

*Britain and
the Economic
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Germany,
1850 – 1865:
The Two
Zollverein
Crises*

By Thomas Rayner

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Research Master Thesis

History

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02/10/20

Word Count: 35,196

Supervisor: Jacco Pekelder

Second Reader: Oscar Gelderblom

Abstract

Between 1830 to the 1860s the question of German unification gained increased significance as a European problem. Simultaneously, free trade as an idea proliferated with rapid political connotations that came to shape the outcome of how Germany's neighbours perceived unification. Britain, deeply invested in how German unification would shape the balance of power, perceived German politics through its own liberal free trade identity. Going beyond the already researched episodes of the 1848 Revolutions, the 1848-1852 and 1864 Schleswig-Holstein Crises, and 1860s Wars of German Unification, and focusing instead upon the struggle for economic leadership in Germany via the Zollverein (the German customs union), this paper demonstrates British observers maintained vivid preferences towards the role and character of a united Germany. The arena of commercial rivalry is shown to be a nexus of the wider problems of the German question. British observers consistently prioritised a liberal solution to the German question, which ultimately led to broad support for Prussian leadership in the Zollverein, as Prussia had framed itself as a proponent for tariff liberalisation, and thus of wider Germany. Although, throughout the 1850s some actors such as the press often advocated a system of dualism (joint Austro-Prussian leadership), a pro-Prussian consensus ultimately emerged. Britain also maintained an instrumental view of united Germany's geopolitical role within the heart of Europe as another territorially satisfied Power that would check French and Russian aggression. Using a wide range of underutilised source material this thesis presents the first account of British public opinion towards the Zollverein. This includes: parliamentary speeches; editions of the *Times*, *Economist*, *Manchester Guardian*, and *Observer*; academic articles published in the *Edinburgh Review* and *Quarterly Review*; and the correspondence of British diplomats and consuls stationed in the German Confederation. Subsequently, it is shown the perceptions of British observers towards the Zollverein mirror the wider positions they held on the internal political organisation and external integration of Germany into the European states system. Surprisingly, by researching two pivotal moments in the development of the Zollverein – the accession of the Steuerverein into the Zollverein, 1850-53, and the 1860-65 negotiations for a free trade treaty with France and Britain – it is shown free trade held pronounced political undertones that can help explain how British public opinion formulated an ideal outcome for a united German nation.

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank a plethora of individuals and institutions that helped me to complete this thesis.

To the staff of the German Historical Institute in London, thank you for showing me the ropes and teaching me how to navigate your wonderful collection.

I feel especially honoured and grateful to Dr. Paul Moore and the German History Society for inviting me to present this thesis at their Annual Conference this year. Despite Covid-19 restrictions, the Conference was again a true pleasure to be a part of.

It would not have been possible to complete this thesis without the sagacity and wisdom of Prof. Jacco Pekelder. Thank you for all of the support you have given me throughout my stay at Utrecht University and for extending a helping hand in times of adversity. I am eternally grateful for the opportunities you have provided me and for encouraging me to grow as a scholar.

To my old mentors at the Bournemouth University History Faculty, I wish to thank you for kindling my passion in history and academia. You would be hard-pressed to find a better group of educators anywhere else.

Finally, I wish to thank my partner Antonia who has supported me in every step of the way upon this journey. My debt to you may never be repaid.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Research Questions

“Prussia might be looked upon as a rising state, whose greatness will be based upon the Commercial League. I predict that at some future day the men who devised that grand scheme for uniting Germany will be revered like their Prussian hero Fritz.” – Richard Cobden, 11 September, 1838.¹

