

Greg Behrman. *The Most Noble Adventure: The Marshall Plan and How America Helped Rebuild Europe*. New York, NY: Free Press, 2007. Pp. 450. Paper \$16.

A December 2000 Brookings report on "Government's Greatest Achievements of the Past Half Century," based on a survey of history and political science professors, ranks "Rebuild Europe after World War II" first. With the material and perspective newly available two decades after the Cold War, Greg Behrman does well to offer a first complete "narrative" history of this "noble adventure." It is indeed an epic with an "all-star" cast: George Marshall, Will Clayton, Arthur Vandenberg, Richard Bissell, Paul Hoffman, and Averell Harriman are the heroes, plus, of course, their European counterparts. Of these, Stalin was certainly the dark star, unwittingly unifying Western Europe on the side of the U.S.

The Plan was indeed Marshall's. He had taken the job of secretary of state because Clayton could not. As of 1944, Clayton had served as undersecretary of state for economic affairs and had seen the clear danger in Europe's postwar devastation. This insight, along with the political analysis of George Kennan's "Long Telegram" and Marshall's own perspicacious perception of Stalin at their chilly Moscow meeting, convinced Marshall of what had to be done. He outlined a complete plan in a brief talk in 1947. It laid out an *objective*—"the revival of a working economy [...] so as to permit the emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist"; the *means*—"for achieving European recovery was to 'help' Europe meet its requirements for [...] foreign food and other essential products"; a *time line*—to bridge Europe to self-sustainability over three to four years; and the U.S.'s *motives*—it would be disastrous to Americans to do nothing since "there can be no political stability and no assured peace as long as Europe's economy was mired in desperation and dysfunction" (69).

After the war, Congress was ready to retire back into its earlier isolationism, and it was Republican Senator Vandenberg, an FDR convert to internationalism, who took the lead with the Marshall Plan. Everyone understood that Germany was at the heart of the matter economically, but politically it was more difficult to include (almost) everyone's recent archenemy in a newly uniting Europe. Stalin's Berlin Blockade, in response to the currency reform in the Western zones—also instigated by the Marshall Plan—sealed the deal.

The Plan was institutionalized in the independent European Recovery Administration led by Hoffman, who sold it to Americans with more success than his Studebakers (he had been the company's president). Hoffman hired MIT's Bissell to structure the dispensing of aid and former Secretary of Commerce Harriman to run the European operation.

The Plan delivered circa \$13 billion of American aid to Europe (equivalent to at least \$100 billion today, with a multiplier effect of at least triple that). It also allowed Europe to import the tremendous technological and managerial revolution that the war had accelerated in the U.S. The emerging economic unity also created a large new market, which stimulated a degree of innovation and entrepreneurship entirely new to the previously particularist European

autarkies. This led to unprecedented economic growth, with West Germany's *Wirtschaftswunder* its poster child. But even before aid came in ships and via "candy bombers" in Berlin, the psychological impact of the American commitment to help Europe was immense, as best attested to by the "extraordinary rise in fertility" that followed.

Behrman occasionally comes across like a booster, but there is much to boost. Marshall, already a retired hero, owed no one, and acted nobly on humanitarian and patriotic grounds; the Plan was noble both in the goals it achieved and in the people it attracted. Today's European Union is unthinkable without the Marshall Plan. By focusing on these chief actors, Behrman has also given us a richly textured account of a genuinely singular adventure in policymaking and policy implementation.

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