘industrial vehicles’ (chiefly trucks) would grow from 85,000 to 120,000, an increase of over 500 per cent. For Lehideux, accordingly, it was important that all the major automobile companies, and not just Ford SAF, continue to produce trucks for the remainder of the Occupation if afterwards the programme were to be rapidly implemented. The COA thus had no interest in privileging Ford-Werke’s truck programme.

Ford SAF seems to have played a slightly more subtle game than the COA. There is some evidence that Ford SAF sought to mobilize the French automobile industry to contribute to Ford-Werke’s programme. In addition to urging the COA to intervene on its behalf, Ford SAF pressured individual companies to fulfil their obligations. In November 1943, for example, Dollfus criticized the directors of Citroën for refusing to accept Ford-Werke’s demands regarding norms for certain parts for gear-boxes – a criticism not without irony given Ford SAF’s ongoing disputes with Ford-Werke on precisely this issue. It is difficult to gauge to what extent Ford SAF’s efforts constituted a stratagem to deflect responsibility for its own disappointing results. What is clear, however, is that Ford SAF echoed the COA in insisting that others were to blame for problems and delays. Writing to a Ford-Werke official in October 1943, Dollfus again complained that Ford SAF had received no help from the French automobile industry. As for German promises to supply matériels and manpower, he remarked that ‘nothing has been done to help Ford SAF or rather that if efforts have been made to help Ford SAF, these efforts have achieved nothing’. Not surprisingly, Dollfus was particularly critical of Wiskott’s continuing activities on behalf of the Hauptausschuss Kraftfahrzeug, lecturing to Speer’s staff that they were counter-productive as well as a violation of existing agreements.

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Footnotes:


81 AN 3W/228, Dollfus to Citroën, 22 November 1943; and Dollfus to Lehideux, 25 September 1943.

82 AN 3W/228, Dollfus to Lockmann (Ford-Werke), 5 October 1943; and RA-MA RW 24/32, Rüstungs- und Beschaffungsstabs Frankreich, ‘Aktevermerk’ on meeting with Dollfus on 28 October 1943, dated 29 October 1943.

83 AN 3W/221, Raoul Desombiaux deposition, 31 May 1945.


85 For stocks, see AN 3W/221, untitled and undated note. For German armaments officials, see the deposition of André Kronefeld, 16 April 1945, in ibid.
meeting with German armaments officials in early November 1943, Dollfus proposed that Ford SAF alone be made responsible for inspecting its products. Not surprisingly, the delegates of Ford-Werke opposed the proposal. Unwilling to drop the matter, several days later Dollfus wrote to Streit, Ford-Werke's representative in France, to insist that German technicians be removed from his factories, arguing that the quality of Ford SAF's products was beyond reproach. No doubt tongue-in-cheek, he even suggested that the technicians would be better employed at Ford-Werke since a large number of the various parts it had recently delivered to Ford SAF were supposedly defective. But Dollfus did not stop here. In its tone and content, the letter amounted to a categorical rejection of Ford-Werke's position on almost every issue concerning the truck programme. Claiming to speak as one Ford man to another, Dollfus maintained that Ford-Werke's quality problems demonstrated that he had always been right about the need for flexibility in terms of manufacturing norms as well as about the disadvantages of centralizing engine production in one plant. The message was clear: Ford SAF was in no way responsible for the problems afflicting Ford-Werke's truck programme and should therefore be left alone to operate as it deemed best.

The imposition of Patenfirmen and Leitenfirmen

By the autumn of 1943, the German authorities in France felt increasingly frustrated. Despite their efforts to reanimate Ford-Werke's truck programme undertaken in the wake of the July meetings, progress remained unsatisfactory. To be sure, the programme was far from a complete failure. According to German reports, during the third quarter of 1943, Ford SAF produced 2,501 engines, which represented just over 60 per cent of the expected output which was due to increase by 50 per cent to 6,000 engines. Somewhat awkwardly for Ford-Werke, this total represented only one third of the expected output that was due to be acquired by some way or another, help us to reach the goal. Dollfus' claims, however, fell on deaf ears. The Germans suspected that the Ford programme was heading for failure and believed that the French - and Ford SAF especially - were to blame. No one was more convinced of this than Wiskott, the Hauptausschuss Kraftfahrzeug's delegate. A key moment came in early October 1943 when Becker, the enemy assets administrator at Ford SAF, sent a report to Ford-Werke which blamed the German authorities for many of the difficulties with the truck programme. Quickly apprised of the report, Wiskott wrote a letter to Becker in which he identified the essential problem as incompetence on Ford SAF's part. If Ford SAF had difficulties with its suppliers and sub-suppliers, it was largely because it had neglected to appoint 'competent liaison officers between Hiring, Planning, Purchasing and Production Departments [of Ford SAF] on the one hand, and the contractors concerned on the other'. Compoundng this problem was the COA's failure to fulfill its promise, supposedly made in July, to loan three of its officials to act as 'purchasing specialists' for the company. Ford SAF thus urgently needed to acquire more 'staff and employees' in order to reorganize its operations. Ending on a stirring note, Wiskott insisted that the Ford programme constituted a 'first rate patriotic duty' for all the Germans concerned 'and [that] this justifies every attempt and every step which can, by some way or another, help us to reach the goal'.

Wiskott, however, had not said his last word. Two days after his first letter to Becker, he penned another and much longer one in which he expressed astonishment at the disorganized nature of Ford SAF's activities, particularly its purchasing department, which, despite repeated German complaints, remained incapable of performing the tasks expected of it. The incompetence of the purchasing department handicapped Ford SAF's relations not only with potential suppliers and sub-suppliers but...
also with other automobile companies. The result was to exacerbate what Wiskott perceived to be the long-standing 'ill-feeling' of French companies towards 'Ford-Matford methods'. Clearly frustrated, he condemned the continued absence of an effective department as 'nothing else but sabotage'.