This uncanny divination of Richard Cobden neatly encapsulates the story this thesis shall tell. His prediction is significant, not only because Cobden was one of the first in Britain to appreciate the impact the Zollverein would have within the politics of German unification, but because he would also shape the course of events himself. Cobden planted the seed of a powerful idea in Britain which became embedded within public opinion as well as throughout all policy making institutions: free trade. His political crusade to eradicate tariffs on corn imports – an issue which was successfully nationalised by the single-issue pressure group the Anti-Corn-Law League of which he was a leading member – culminated in a decisive victory in 1846 as the Corn Laws, after a polarising political crisis which was unrivalled in British history until 170 years later, were repealed by the Tory Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel. Free trade became established into the heart of Britain’s national interest, since it had settled the most volatile domestic issues of parliamentary reform and class conflict, as it received widespread cross-party support. With unparalleled haste free trade was now a cornerstone of British identity. Free trade, with its deep roots in liberal ideology, functioned as the reference point in which the British perceived their relations with other nations – including the fledgling and hypothetical German nation state. Akin to Britain, the German States were undergoing their own political crises between the forces of protectionism and free trade. Following the indecisive carnage of the 1848 Revolutions the quest for unification in Germany became paralysed. Prussia, Austria, and the Lesser States still locked horns against one another over the question of how Germany should organise itself into a cohesive whole. One of the most pressing arenas in the competition for supremacy was the Zollverein. Prussia led the German customs union and coveted – for both political and economic reasons – to liberalise its tariffs. Austria, a protectionist state, was excluded from the toll-union, again for political and economic reasons, and fought tooth and nail between 1851-53 and 1860-1865 to revise her position.

It is the object of this thesis to demonstrate how Britain, specifically British public opinion, perceived this decisive battle for economic supremacy in Germany. Britain, as the standard-bearer of free trade, was ideologically devoted to its dissemination across the world. Simultaneously, the British were deeply invested in retaining their idea of the balance of power in Europe – something a united Germany would fundamentally alter. Britain, as a signatory of the 1815 Treaty of Vienna, held a right by international law to guarantee the independence and integrity of the German Confederation. Furthermore, Britain’s vivid geopolitical interests in Germany, essentially perceiving it as the keystone of European peace, make the study of its public opinion a worthwhile endeavour; the views of the public could have altered to what degree Britain intervened in the German question. Thus this thesis looks to the Zollverein as a nexus of the central issues of German unification: it was the arena of Austro-Prussian rivalry, it mirrored wider struggles between liberalism and authoritarianism via the conflict between free traders and protectionists, and the Zollverein organized the lesser states into a cohesive body which constructed a unified policy towards foreign nations

¹ Richard Cobden to Frederick Cobden, 11 September, 1838, in Anthony Howe, *The Letters of Richard Cobden 1815-1847*, vol I, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007) 137.

and thus impacted the balance of power. Nevertheless, claiming that economic unification preconfigured political unification has become untenable, if only because of the simple fact in 1866 the members of the Zollverein went to war against its architect Prussia. However, we should not mark as redundant any possible influence the Zollverein may have had in the German question before the 1866 Seven Weeks War. Directly preceding this, in 1865, Britain raced to secure a free trade treaty with the Zollverein and in turn displayed its acceptance of Prussia's economic leadership in Germany. Therefore, we are left with a puzzle as to what political role the Zollverein played in the German question and how Britain perceived this. Subsequently the immediate question I shall seek to resolve is: Did British public opinion perceive the Zollverein as a political question, in terms of the internal organization of a united Germany and its role in the European States System? To conduct this investigation I apply two subsidiary questions: Did British observers (the press, essayists, politicians, and diplomats) perceive the issue of the accession of the Steuerverein into the Zollverein between 1850-1853 as an economic or a political question? Did British observers (again: the press, essayists, politicians, and diplomats) perceive the Franco-Zollverein Treaty of Commerce 1860-1865 as an economic or a political question? Ultimately, and perhaps surprisingly for historians of international politics who have tended to neglect commercial relations, this thesis will illustrate that for Britain commercial policy intertwined with security interests. Conflict in Europe threatened to disrupt British exports and it was also believed the proliferation of free trade would guarantee pacific relations. Subsequently, I argue Britain primarily supported Prussia's economic consolidation of Germany for political reasons, or to maintain a favourable balance of power in Europe, and this mirrored the wider positions the British held on the German question.

In formulating these research questions a debt is owed to a handful of scholars, chief among them is Werner E. Mosse. His contribution *The European Powers and the German Question, 1848-71: With Special Reference to England and Russia* (1958) succinctly defined the German question as comprising two largely distinct dimensions: *internal* German exclusive dynamics, this includes strides towards liberalism, constitutional reform, and Austro-Prussian rivalry; *external* dynamics featuring a European aspect, including the principle of nationality with its tendency for territorial aggrandizement, and the alteration of the balance of power of the Concert of Europe.² This delimitation is useful, not only because it accurately reflects how contemporaries compartmentalized the German question, but because it allows scholars to clearly define what the political issues of German unification were.³ Therefore this thesis focuses upon this internal organization and external role dynamic in analysing how British observers perceived the Zollverein as a political problem. It is not immediately clear which dimension is most applicable to the Zollverein, and Mosse has provided no hints within his conceptualisation. Here, the Zollverein is seen as encompassing both: the customs union was a vehicle of liberalisation throughout Germany and acted as a catalyst of animosity between Austria and Prussia, it also impacted the balance of power as, increasingly for Germany's neighbours surrounding the most-favoured-nation (MFN) free trade treaty networks of the 1860s, security interests were deeply embedded within commercial relations.

