

## P R E F A C E

The purpose of this volume is to bring to international relations scholarship an understanding of the changing role of business in contemporary world affairs. The premise with which we began this project was that firms do not simply compete in world markets, they also cooperate among themselves in ways that have political ramifications. In this project, we sought to explore the variety of ways in which businesses cooperate internationally to pursue both economic and political goals. We were particularly concerned to determine the degree to which the institutions created by the private sector operated autonomously or in coordination with governments and intergovernmental organizations. Our hope was to contribute to larger debates within the field of international relations by applying current perspectives on cooperation, norms, and regimes to the activities of the private sector, explicitly rejecting the state-centeredness of much research and theorizing.

Our contributors approach this subject from a variety of perspectives, but all aim to explain different aspects of interfirm cooperation: its structure, character, and placement within the political and economic system. The focus is global in most of the cases, rather than domestic or comparative. The outcome, as represented in this volume, provides an initial cut at understanding the significance of corporate power in the *global* system, as opposed to the interstate system. In a world in which major corporations determine so many of the most significant outcomes, such as decisions about investment and employment, we need to have a better grasp of the political significance of their global activities. Private authority is a form of “governance without government” at the international level, and we bring together empirical cases to explore its operation and effect.

But this subject is not just of interest to scholars of international relations. It goes straight to the heart of current concerns about the effects of globalization on the capacity of states to pursue their national interests. Private authority is unaccountable and perhaps uncontrollable without concerted international cooperation among states, backed by effective institutions. The great power wielded by international business has been perceived by many as a threat to democratic institutions and to the quality of life of the mass of people, and may lead to political mobi-

lization to restrain this private exercise of authority. As we move into the next millennium, concern about the growing impact of business on the fate of individuals and societies is unlikely to subside.

This project began when Tony Porter and Virginia Haufler each realized they had finally found someone else developing a research project around the concept of a private international regime. Together with Claire Cutler, whose work on private international trade law was closely related, we organized a panel on this topic at the International Studies Association meeting in Chicago in 1995. The response to our panel was so gratifying, particularly the enthusiasm of Susan Strange and the critical but interesting comments of our panel chair Stephen Krasner, that we decided to pursue this topic further. In the fall of 1995 we submitted successful proposals to the International Studies Association (ISA) for a workshop, and to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRCC) for a follow-on conference. The workshop, held prior to the International Studies Association meeting in San Diego in 1996, produced an exhausting and exhilarating exchange among the participants. We started with a focus on private international regimes and, finding that too narrow and state-centric, quickly expanded to consider interfirm cooperation more generally, private international law, and private authority. The following August we organized a conference at the beautiful campus of the University of Victoria (B.C.), bringing together most of the original workshop participants along with a number of other commentators. Susan Strange and Anne-Marie Slaughter each addressed the conference, and our discussants Mark Zacher, Andrew Moravcsik, and Sol Picciotto graciously—and sometimes ferociously—pushed us to develop a useful framework for understanding and explaining interfirm cooperation and the emergence of private authority.

This book project followed naturally from the work we did at the workshop and conference. We thank the ISA and SSHRCC for providing us with the financial support that gave us the opportunity to work with such a stimulating group of people. We all learned a tremendous amount from each other, and enjoyed our arguments together. The editors want to thank all our contributors for their hard work and enthusiasm. In addition, we would like to especially thank our series editor, James Rosenau, and the reviewers of the manuscript.

Virginia Haufler would like to thank her colleagues at the University of Maryland for their support and encouragement, along with the financial support of the Department of Government and Politics. She also credits the members of the Washington International Theory Seminar (WITS) with providing critical comments that helped improve and clarify our initial framework paper for the workshop and conference.

Claire Cutler would like to thank the president of the University of Victoria, Dr. David Strong, for his enthusiastic and early support, both moral and financial, for the Victoria conference. She also thanks friends and colleagues at the British Columbia International Relations Seminar, held at the University of British Columbia, for their useful comments on earlier drafts of the framework paper. Tony Porter would like to thank Bill Coleman for his suggestions. Finally, all three of us wish to express our appreciation of the benefits we gained from own collaboration on this project: we have had our intellectual horizons broadened by our discussions and in the process have become valued friends.