If anything, Wiskott was even more exasperated by Becker's criticism of the German authorities and, by implication, of himself. The Hauptausschuss Kraftfahrzeug, he maintained, had done everything possible to help Ford SAF. During the second and third quarters of 1943, for example, it had supplied the company with considerable amounts of iron and steel, even diverting scarce contingents from Renault. More generally, Wiskott rejected the claim that the priority accorded to the Ford programme was meaningless, maintaining that Ford SAF had never submitted a specific request for contingents intended for other companies. He made a similar point regarding manpower: not once during the last six months had Ford SAF asked that particular tool-makers be requisitioned to work in its factories. Wiskott's arguments pointed to the confusion that reigned on basic issues of initiative and authority. From the German standpoint, it was up to the French to identify sources of materiel and manpower, which German officials would then arrange to have transferred to Ford SAF. For both the COA and Ford SAF, however, the task of locating supplies belonged to the Germans.

For our purposes, however, the most interesting aspect of Wiskott's critique was his unfavourable comparison of Ford SAF's efforts with those of other French companies. How was it, he asked, that Peugeot had succeeded in finding 60,000 machine tool hours during the last six months whereas Ford SAF found almost none? But this question was merely the preface to a more sweeping indictment:

To conclude, I wish to tell you something else which I observed personally, particularly at the time when I was in charge of the whole of the French vehicle programme: The [sic] activity and the cleverness of nearly all the French automobile manufacturers to iron out matters in silence when Ford S.A.F. would be sending out S.O.S.'s. [sic] is remarkable and should be considered. Because it is not true that the Frenchman is not willing [to work for the Germans]. Each day brings proof of the contrary. All this extolling on the part of Ford S.A.F. to keep away from you their own mistakes is as poor, compared to the work accomplished by the French automobile manufacturers...

'There is something rotten in the state of Denmark' and the old saying 'God helps those who help themselves', Mr Dollfus should have applied it to himself last June. I do not see why you should have given him such a good alibi...by your statement in regard to the deficiency of the German organization.

Wiskott did not ignore the various handicaps afflicting the French economy in 1943. Nevertheless, he was convinced that responsibility for the disappointing results of the Ford-Werke programme lay principally with Ford SAF and with Dollfus. Just as significantly, he intimated that Ford SAF's incompetence was at least in part deliberate - that the company was sabotaging the truck programme.

Wiskott's indictment of Ford SAF provoked a series of meetings of French officials in Paris in mid-October. At the first meeting, Becker contritely sought to dampen Wiskott's anger by maintaining that his criticisms were not his own but those of Dollfus; at the next meeting, however, Becker forcefully reiterated Ford SAF's catalogue of complaints, thereby confirming Wiskott's suspicion that he had become Dollfus' mouthpiece. With tensions rising, it was decided to bypass Becker and organize an encounter between Wiskott and Dollfus at the end of the month. Whatever the expectations might have been, the results proved thoroughly discouraging as the two men simply talked past one another. While Wiskott defended his efforts to invigorate Ford SAF and the Ford-Werke programme, Dollfus insisted on the preservation of his company's independence which, he insisted, was guaranteed by the agreements signed between the French and German authorities. Once again, it seemed, Ford-Werke's truck programme had reached an impasse.

It was at this moment of renewed deadlock that the fates of the Ford-Werke programme and of the Speer–Bichelonne accords converged. The accords called for the creation of S-Betriebe, specially designated factories whose workers would be excluded from Sauckel's labour drafts. Potentially, however, the significance of the S-Betriebe system extended well beyond labour supplies: it offered a means of imposing priorities on French industrial production by deliberately favouring some sectors and even companies while neglecting others - something the occupation authorities had long demanded but hitherto failed to achieve. For these reasons, German officials in November 1943 looked to the S-Betriebe designation as a possible answer to their problems with the Ford-Werke programme. The result was that Ford SAF was soon named an S-Betriebe. At the same time, the value of this measure depended in large part on its exclusiveness. The more S-Betriebe there were, the more difficult it would

91 Ibid., Wiskott to Becker, 12 October 1943 (English translation). Emphasis in original.

92 Ibid.

93 BA-MA RW 24/32, 'Aktenvermerk' regarding a meeting on 14 October 1943; 'Aktenvermerk' regarding a meeting on 15 October 1943; and 'Aktenvermerk' regarding a meeting on 28 October 1943.
become to translate this status into concrete benefits for Ford SAF in terms of priority. And here the pertinent point is that by the end of 1943 virtually all French automobile companies were S-Betriebe, rendering the distinction effectively meaningless.  

German efforts to break the impasse with the Ford-Werke programme, however, did not centre solely on the designation of S-Betriebe. The Speer–Bichelonne accords also foresaw the extension of Patenfirmen and Leitenfirmen in France. As discussed in the previous chapter, a German Patenfirma would be appointed to oversee a single French company while a Leitenfirma would oversee several French companies. At the beginning of November 1943, at the height of the crisis created by Wiskott’s letters, German armaments officials in Paris met to consider the overall situation created by the fact that the hoped-for production increases by French companies had ‘failed to occur’. Agreement was quickly arrived at on the need for armaments teams to be more effective in their interactions with individual companies. Given the immense difficulties afflicting the French economy, the armaments teams would have to be flexible and inventive; the imperative was ‘to improvise’ and to avoid ‘bureaucracy’ (Bürokratismus). They would, in other words, have to disregard formal rules and regulations in the quest to stimulate production. But it was also decided to exploit as fully as possible the system of Patenfirmen and Leitenfirmen. As one official remarked, this measure imposed itself precisely because armaments teams lacked the resources to supervise the ‘technical’ aspects of production in the ‘required detailed manner’. Only German companies from the same industry, it was presumed, possessed the practical knowledge to oversee the efforts of French companies to fulfil their contractual obligations.  

