

31 October 2013

## **Wartime and post-war public works: Administration, policies and expertise around a mobilised civilian ministry (1914-1929)**

**This international scientific conference organised as part of Excellence Laboratory (LABex) project called *Writing a new history of Europe*, supported by Irice UMR 8138, the "European Identities, International Relations and Civilisations" unit at Universities Paris 1, Paris 4 and CNRS, with support from the History Committee at the French Ministry of Territorial Equality and Housing and the French Ministry for Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy**

**19-20 June 2014, Paris, France, Grande Arche de La Défense**

### **Call for Papers**

The proposed international scientific conference is a part of the World War I commemorations.

Since the nineteenth century, the French Ministry of Public Works was a tool for durably showing the State and the Nation's presence across territories. Between 1914 and 1918 and during the 1920s, its works and its actions played a part in building and healing the wounds affecting a State and a Nation that had been plunged into what some called "total war". For two decades now, a major component of World War I historiographical thought has been probing the conflict in the light of a *war cultures* approach. This approach tends to show that the war's footprint was not just limited solely to military aspects but affected both the front and society behind the lines. It shows that the conflict seeped into daily life and representations of the populations in the belligerent nations and that it fed from this. This conception has become a fertile way to gaining an overall understanding of total war and the representations put forward for both France and for other countries. The purpose of this conference is to read the trajectory taken by the actions of the Ministry of Public Works during the period, in the light of these thoughts.

"Public works" fit into a context of "boundless expansion" by the State and shifting ministerial authority so as to support the work effort and then organise the rebuilding work. Here questions are aimed at both central administration and its territorial presence, the policies implemented with their aims and the perceptions as well as the technical expertise and culture involved. Allowance is made for the fact that ministerial power fit into a wider set of relations with the players and representatives of public and private interests involved in activities that were in

turmoil due to the wartime and post-war context.

Control over mining and importing energy resources, requisitioning rail infrastructure and rail, road and sea transportation services to ensure the mobility of persons and property, contributing to the war industry, supervising the postal service and telecommunications networks, rebuilding a territory and the public works destroyed or damaged by the war, all of these various attributions that befell the French Ministry of Public Works and often shared with other administrations, ensured a series of sensitive links between the front line, the rear and the Allies. Territorial and Civil Service, with the Ministry supporting the armies while playing a part in the war economy. The fields in which it was active were directly related to the living conditions of the French during the conflict. Major technical progress set out lines that were to become a durable part of French society later on, with changes that were to modify behaviour in terms of mobility and energy usage.

And yet, studies covering public policies linked to Public Works during this period have remained surprisingly few and far between, with no overall viewpoint. Themes like moving out of a territory before moving back to it, the changing relationship between military and civilian authorities, the creation of new government structures brought on by the war and then by rebuilding and marked by technically minded ministers like Étienne Clémentel, Albert Thomas, Louis Loucheur, Marcel Sembat or Albert Claveille will be at the heart of the conference. In the same way, personnel commitment, from engineers right down to street sweepers, changing technical cultures, war induced industrialisation followed by converting the war economy to developing new businesses will all be restated.

Lastly, special attention will be focused on communications by proposing to compare the French case with that of other belligerents, as part of a comparative or cross comparison historic look. The war situation as well as the ministerial thrust leading us to consider multiple expressions of non-French wartime public works, including some of them in France.

The first day will cover the actual wartime period:

- An administration mobilised and mobilising others: The Ministry of Public Works at war
- Civil and military mobility challenges: Innovations, practices, coordination

The second day will cover a time line including the 1920s:

- Industrialising a conflict: The social and technical challenges of total war
- With reconstruction, a new landscape emerges: From territory to remembrance

The papers from the conference will appear in the Review published by the History Committee of the French Ministry of Territorial Equality and Housing, and of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy as well as on the Internet.

The Scientific Committee comprises Alya Aglan-Wismann (Professor of Contemporary History at University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, UMR Irice LabEx EHNE), Pierre Chanceler (Temporary Lecturer at Université de Picardie-Jules Verne), Corine Defrance (Research Leader at CNRS, UMR Irice LabEx EHNE), Clotilde Druelle-Korn (Associate Professor in Contemporary Economic and Social History at University of Limoges), Mathieu Flonneau (Associate Professor in Contemporary History at University of Paris 1 Panthéon –Sorbonne, UMR Irice LabEx EHNE, P2M), André Guillerme (Professor at Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers), Léonard Laborie (Researcher at CNRS, UMR Irice LabEx EHNE), Philippe Nivet (Professor of Contemporary History and Head of the History and Geography UFR at Université de Picardie-Jules Verne), Arnaud Passalacqua (Associate Professor in Contemporary History at University of Paris-Diderot, P2M).

Proposals for papers (one page maximum), along with the author's qualifications and positions as well as a mention of their latest publication along with their mail and e-mail contact details will be accepted until 15 January 2014 at the following address: [contact.travauxpublics.publicworks.1914-2014@planete-tp-plus.com](mailto:contact.travauxpublics.publicworks.1914-2014@planete-tp-plus.com).

Please send any questions to: [contact.travaux-publics@i-carre.net](mailto:contact.travaux-publics@i-carre.net)