² Werner E. Mosse, *The European Powers and the German Question, 1848-71: With Special Reference to England and Russia*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1958) 2.

³ The prolific scholar of the German question Wolf Gruner has also incorporated this approach, "there are at least two levels on which to approach the subject: a national-German and a European-international one," Wolf Gruner, "Germany in Europe: the German Question as Burden and as Opportunity", in John Bruilly, *The State of Germany. The National Idea in the Making, Unmaking and Remaking of a Modern Nation-State*, (London, Longman, 1992) 210.

Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks

By researching how British observers perceived the German customs union this thesis is firmly rooted within the constructivist tradition of international relations. To elaborate, the emphasis placed by constructivists upon *identity* and *perceptions* has shaped the selection of sources, research questions, and methodology. In turn, Britain is not understood as a cohesive unit, instead it is recognized there existed a stark intellectual and ideological rift between at least two loosely defined schools of foreign policy: the idealists and the realists. The distinguished historian Paul Kennedy has given us one of the clearest descriptions, worthwhile quoting in full, of what exactly these groups believed: “the former preached the gospel of international morality and goodwill, the latter the morality of the state and the need to defend national interests; the former disliked war, the latter defended or even glorified it; the former urged arbitration and conciliation, the latter scorned them as a slight to national honour; the former upheld the freedom of the individual, the latter a sense of duty to the state.”⁴ Moreover, Scott Murray has dissected the idealists in better detail by illustrating the group lacked systematic rigour and contained internal factions such as: Radicalism, Whiggism, Gladstonianism, Liberal Unionism, and Liberal Imperialism.⁵ A significant element these scholars have forgotten, however, is Palmerstonianism. Raymond Sontag has revealed amongst the idealists and realists the greatest dispute existed between the Cobdenites and the Palmerstonians – the former A.J.P. Taylor has christened the “trouble-makers.”⁶ Essentially, Sontag explains, the difference was one of methodology: Cobden would see liberal England lead by moral example whilst Palmerston advocated direct intervention and can be said to have acted as the “schoolmaster of Europe.”⁷ Yet the divisions between Cobden and Palmerston and the two schools of thought they represented went beyond just methodology. Cobden was a utopian pacifist whilst Palmerston was deeply influenced by Castlereagh’s balance of power doctrine.⁸ Thus whilst a Liberal by political affiliation, Palmerston more closely resembled the anti-revolutionary territorial conservatism of the Tories.⁹ These Conservatives perceived European politics through the normative lens of great power politics in that they believed the balance of power secured Europe against bids for hegemony and war.

Any account of Britain’s Germany policy should therefore recognise the constant internal conflict between these two schools of thought. This point helps to explain why British policy lacked direction when the question of integrating Germany into the European states system arose.¹⁰ However, there are deficiencies in these compartmentalisations of British foreign policy camps. This is because they do not account for the notion some actors may have changed their stance over time, or that their outlooks were more nuanced than what these categorizations reduce them to. There were, however, clearly demarcated lines of thought which nevertheless provide a useful guide to organise and analyse British observers.

⁴ Paul Kennedy, “Idealists and Realists: British Views of Germany 1864-1939”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 25 (1975) 138.

⁵ Scott W. Murray, *Liberal Diplomacy and German Unification: The Early Career of Robert Morier*, (London, Praeger, 2000) XVII.

⁶ The Cobdenite-Radicals did not hold ministerial position in the period under study but nevertheless held significance influence on policy formulation in the legislature, Muriel E. Chamberlain, *‘Pax Britannica’? British Foreign Policy 1789-1914*, (London, Longman, 1988) 15.

⁷ Raymond James Sontag, *Germany and England Background of Conflict 1848-1894*, (New York, Russell & Russell, 1964) 28.