Armaments teams were expected to work closely with officials from the Paten and Leitenfirmen, but they could not substitute for the latter. Several days later, German officials announced that Patenfirmen had been assigned to several automobile companies, prominent among them Ford SAF. And for the latter, the Germans named Ford-Werke.  

Recourse to Patenfirmen in the French automobile industry, however, created its own problems and controversies. While Vichy authorities sought to work with the Germans to ensure that the process of assigning Patentfirmen provoked as little disruption as possible, Lehideux and the COA viscerally opposed the measure. As usual, Lehideux complained that the Germans had failed to consult the COA when taking the decisions—a failure that supposedly violated the agreements between French and German officials. Also present was the suspicion that German companies would exploit their position as Patenfirma to take control of French companies. But the COA’s opposition appeared to be motivated by the belief that the system of Patenfirmen would disrupt the overall production programme drawn up by the Hauptausschuss Kraftfahrzeug because the German companies involved would pursue their own interests; the result would be to favour one or two French companies at the expense of the others. In effect, the COA feared that the Germans would succeed in imposing production priorities on the French automobile industry and, still more the point, in according priority to the Ford-Werke programme.  

True to form, Lehideux threatened to end his active support of industrial collaboration if the occupation authorities did not renounce their plans regarding Patentfirmen. This time, however, the Germans refused to back down. In response to their complaints, the COA was told not only that Bichelonne had given his prior approval but also that Speer himself had issued a ‘formal decision’ that could not be reversed. German officials did offer Lehideux a fig leaf, promising to consult with the COA on any future appointments of Patentfirmen; but this promise was largely honoured in the breach. It is worth underscoring that the Germans bypassed the COA, dealing directly with Bichelonne, and that they ignored Lehideux’s threats of non-cooperation. By the closing months of 1943, any remaining confidence in Lehideux had evaporated and German armaments officials were determined to forge ahead.  

Although Lehideux failed to sway the Germans, his fears proved to be misplaced as the Patentfirmen quickly showed themselves to be little threat. As noted in the previous chapter, Speer’s officials had initially defined the powers of the Patentfirmen and Leitenfirmen in limited terms. This remained the situation despite the planned-for increase in the number of such companies as a consequence of the Speer–Bichelonne accords. Thus, instructions drawn up in October 1943 for German companies acting as Patentfirmen and Leitenfirmen emphasized their role as advisors

94 AN 19830589/6, MPI to Comité des petites et moyennes entreprises, February 1944; and 3W/229, MPI note, no. 8891, 24 December 1943.  
95 NARA T 77/1263, Rü Kdo Paris-West, 'Aktenvermerk über die Besprechung der Rüstungskommandeure beim Rü-Be-Stab Frankreich am 1.11.43', 2 November 1943; also see T 77/1264, Rü Kdo Paris-Mitte, 'Lagebericht', no. 686/43, 18 November 1943.  
96 AN 3W/233, Rüstungsoffizin in Frankreich to Ford SAF, 4 November 1943.  
97 For Vichy authorities, see AN 19830589/6, MPI to General Stud (Rüstungs- und Beschaffungsamt in Frankreich), 15 November 1943.  
98 AN 19830589/6, COA, 'Désignation de "Patenfirma" par les autorités d'occupation', 12 November 1943; and 3W/233, 'Memento. Arguments contre le parrainage dans l'automobile', 2 November 1943.  
99 See AN 3W/233, 'Compte-rendu de notre visite à M. Bellier le 6 novembre 1943 au sujet de "Patenfirma"', L'Epine, 8 November 1943; and 'Projet: Réflexions sur les Patentfirmen', 12 December 1943.
and facilitators. They could appoint particular agents (*Firmenbeauftragte*) to French companies but their duties were largely confined to those of liaison. No doubt the lack of authority attached to the *Patenfirmen* helps to explain why some German companies refused the offer, calculating that the status brought no real benefits.\(^{100}\)

Before long, moreover, the armaments teams were complaining about the system of *Patenfirmen* and *Leitenfirmen*. Although members of the two groups (armaments officials and delegates of German companies) were supposed to work closely together, the responsibilities of each remained uncertain, hampering effective cooperation. It was not enough that everyone ‘share information’, the armaments team for Paris-West argued in October; what was needed were well-defined tasks.\(^{101}\) The rapid multiplication of *Leitenfirmen* and especially *Patenfirmen* did nothing to help matters. At the end of 1943, another armaments team reported that the principal result had been a notable rise in paperwork at the expense of direct contact with French companies.\(^{102}\) But the real problem with the *Patenfirmen* and *Leitenfirmen* was that they could not fulfil their purpose – that of providing a close-up, hands-on oversight of French companies working for the Germans. The delegates of the German companies possessed neither the authority nor the resources to do so. Such oversight would have required that German *Patenfirmen* or *Leitenfirmen* take over the running of French companies, something that had been excluded from the beginning and that would have been so disruptive as to be counter-productive. The armaments teams had never been able to exercise such a level of oversight on French companies, and they were justifiably sceptical that German companies would be any more successful. In the end, the internal affairs of French companies largely amounted to *terra incognita* for the Germans both before and after the Speer–Bichelonne accord.

