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Neutrality in Twentieth-Century Europe : Intersections of Science, Culture, and Politics after the First World War [Book review]

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2022-09-02

Autio-Sarasma , S 2022 , ' Neutrality in Twentieth-Century Europe : Intersections of Science, Culture, and Politics after the First World War [Book review] ' , Journal of Cold War Studies , vol. 24 , no. 3 , pp. 248-250 . https://doi.org/10.1162/jcws_r_01085

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/355391>

https://doi.org/10.1162/jcws_r_01085

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Neutrality in Twentieth-Century Europe. Intersections of Science, Culture, and Politics after the First World War. Edited by Rebecka Lettevall, Geert Somsen, and Sven Widmalm.

Routledge Studies in Cultural History. Routledge, New York and London, 2012. 352 pp.

£ 80.00

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Neutrality in Twentieth-Century Europe is an interesting contribution to the discussion of 'neutrality' in science and politics. It is especially useful as a contribution to the analysis of the relationship of science, culture and politics during an era of strong division. Since *Neutrality in Twentieth-Century Europe* is focusing on the period after the World War One, it offers an interesting prehistory to the themes that were taken into discussion after the World War Two and during the Cold War. From the point of view of the Cold War, it is interesting to take a look at how the division and the change of 'world order' some 30 years earlier influenced the relationship of science, culture and politics.

The main focus in the edited volume *Neutrality in Twentieth-Century Europe* is on the smaller European states that strongly engaged in neutrality in their actions during the World War One. Important definitions connected to 'neutrality' in science and culture were notions such as 'impartiality', 'objectivity' and 'internationalism'. Science, culture and politics with concepts connected to neutrality are in the core of the analysis in altogether fifteen articles in the volume. They are divided into four thematic parts focusing on internationalism, science, culture and politics. The starting point for the volume is that neutrality as a cultural, scientific

and political resource was in itself a construct, for it was given meanings, and it was used rhetorically for a variety of new purposes. This gave smaller nations and intellectuals a new kind of role in the European (and even world-scale) scientific, political and cultural discussions. The aim of these smaller nations was to become neutral mediators between the former belligerent states, in order to facilitate international cooperation and to enhance international scientific cooperation. The post-World War One period is defined as an era of emerging nation states, but it is especially interesting that the main actors in the science/politics/culture discourse were primarily individuals, small actors and organizations representing nation states.

The focus in the edited volume is on the intersections of science, culture and politics in the world divided by the war, whose outcome was the controversial Treaty of Versailles. The post-war development helped 'neutrality' to gain a new appeal, which activated actors in the small and 'neutral' nations such as Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Norway to mediate in the complex situation. The war introduced modern nation states as the basis for a new world order, and although the actors analysed in the volume were enhancing internationalism, they were – in the end – reinforcing nationalism as a representatives of nation states.

Before the World War One, Germany was in many respects a super power of science and closely connected to the wider scientific developments in Europe. After the war, it was a question of the role of defeated Germany and the rest of the 'civilized' world (p. 10). The demand to leave Germany out of scientific circles, such as the International Research Council (IRC) – especially after of the "Proclamation of the Civilized World" in 1914 – caused a complex situation in the European scientific and political spheres. However important was the fight for internationalism and peace, remaining neutral in politics and science after the

World War One proved to be very difficult. This was the case with the Dutch relationship with Germany and accommodating scientific organizations such as the IRC. Denmark met difficulties in enhancing science on the basis of internationalism. In Sweden and Norway, the Nobel Prize institution created the basis to gain more power within the scientific community. Sweden, which had strongly emphasised its neutral and apolitical role in foreign policy, met the challenge when it wanted to gain a role as a mediator of the new era based on peaceful scientific, technological, and economic progress. The demand and goal of objectivity and impartiality in the case of the Nobel Prize were challenged, when international ties in science and culture were severed. Swedish science had been strongly oriented towards Germany, and it had to reassess its Nobel Prize policy under the pressure of divided scientific values.

It was not only about science and politics it was also a question of culture connected and European ideas and idealism. Pan-Europeanism, Zionism and scientific debate created the basis of cultural encounters in Europe of the 1920s. The aim to restore peace and to solve the problems caused by the war – such as problem of refugees when millions of people lost their country and citizenship – became the main aim of the international actors. The World War One was not only a military disaster, but also a humanitarian catastrophe, that was reconciled by the League of Nations and individual actors. In this process, neutral Scandinavian countries had a role to play.

The edited volume *Neutrality in Twentieth-Century Europe* is an enlightening contribution to the international and transnational interaction of scientists, organizations and smaller states in the world divided by the World War One. By analysing the themes such as neutrality, objectivity, impartiality and internationalism in the context of divided world, the volume raises into discussion themes that are possible to find also from the Cold War discourse after

the World War Two. This makes *Neutrality in Twentieth-Century Europe* very recommendable reading for those interested in any kind of any post-war developments in the field of science, culture and politics.