⁸ John Atkinson Hobson, *Richard Cobden The International Man*, (New York, H. Holt and Company, 1919) 56

⁹ Carsten Holbraad, *The Concert of Europe: A Study in German and British International Theory, 1815-1914* (New York, Barnes & Noble, 1971) 117.

¹⁰ John Charmley, “Palmerston: ‘Artful Old Dodger’ or ‘Babe of Grace’?” in *The Makers of British Foreign Policy: From Pitt to Thatcher*, ed. T.G. Otte, (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2002) 92.

Therefore, in presenting British views of the Zollverein it is necessary to accommodate for competing identities – in terms of liberal idealism and balance of power realism – and their influence upon perception formulation.

To ascertain how British observers perceived the Zollverein aspects of the ‘bundles of identifications’ theory outlined by Bucher and Jasper shall be applied within analysis. The theory, purposed for IR scholars, contends “state identity” should be understood as the temporarily dominant bundle within a set of competing identifications. Rather than focusing upon the domestic level in identity construction Bucher and Jasper argue it is action on the international stage which allows a configuration to hold temporary privilege – reversing the notion that what a state is shapes how it behaves. The research procedure they sketch seeks to collate relevant observations referencing a state’s identity. This process is guided by the following analytical questions: what concepts inform identifications (‘Western’, ‘liberal’, ‘authoritarian’)? Can discursive conflicts be found? Do identifications co-vary across time? Accordingly, the most frequently recurring references within the source material are extracted with a focus upon intertextual links and cross-references. The goal is to construct a web of identifications that demonstrate temporal and relational patterns. Followingly, Bucher and Jasper recommend further disaggregating research projects into three dimensions: 1) a focus upon identifications that convey “self-understandings” (narratives of the self), such as economic, political, and religious principles that reference historical, cultural, or foundational narratives. 2) Uncovering the role of “others” within identification practices, asking what categories and concepts inform identifications within specific relations and foreign policy discourse. This may depict relations as cooperative, strategic, and antagonistic, also, actors may be classified as belonging to varying status groups or imagined communities (e.g. the West). Furthermore, this dimension of analysis discerns how identifications fit into “I-we-they” logics, such as how actors articulate state identity and how they might consider the perspective of the ‘other.’ 3) Identifications within specific policies, such as foreign policy statements and direct action, constitute the third focus area to highlight discursive tensions within identifications and to demonstrate identity does not precede actions. Furthermore, an actor’s justification of policy illustrates how bundles of identifications temporally attain privileged status over other narratives of the self.¹¹

However, because this remains an empirical and narrative focused thesis embedded within the Anglo-Saxon tradition – as opposed to the more rigid kind of investigation a political or social scientist might conduct – it is not useful here to overextend the theory where it does not complement the research itself. Instead, suitable tools are extracted and tailored towards this specific investigation. Therefore this thesis borrows Bucher and Jasper’s line of questioning, understanding of state identity as constituting “multidimensional processes,” “multiplicity,” “contingency,” and “development,” and also agrees “analysis should provide for the possibility that non-state actors might be central to identification practices.”¹² This is because the idealists and realists were in constant conflict to attain privileged status – again Britain cannot be seen as a cohesive whole. Also, affiliates of these two factions, our significant actors under investigation, were often non-state actors. It is thus necessary to incorporate a wide range of actors that garnered their respective faction privileged status in constructing Britain’s state identity in relation to Germany. Diverging from the ‘bundles of identification’ theory, however, this thesis does accommodate for the possibility of identity preceding action. As will be demonstrated the two factions under study often held dogmatic views rooted within their understanding of Britain’s historical role in Europe. Thus an identification configuration may attain privileged status from both pre-

¹¹ Bernd Bucher, Ursula Jasper, “Revisiting ‘identify’ in International Relations: From identity as substance to identification in action”, *European Journal of International Relations*, 23:2 (2017) 391-415.

¹² *Ibid.* 397.

existing domestic factors and external actions. Lastly, it would be quixotic to focus upon actions as solidifying state identity here because Britain hardly acted or had any concrete policy towards the German question.