But it is not merely the case that the system of *Patenfirmen* and *Leitenfirmen* did nothing to solve the basic problem of oversight. If anything, it exacerbated matters by stoking the suspicions of French industrialists. ‘The signs appear to be multiplying’, remarked one report in October 1943, that ‘French factory directors see in the naming of a *Patenfirma* the tutelage and control of their own factories, with the result that their own initiative and interest in cooperation sinks.’ That these suspicions proved to be largely unfounded is less important than their immediate effect, which was to dampen the ‘desire (Lust und Liebe) to cooperate’ with the Germans.\(^{103}\) This point is critical because, now more than ever, the occupation authorities desperately needed French goodwill. In the context of late 1943, with the French economy suffering from massive shortages of almost all factors of production as well as of transport, the ability to get anything done depended more and more on the initiative of individual companies. The emphasis placed on improvisation – on *déroullardise* – applied not only to the Germans but even more so to the French. It was, above all, French companies who would have to improvise to keep production going; and it was they who would have to find ways (legal and other) to overcome the many obstacles facing them. Just as importantly, the Germans could not command this effort, most obviously because they lacked the resources but also because such an effort lay beyond accurate observation and evaluation. Neither the armaments teams nor the delegates of *Patenfirmen* could really know whether a French company was doing all it could. As a result, the Germans had no choice but to rely on French goodwill at the same time that the system of *Patenfirmen* and *Leitenfirmen* risked jeopardizing what remained of this goodwill.

### Ford-Werke as Ford SAF’s *Patenfirma*

If Ford-Werke became Ford SAF’s *Patenfirma* in early November 1943, it was initially unclear what this would mean in concrete terms. In mid-November, the German armaments administration in France informed Johannes Stahlberg, its ‘industrial commissioner’ with Ford SAF, that his services were no longer needed as Ford-Werke had become the company’s ‘sponsor’ (*marraine*); the fact that Stahlberg had initially come from Ford-Werke does not appear to have mattered.\(^{104}\) In any event, instead of appointing someone to replace Stahlberg, Ford-Werke contented itself with an attempt to strengthen the authority of Becker, the enemy assets administrator with Ford SAF. Accordingly, at a general meeting of Ford SAF shareholders that month Becker declared that, as joint-director of enemy property (the absent Schmidt of Ford-Werke was the other), he would have to approve all decisions taken. As Dollfus informed a board meeting later the same day, Becker had become the ‘assistant director’ of Ford SAF.\(^{105}\)

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\(^{100}\) BA-MA RW 35/787, untitled instructions dated 15 October 1943. For an example of refusal, see BAL R 3/3276, Zahnradfabrik Friedrichshafen AG to Länderbeauftragte für Frankreich des Hauptausschusses Panzerwagen und Zugmaschinen, 26 October 1943.

\(^{101}\) NARA T 77/1263, Rü Kdo Paris-West to Rüstungs- und Beschaffungsstab Frankreich, 26 October 1943.


\(^{103}\) BA-MA RW 24/110, Rü Kdo Paris-West, Kriegstagebuch, 12 October 1943.

\(^{104}\) AN 3W/228, Rüstungs- und Beschaffungsstab Frankreich, untitled note, 16 November 1943.

\(^{105}\) BPRC, FMC, ACC 606, Box 2, ‘Minutes of the Ordinary General Meeting of Shareholders Held on November 16th, 1943’; and ‘Ford S.A.F. Minutes of the Board Meeting Held on November 16th, 1943’.
It soon became apparent, however, that this change did not amount to much. One reason is that Becker had already shown himself to be sympathetic to Ford SAF's difficulties as presented by Dollfus. It was therefore unlikely that he would overrule the latter. But there is another reason why the imposition of a Patenfirma meant little: Ford-Werke's attitude. In early 1944, German armaments officials in France would complain that the Patenfirma system, rather than facilitating collaboration between French and German companies, often aggravated tensions by underscoring conflicts of interest. Interestingly, however, Ford SAF and Ford-Werke were an exception as tensions between the two companies abated during late 1943 and early 1944. The reason appears to have been Ford-Werke's lack of interest in exploiting whatever potential for greater control its Patenfirma status offered. After the war, Schmidt claimed that Ford-Werke had refused the proposal for 'custodianship' of Ford SAF. If, strictly speaking, this claim is false since Ford-Werke was appointed Patenfirma, it does point to a more basic truth: that well before the end of 1943 Ford-Werke had abandoned its earlier ambitions to integrate Ford SAF into its European empire. Instead, its goal became to distance itself from Ford SAF in order to avoid being blamed for the perceived failure of the truck programme. This is not to say that Schmidt did not expect Ford SAF to make some contribution to the programme. But it did mean that Ford-Werke would seek to limit any direct involvement with Ford SAF – and thus any responsibility for its results.

But even if Ford-Werke had still been interested in taking over Ford SAF, it would likely not have succeeded. One reason is that the German authorities did not conceive of the Patenfirma and Leitenfirma system as a means to control French companies. As a result, any German official (whether Becker or someone sent directly by Ford-Werke) would have lacked the power to intervene in the running of Ford SAF. German armaments officials did try to tighten the reins over Ford SAF: in November 1943, they appointed a special delegate to the company charged with overseeing its participation in the truck programme and in December they replaced Becker with someone more independent of Ford-Werke.106


Dollfus. Yet none of this mattered: Ford SAF would remain free of German control for the remainder of the Occupation.

Ford SAF, however, owed its continued independence to more than the limited scope of the Patenfirma and Leitenfirma system. In the end, Ford SAF remained independent because the Germans never found a way to reconcile their dependence on the willing cooperation of French companies with their need for sufficient control to ensure that this cooperation was forthcoming. In overseeing the application of German contracts by French companies, armaments teams were supposed to provide a measure of control; but they lacked the resources and expertise to do so. A major purpose of Speer's two reorganizations of the economic administration in France was to strengthen German control by devolving responsibility to German industries and companies which, by working closely with their French counterparts, would ensure that French companies gave their maximum effort. But as the case of Ford SAF indicates, the Hauptausschuss Kraftfahrzeug was simply unable to fulfil this mission. As a result, the German authorities turned to the Patenfirma and Leitenfirma system. Yet, short of seizing direct control of a company, which was not a practical possibility, assigning a Patenfirma to a French company did nothing to reduce German dependence on French cooperation. The simple fact is that in the political-economic context of occupied France it was extremely difficult to compel a company to work wholeheartedly for the German war effort if the company believed that to do so was not in its best interests.

Assessing Ford SAF's contribution to the Ford programme

The German historian Peter Leßmann concluded that the Ford-Werke programme had failed even before the imposition of a Patenfirma because it offered no advantages to Ford SAF. His assessment needs to be nuanced. Ford SAF did contribute to the Ford-Werke programme, producing 2,501 engines in the third quarter of 1943 (slightly over 60 per cent of targeted production) and 1,991 engines in the fourth quarter (33 per cent of targeted production). Although at the end of the year the armaments team...
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for Paris-West anticipated a sharp decline in Ford SAF's output, it later reported that the company had produced 2,922 engines during the first quarter of 1944. If this figure fell far short of the 6,000 engines foreseen in the initial programme, it is worth recalling that almost no one on the French or German side believed that this goal was feasible. During the opening months of 1944, production continued even if it fluctuated. According to German figures, in March 1944 Ford SAF produced 271 trucks, 922 engines and 1,019 rear axles; in April 389 trucks, 730 engines and 900 rear axles; and in May 84 trucks and 164 engines (no figures for rear axles were provided). Although in mid-May 1944 the Germans feared that the Ford programme was about 'to come to a standstill', in June 1944 Ford SAF still managed to produce 220 trucks and 302 engines. Assuming German figures to be accurate, Ford SAF made a substantial contribution to the Ford-Werke programme during late 1943 and into the first half of 1944, though one that fell far short of production targets.

What are we to make of this contribution in light of Lehideux and Dollfus' later claims that Ford SAF sabotaged the German war effort by deliberately under-producing? Throughout the Occupation, Ford SAF operated under an element of constraint: it could not simply refuse all cooperation with the Germans without risking severe sanctions, including the arrest of its directors and even the seizure of its equipment and workforce. The fact that the French government — and the MPI in particular — appeared to have thrown what little authority it retained behind the Ford-Werke programme also ruled out complete non-cooperation. Ford SAF thus had little choice but to contribute something to the truck programme. But the company also had more positive incentives for cooperation. Financially, in addition to price increases for its products, Ford SAF received sizeable advances from both the German and French sides. Although Dollfus would later complain that neither Vichy nor the Germans had kept all their financial promises, it appears that considerable money flowed into Ford SAF's coffers throughout 1943 and 1944. Indeed, as late as May 1944, the company accepted a new German contract for parts for 3-ton trucks worth over 12 million RM. Another incentive for participating in the Ford-Werke programme was that it helped Ford SAF to prepare for the post-war period, which by early 1944 appeared to belong to the near- or medium-term rather than to the long-term future. Most obviously, the truck programme helped to keep Ford SAF's factories running (and earning healthy profits) at a time when the French economy was being ground down by massive shortages. No less importantly, however, the programme confirmed Ford SAF's status as a major player in the French automobile industry — a status that the company would seek to build upon after the Liberation.

At the same time, several factors worked to dampen Ford SAF's interest in participating in the Ford-Werke programme. The overall military situation constituted one such factor. As the possibility of a German defeat grew during 1943–4, the company could not avoid questioning the wisdom of continued collaboration with the occupiers. Allied bombers, moreover, continued to attack French companies, most notably Renault and Peugeot, which suggested that the Allies would judge the wartime activities of the automobile industry as a whole with a stern eye. After 1942, Ford SAF escaped further air raids, no doubt partly because of the dispersal of its productive facilities in several sites. For this reason, the company would continue to resist Ford-Werke's demands that it centralize engine production in one location, despite admitting that decentralized production was less efficient. But resisting the centralization of engine production was not simply intended as a safeguard against air bombardment; it can also be seen as part of a larger divergence of interests between Ford SAF and the Germans. In this context, a wholehearted commitment to the Ford-Werke programme made no sense. Indeed, Ford SAF had a clear-cut interest in limiting its contribution to the Ford programme — especially if this could be done without provoking the wrath of the Germans.

Another factor limiting Ford SAF's interest in the Ford-Werke programme was the emphasis on making engines and parts for German trucks. From the beginning, Ford SAF strove to continue to produce its own French trucks, even if on a reduced scale. Dollfus justified this position by pointing to the value of keeping workers and machinery
employed during the transition from French to German production. Yet this was not the only or even the chief motive. In producing French trucks, Ford SAF sought to preserve both its favourable position in the domestic market and its special expertise in this area. Trucks, to recall, figured prominently in Lehideux’s five-year ‘production programme’ for the post-war period. Dollfus had consulted closely with Lehideux on post-war planning, and he could reasonably expect Ford SAF to be given a major role in the programme. But to exploit this opportunity, the company would need to maintain and hone its skills in producing French trucks. That these skills were in some ways unique is suggested by the ongoing wrangling between Ford SAF and Ford-Werke over the specifications to be used for various parts. Working to its own specifications – that is to say, producing French trucks and truck parts – was not only what Ford SAF knew best but what it believed it would be called upon to do when the Germans were gone. Until then, however, Ford SAF resisted German demands that it shift rapidly to making engines and parts for Ford-Werke trucks. Although precise numbers are not available, it does appear that Ford SAF continued to produce French trucks well into 1943, despite earlier promises to stop doing so. This production, moreover, came at the expense of the Ford-Werke programme, partly because it translated into fewer German trucks and partly because the Wehrmacht continued to shun Ford SAF trucks for quality reasons.116