Two historians, who have made significant contributions in the field, have reached this conclusion regarding two central events in the German question which had the potential to compromise the tranquillity of Europe: the 1848 Revolutions and 1864 Schleswig-Holstein Crisis. Murray contends the historiography thus far, regarding the attempts of scholars to demonstrate how well British policymakers divined the significance of the German question, has singularly shown “the difficulty of making any firm claims regarding Britain’s attitude towards unification.” In discussing Britain’s German policy after 1848, Murray has questioned “if such a thing can be said to have existed at all.”¹³ Werner E. Mosse in his discussion of Palmerston and Russell’s strategy in April, 1864, to achieve an armistice to the Dano-German conflict and thus prevent the dismemberment of Denmark observes: “The policy finally decided on by the British government hardly deserves the name.”¹⁴ This notion becomes further apparent in remembering there was no military or other direct intervention by Britain to hamper German unification. Whilst inaction may be considered a form of action, here it is believed a focus upon perceptions, since an emphasis upon policies has proven to be a quagmire, can better explain Britain’s understanding of the Zollverein as a political problem.

The work of Daniel Hucker upon “representations” is also employed to operationalize this investigation.¹⁵ Hucker endorses the use of “representations” to identify dominant trends within public opinion that were actually perceived by the policy-making elite. He puts forward two distinct categories of ‘representation’: *reactive representations*, the more tangible manifestations of public opinion that can be extracted from the documentary record (correspondence, newspapers, parliamentary debates); and *residual representations*, those less tangible expressions of public opinion which cannot be wrested from the archives by historians. Hucker elaborates that this second category encompasses representations which are instinctively or intuitively understood by policy makers; however this could be better articulated by reformulating this category as ‘unspoken assumptions’. Muriel Chamberlain, a historian of nineteenth century British foreign policy, called attention to these “basic assumptions” held by British policymakers which were widely understood but remain absent from the documentary record.¹⁶ For example, in this investigation an unspoken assumption encountered is the lingering threat of French aggression, drawing upon memories of the Napoleonic Wars, for British observers in formulating their perceptions towards the geopolitical role of a united Germany. In other words, Francophobia constitutes a factor which cannot be underestimated. Nevertheless, the overarching focus of this “representations” approach is upon identifying the actual influence public opinion had upon foreign policy. Inspired by the work of Pierre Laborie,¹⁷ Hucker argues the actual impact of

¹³ Murray, *Liberal Diplomacy*, 102-103.

¹⁴ Mosse, *German Question*, 191; This is further corroborated by T.G. Otte who argues “Lord Russell had good intentions, but he had no policy”, T.G. Otte, ““Better to Increase the Power of Prussia” Great Britain and the Events of 1864”, in e.d. Olivier Auge, Ulrich Lappenkuper, Ulf Morgenstern, *Der Wiener Frieden 1864. Ein Deutsches, europaisches und globales Ereignis* (Paderborn, Ferdinand Schoningh, 2016), 289.

¹⁵ Daniel Hucker, “International History and the Study of Public Opinion: Towards Methodological Clarity”, *The International History Review*, 34:3 (2012) 775-794.

¹⁶ “One problem about writing a history of British foreign policy in the nineteenth century is that the basic assumptions upon which it was based are almost never discussed by those who made it. They seldom spelled them out in Parliament and very, very rarely analysed them in letters or despatches”, Chamberlain, *Pax Britannica*, 8.

¹⁷ Pierre Laborie, ‘De l’opinion publique a l’imaginaire social’, *Vingtieme Siecle, Revue d’histoire*, xviii (1988) 104.

public opinion can only be understood by focusing upon how it was perceived by and represented to policymakers. This requires locating within the vast array of divergent manifestations how “dominant tendencies” emerge. Dominant tendencies provide a shared perception of what public opinion actually was. Since it would be inaccurate to approach public opinion as homogenous, this allows for a more feasible investigation into “common notions” of beliefs, assumptions, and perceptions. Hucker also connects this methodological framework of representations to constructivism. He argues: “It is a constructivist approach that lends itself to an analysis of public opinion via a conceptual notion of representations; public opinion only becomes 'meaningful' by virtue of how it is 'represented' and 'perceived'.”¹⁸ Ultimately, this approach shall aid this investigation in discerning what meaning British observers gave to an economically united Germany.

Whilst this approach aptly links public opinion (non-state actors) to policy makers (state actors), this thesis deviates from Hucker’s emphasis upon tracing the influence of the former group upon foreign policy choices. Akin to Bucher and Jasper’s focus, this investigation will instead cross-examine material from both groups of actors and construct a more wholistic proxy of British public opinion which presents both sets in synthesis. Subsequently, British public opinion is seen as encompassing both state and non-state actors. The goal is not to present a truly representative reconstruction of how Britain perceived the political impact of the Zollverein on the German question; at best, this would be folly since the historian is constrained by an incomplete documentary record, and such a positivist understanding would stipulate there is a definitive ‘truth’ to be recovered. Instead, it is to present a range of views whilst also aiming to incorporate more marginalized perspectives that illustrate at what moments in time a dominant trend emerged out of a set of contested perceptions. Or in other words, the goal is not to trace the influence of public opinion on policymakers, analogous to Hucker, rather it is to identify wider, and more general trends of British perceptions towards the Zollverein and a united Germany.

Sources

We are thus provided with the necessary tools to examine the documentary record and construct a historical investigation. To do this, a wide range of sources are utilised, and they constitute at least four different genres: parliamentary debates, correspondence, newspapers, and academic articles. It should be noted further sources, such as autobiographies and memoranda, are also included but take a subsidiary focus due to their limited quantity and relevance.¹⁹ Correspondence and newspaper articles constitute the bread and butter of this thesis, that is because these genres contain the accounts with the greatest veracity of subjective opinion formulation. For example, the *Times* was especially attentive towards German domestic political developments during this period and commented frequently upon their European significance. With the help of the digital archive *Proquest* we are able to extract every edition of the *Times* during the period under investigation, as well as for the three other newspapers this thesis utilises: the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Observer*, and the *Economist*. These newspapers have been selected because they represent contrasting paradigms of public opinion (although the *Observer* acted as a sister publication of the

¹⁸ Hucker, “Public Opinion”, 786.

¹⁹ Lord Augustus Loftus, British envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary at Berlin, has produced an autobiography dedicated to court intrigue and containing no useful account of his role within preliminary discussions of a free trade treaty between Britain and the Zollverein. Curiously, the Zollverein is referenced in the index as “the basis of German unity and Prussian supremacy,” however the corresponding pages are irrelevant and discuss only Italian politics, Lord Augustus Loftus, *The Diplomatic Reminiscences of Lord Augustus Loftus, 1837-1862*, Vol I (Cassell & Company, London, 1892) 343; Lord Augustus Loftus, *The Diplomatic Reminiscences of Lord Augustus Loftus, 1862-1879*, Vol II (Cassell & Company, London, 1894).

Guardian and held concurrent views). However, it might better be stated these newspapers functioned as opinion forming institutions and instead instructed the British public on how to perceive Germany. During his study of nineteenth century British public opinion towards Germany Sontag has emphasised this point: “In foreign affairs it is self-evident that the public as a whole has no other source for forming opinions than the Press.”²⁰ Therefore, newspapers are unquestionably one of the most valuable resources we have apropos of nineteenth century public opinion. This is further demonstrated by the fact it was the usual practice of the states of Europe to perceive certain publications as representing the general sentiments, or even the political leadership, of their respective nations.²¹ Furthermore, the historian who has trawled nineteenth century archival material will likely have seen the abundant newspaper clippings attached to foreign office correspondence demonstrating as much.²²

The *Times* held this mantle of ‘official paper’ in Britain and by mid-century it constituted a leviathan. Writing on November 3, 1855, the *Saturday Review* admitted “no apology is necessary for assuming that the country is ruled by The Times. We all know it, or if we do not know it, we ought to know it.”²³ The *Times* – a conservative, anti-French, publication – was presided over by editor John Thadeus Delane between 1841 to 1877.²⁴ Due to its preeminent position, the *Times* was effectively unconstrained and frequently took controversial stances on matters of international politics – often to the ire of British and Continental governments. Nevertheless, even the *Times* by the late 1850s became a “friend of Palmerstonianism” as the press bowed to minister’s widespread popularity in matters of foreign policy.²⁵ Regarding the German question, the publication often changed stance and fluctuated between impassioned defences of Prussian leadership in Germany, to solutions based upon co-leadership with Austria and the Lesser States. The *Manchester Guardian* – which was edited by the anti-corn-law league veteran Jeremiah Garnett between 1848-1861 and had a radical, free trade, industrialist, pedigree²⁶ – unsurprisingly took special interest with the commercial dimension (specifically upon matters of market access) of the German question.²⁷ Lastly, the *Economist* originated from Richard Cobden and the anti-corn-law league who in 1842 wanted to create a “London weekly Free trade newspaper” to further the goal of Repeal.²⁸ Whilst ideologically inclined towards free trade, the *Economist* incorporated a sophisticated analysis of the power-political dynamics of the wider German question – in contrast to the *Guardian* and its sister publication the *Observer*. In this thesis emphasis shall

²⁰ Sontag, *Germany and England*, 23.