All told, then, Ford SAF’s interests pointed in different directions. If the realities of occupation made it necessary to participate in the Ford-Werke programme, good reasons existed to limit this cooperation. But does this mean that Ford SAF deliberately under-produced? Assessing this claim is not easy. The extant records are incomplete, and for obvious reasons wartime documents, whether from Ford SAF or the COA, make no mention of sabotaging production. Nevertheless, it is possible to build a circumstantial case that Ford SAF deliberately contributed less than it might have to the Ford-Werke programme. Just as importantly, however, this under-production did not constitute resistance.

If Ford SAF under-produced, the obvious question is how. One possibility is what might be called direct sabotage – intentional acts to hamper production by damaging or destroying machine tools and machines, parts and semi- and finished goods. Although no evidence of direct sabotage at Ford SAF has been found in German or French police reports, there is the intriguing case of Eugène Hug, who for several months worked at Ford’s Poissy plant during 1940–1. In his memoirs, Hug recounts the numerous ways he sabotaged production by tampering with various vehicle parts and mechanisms before assembly. To cite but one example:

You could do it in the assembly process by fucking up the bolts. Instead of using a dynamometer to measure the tightening force, you used a pipe wrench, over tightening the crankshaft bolts until you heard a crack in them. Two or three bolts treated like this would make the crankshaft dance, creating such a loud noise that the engine would have to be pulled.117

Hug left his job at Ford SAF in April 1941, though it is certainly possible that other workers continued to sabotage production in clandestine fashion. This conclusion might seem all the more plausible in light of the company’s persistent quality problems. If Ford SAF’s trucks were sub-standard, perhaps one explanation for why is direct sabotage.

There are strong reasons to believe, however, that direct sabotage was an extremely rare phenomenon not only at Ford SAF but across French industry. The occupation authorities were hyper-sensitive to this danger. Indeed, several factors combined to create a presumption of sabotage, among them: inflated fears of Resistance and especially communist influence among workers; the acute awareness that the French people in general resented the occupiers; and a conspiratorial mind-set that was not confined to the various security forces. In the early years of the Occupation, German reports spoke of ‘passive resistance’ among French workers and industrialists, by which was meant a general lack of enthusiasm for collaborating with the occupiers. During 1943–4, one finds more and more references to the risks of economic and industrial sabotage. An MbF survey for the last quarter of 1943, for example, remarked that ‘practical work in production policy is increasingly hampered by enemy propaganda and terror actions’.118 In February 1944 another report spoke of ‘precise plans’ to destroy machine tools as well as ‘critical production’ (Engaßfertigungen). That communist leaflets increasingly urged workers to sabotage production no doubt further fuelled the fears of the Germans.119 By March–April 1944, German armaments officials were urgently discussing the need to assign security teams to important

French factories, even if manpower shortages meant that they could 'guard' only 10 per cent or so of the factories so identified. Yet, despite their sensitivity to the dangers of sabotage, the Germans discovered little concrete evidence of its existence. This was partly a definitional issue. The German authorities defined sabotage in expansive terms that encompassed a variety of actions that took place well outside of factory walls: cutting telephone and electrical cables as well as railway lines, setting fire to German (and French) government installations, attacking occupation personnel and stealing German goods, including tobacco. This definition meant that direct sabotage of production was only one type in a larger category of actions that German reports typically labelled as sabotage. Further reducing the number of potential cases is the broad nature of the definition of sabotage within factories, which the Germans conceived of as 'any expression [by workers] of anti-Germanism', a conception which included writing graffiti, distributing tracts and attending unauthorized meetings, regardless of the agenda. But problems remain even if one limits the meaning of sabotage to the deliberate damage or destruction of matériel and machines. Distinguishing between intentional acts and accidents often proved difficult in practice. Accidents, moreover, were almost certainly on the rise if only because of the mounting fatigue of French workers due to longer hours and declining food supplies. Ultimately, the presumption of sabotage could not hide the reality that proof was often lacking, which helps to explain why the Germans tended to discuss the phenomenon in general as opposed to detailed terms. Indeed, it is striking how rarely German (and French) reports cited concrete evidence of direct sabotage in factories. If this is partly because direct sabotage sometimes left no trace, it is even more so because cases were rare.

But even if direct sabotage occurred more frequently than appears, it would have been a marginal phenomenon. For it to be otherwise, sabotage would need to be systematic – it would have to take place on a large scale and over a prolonged period. Such an endeavour, however, is highly implausible in the context of wartime France. Who would organize and direct it? How would individuals or groups of workers know when to act and when not to? Perhaps most importantly, how could such an elaborate plot be kept secret from both the German and French police? Someone would be bound to talk, even if inadvertently. It is true that the Germans (and French) lacked the manpower to police most factories. But this does not mean that they were completely ignorant about what was going on. A string of suspected sabotage actions at the Peugeot works in Sochaux between November 1943 and March 1944 did not go undetected, provoking increased surveillance as well as repressive measures by the Germans. In the case of Ford SAF, several German officials were assigned to its factories while others made frequent visits. The armaments team for Paris-West, which was responsible for overseeing the Ford programme, regularly reported on the numerous difficulties that Ford SAF encountered during 1943–4. Conspicuously absent from the list was direct sabotage. Even Wiskott, the Hauptausschuss Kraftfahrzeug's delegate, who was no friend of Ford SAF and who accused Dollfus of sabotage (by which he meant gross incompetence), never maintained that matériel was being wilfully damaged or destroyed. If any evidence or even suspicion of direct sabotage had existed, he would certainly have cited it in his indictment.

All in all, it seems unlikely that direct sabotage significantly affected Ford SAF's participation in Ford-Werke's truck programme. More intriguing, however, is what might be called indirect sabotage – that Ford SAF (and perhaps other automobile companies) deliberately restrained its efforts, producing less than it could have. In early 1944, a Free French report claimed that this phenomenon, which it called 'administrative sabotage', was rife in the automobile industry among others. Assessing this claim, however, poses similar problems to those concerning direct sabotage. Hardly surprisingly, company records contain no contemporary evidence of plans or orders for under-production. The absence of a 'smoking gun', in turn, underscores the related issues of feasibility and plausibility. To have a notable impact on output, deliberate under-production has to


121 The French police employed a similarly expansive definition. See the files on wartime sabotage cases in APP BA 2306 and ADY 1W/178.


126 AN F1/1a/3769, Comité français de libération nationale, Commissariat à l'intérieur, 'Les sabotages industrielles', 12 February 1944.
occur on a significant and prolonged scale; it cannot simply be episodic. But if so, how was it organized and directed? Who under-performed: specific groups of workers or all workers; managers and directors; or everyone? What did these people do or not do? And, once again, could such a conspiracy to under-produce be kept hidden from the suspicious eyes of the Germans?

The claim of under-production, however, poses additional problems. One problem concerns the standard of comparison. After the Liberation, Dollfus and Lehideux both contended that the most suitable standard were production figures before France’s defeat, with the sizeable gap between the pre- and post-defeat figures seemingly demonstrating the reality of under-production. But this comparison makes no sense. Cut off from most of its external ties and subject to crippling German executions as well as to Allied blockade, the French economy during the Occupation was a shrunken (and shrinking) version of its pre-defeat self. It has been estimated that France’s GDP dropped from 107 (100=1938) in 1939 to 60 in 1943 and to 50 in 1944. If one adds what Hein Klemann calls ‘educated guesses’ for clandestine production, the drop in GDP is less marked (80 in 1943 and 66 in 1944), but still significant. To be sure, these are aggregate figures and wartime production levels obviously varied across industries and individual companies. But the basic point remains true: neither Ford SAF nor the French automobile industry as a whole could have maintained its earlier output during the Occupation. Even with the best of intentions, shortages of all types had a deleterious impact on production. Just as pertinently, Ford-Werke’s truck programme came at a time when the French economy was in an accelerated decline.

The problem, then, is what standard of comparison to use. How does one determine the production levels that Ford SAF might have achieved—but did not—during the Occupation and especially during 1943–4? Production levels must have been lower than pre-defeat ones, but how much lower? Any figures chosen risk appearing arbitrary. This difficulty is compounded by the multiplicity of factors influencing production. Even if one could agree on figures for potential wartime production, it is extremely difficult to distinguish intentional acts from unintentional obstacles. As German reports make unambiguously clear, during 1943–4 French companies suffered from growing shortages of almost everything: manpower, matériels, transport, energy. At the end of 1943, the armaments team for Paris-West wrote that Ford SAF urgently needed almost 1,100 additional workers. But an even greater handicap were electricity and coal shortages, which affected all factories. During the last quarter of the year, supplies of both fell every month, culminating in a forced two-week closure of factories for Christmas. Temporary closures continued into the first quarter of 1944, though for shorter periods, while weekend activity grew increasingly limited. In December 1943, for instance, the lack of raw matériels forced the Ford SAF factory at Bourges to work only every other day and with a reduced workforce. If these shortages directly afflicted Ford SAF and other companies, they also had an indirect impact through their crippling effects on suppliers and sub-suppliers, many of whose output slowed to a halt. In February and March 1944, almost every day brought news that yet another of Ford SAF’s suppliers had ceased production. Even before D-Day the German armaments staff in France concluded that the Ford-Werke programme had ‘come to a standstill’ due to shortages.

Another factor affecting production and over which Ford SAF had limited influence concerned the morale of its workforce. Mention has already been made of fatigue and under-nourishment as causes of workplace accidents. But accidents aside, these factors doubtlessly also lowered the productivity of workers. As with other companies, Ford SAF found itself compelled to provide subsidized food to its workers in workplace canteens since official rations were neither sufficient nor consistently available. But these measures proved inadequate, as is evident from the growing discontent of workers due to the widening gap between wages and the cost of living, especially for food and fuel. Despite pressure from Vichy, the Germans generally resisted wage hikes in order to depress French living standards, partly in the hope of rendering the prospect of

working in Germany more attractive. One result was mounting unrest at factories, including a more generalized one affecting all companies on the anniversary of the 1918 armistice. To underscore their grievances, a delegation of Ford SAF workers delivered petitions to the mayor of Poissy demanding more food. Although impossible to measure, the deteriorating working and living conditions sapped the ability and probably also the incentive of workers to work as diligently and industriously as before. In an influential article, two prominent French historians, Patrick Fridenson and Jean-Louis Robert, suggested that this unrest on the part of workers constituted deliberate under-production (freinage). But this conclusion is questionable given the difficulties involved in distinguishing the intended from the unintended effects of deteriorating conditions. Work stoppages aside, which were rare and brief events, we do not know if workers deliberately worked less than they could have. If the petitions of Ford SAF workers for more food had received a positive response, would productivity have increased?

In the end, assessing the claims of deliberate under-production poses considerable challenges. Taken together, the methodological pitfalls and the dearth of sources provide a recipe for frustration. Yet this is not to say that the exercise is futile. It is possible to argue that Ford SAF did, in fact, contribute less to Ford-Werke's truck programme than it could. One component of the argument concerns Ford SAF's interests during 1943-4: as indicated at the beginning of the section, the company had good reasons to limit its contribution. Another component consists of the political-economic situation in France at the time. Put simply, the mounting crisis provoked by the generalized impoverishment of matériel, labour and transport made it possible for Ford SAF to under-produce with little fear of being detected. Here, what economists call information theory can be helpful in understanding the dynamics involved. Information theory focuses on principal-agent relations. The principal is the actor who contracts an agent to furnish some good or service in return for a recompense.

Assessing Ford SAF's contribution

At the most basic level, the theory posits tensions due to asymmetric information: the agent possesses knowledge about his commitment to fulfilling his contractual obligations (for example, how much and what kind of effort he will expend) to which the principal is not privy. Accordingly, the principal strives to design contracts that will reduce this asymmetry, most often by including conditions regarding the quantity and quality of goods or services provided by the agent.

If asymmetric information is a constant in contractual relations, the asymmetry is arguably greater in crisis situations as was the case of wartime France. The increase in shortages, bottlenecks and disruptions all placed an imperative on the débrouillardise of French companies - on their ability to adapt and to improvise, to be creative and cunning. It was companies who possessed the supply networks, the knowledge of local conditions and the general know-how that was essential to overcome the many obstacles to production. From this perspective, the economic crisis potentially empowered companies such as Ford SAF while also disempowering the Germans. More than ever, the latter suffered from information asymmetries: the occupiers needed French companies to do everything they could to keep producing and yet found themselves increasingly unable to measure, let alone verify, the extent to which they did so. Unable to impose an effective system of oversight, the Germans were forced to rely on positive incentives in the form of high profits and hefty advances. But if such measures proved effective during the first two years of the Occupation, the case of Ford SAF suggests that they became less so by 1943-4. Indeed, they proved counter-productive by reducing the need for Ford SAF to participate wholeheartedly in the truck programme.

The growing economic crisis afflicting France thus increased not only Ford SAF's interest in limiting its contribution to Ford-Werke's truck programme but also its ability to do so. Ford SAF had to produce enough to keep its factories running and to appease the German (and French) authorities, but no more. It had no incentive to expend extraordinary efforts to locate alternative supplies and suppliers, to push its workforce or even to improve the quality of its products. Given this situation, one can reasonably conclude that Ford SAF deliberately under-produced during 1943-4. To be sure, concrete proof is lacking, though there are some indications that the company's efforts to mobilize the help of the French workers during the occupation were not always successful.

137 See ADY 1W/10, 'Note', no. 2621, 11 November 1943; and 1W/11, 'Synthèse', 3 December 1943.
139 Macho-Stadler and Pérez-Castrillo, An Introduction to the Economics of Information, and Przeworski, States and Markets, 55-75.
140 See the comments on the 'système D' in de Rochebrune and Hazéra, Les patrons sous l'Occupation, I, 76-86.
automobile industry, for example, were largely pro forma. But concrete proof is arguably unnecessary. To conclude that Ford SAF did not underproduce for the truck programme is to argue that it acted contrary to its business interests – that it was politically committed to industrial collaboration whatever the costs. Yet there is nothing in its wartime behaviour to suggest that this was so.

And this raises another important point: if Ford SAF did underproduce its conduct did not constitute resistance. Ford SAF’s decisions and activities were never motivated by any principled opposition to the occupiers or by a desire to undermine the German war economy. During the early years of the Occupation, the company had eagerly accepted German contracts. Dollfus did not object to working for the Germans but rather to what he perceived to be Ford-Werke’s ambitions. If German officials in Paris would guarantee Ford SAF’s independence then Dollfus would collaborate with them, even if he sought to do so on the most favourable terms possible. What changed during 1943–4 were not Dollfus’ political convictions but his understanding of Ford SAF’s interests. This change, together with the opportunities provided by an increasingly chaotic economic situation, made it both sensible and feasible to under-produce. In this sense and this sense alone is it possible to argue that Ford SAF sabotaged the German war economy.

Another and related point is in order. Under-production in the sense described above was likely not limited to Ford SAF. There is every reason to believe that the dynamics of information asymmetries affected other French companies as well during the Occupation and especially during its final phase. This point is worth highlighting given the argument, prominent in the historiography on German businesses during the Nazi period, that the room for manoeuvre of companies shrank during the war. If so, the politics of industrial collaboration were far less one-sided than is sometimes depicted.

The Germans themselves appear to have recognized this reality, if somewhat belatedly. In early 1944, the German authorities announced their intentions to confiscate heavy machinery from French automobile factories and to send it to Germany. Lehideux protested vociferously but was ignored, indicating that the Germans had lost all confidence in him. But the announcement also amounted to a repudiation by the Germans of industrial collaboration. After four years of effort, the Germans were moving towards the conclusion that the exploitation of the French automobile industry could be best achieved without French companies.

141 See the lengthy file in AN 198305896/6 as well as the smaller file in F12/9961.

139 For an interesting exchange on this subject, see Hayes, ‘Corporate Freedom of Action in Nazi Germany’, as well as the response by Buchheim and Scherner, in the Bulletin of the German Historical Institute, 45 (2009), 29–50.

140 An important exception in Germany (as well as occupied France) were Jewish-owned companies.