²¹ For example, during the 1860 Macdonald Affair, in which the arrest of a British officer on a train in Germany stirred a diplomatic crisis, British diplomat Robert Morier reported German liberals believed the *Times* as “representing the feeling not only of the English public generally, but of Lord Palmerston in particular”, Morier to Russell, 28 October, 1860, FO 30/22/63.

²² Clippings of the *National Zeitung* and *Allgemeine Zeitung* translated into English were often fed to the foreign minister as representing German public opinion, Loftus to Russell, 19 April, 1862, FO 96/366.

²³ Quoted in J.S.R. Phillips, “The Growth of Journalism,” in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, ed. Sir A.W. Ward, A.R. Waller, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1917) 198.

²⁴ See, Arthur Irwin Dasent, *John Thadeus Delane, Editor of “The Times”: His Life and Correspondence*, (London, John Murray, 1908).

²⁵ David Brown, “Diplomacy and the Fourth Estate: The Role of the Press in British Foreign Policy in the Age of Palmerston”, in John Fisher, Antony Best, *On the Fringes of Diplomacy: Influences on British Foreign Policy, 1800-1945* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2011) 44.

²⁶ Peter H. Peel, “*British Public Opinion and the Wars of German Unification: 1864-1871*”, (PhD Dissertation, University of Southern California, 1977) 123.

²⁷ In September, 1848, the paper was highly critical of the disruption to British commerce the blockade of Northern Germany had wrecked during the first Schleswig-Holstein Crisis, *Manchester Guardian*, September 23, 1848.

²⁸ Richard Cobden to John Bright, 4 March, 1842, in Howe, *Letters*, 261; see Ruth Dudley Edwards, *The Pursuit of Reason: The Economist 1843-1993*, (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1993).

be placed upon the reports of foreign correspondents and editorials from these newspapers. This decision has been made because regular correspondents – such as those which reported upon military manoeuvres, and those who translated political speeches – are found to be almost exclusively descriptive and devoid of any insertion of subjective opinion. This constitutes a prevalent issue throughout this thesis as certain sources lack displays of British perceptions.

This is also a feature of diplomatic correspondence which can be explained by a combination of factors: diplomats were issued fact-finding briefs and prioritised observing events and reporting the facts back to the foreign minister; some were afraid to go beyond their station and face reprimand for expressing their own opinion²⁹; some were simply imperceptive, having acquired their positions through nepotism, and lacked analytical rigour.³⁰ However, there also existed talented officials who produced intelligent conjecture upon German matters and they hold a prominent position within this investigation. By name some of these key actors are: John Ward, Robert Morier, Lord Napier, Earl Cowley, and Louis Mallet. The correspondence utilised in this investigation has been gathered from the National Archives, Kew, and from the two volumes of edited correspondence titled *British Envoys to Germany* which has been published by the German Historical Society (2006/2010).³¹ These volumes include full extracts of foreign office correspondence written by British diplomats stationed in the German Confederation, specifically from the missions in: Berlin, Dresden, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Hanover, Munich, Stuttgart and Vienna. The work of Mosslang and his colleagues has proven to be invaluable; their contribution has provided scholars with a comprehensive and insightful record of the viewpoints held by some of the most well-informed British observers of Germany. However, as of now historians of Britain and the German question are yet to utilise these conveniently digitised source compilations. Therefore, this thesis seeks to remedy this oversight whilst also mitigating some of the shortcomings of an otherwise herculean effort: *British Envoys to Germany* has omitted invaluable consular reports that detailed significant developments of the German question (e.g. John Ward's reports of the first Zollverein Crisis sent from Leipzig). Thus original archival research shall fill the gaps to present a more wholistic account of British perceptions towards the Zollverein.

Parliamentary debates constitute another resource utilised to present the perceptions of British state actors towards Germany. The online resource *Hansard* provides us with nearly every word spoken in both Houses of Parliament since 1802. However, it should be noted this resource is better suited to the study of domestic politics since questions about ongoing matters of international relations were usually rebuffed, since it was routine to defend the necessity of secret diplomacy for national security, by the foreign minister or prime minister. Nevertheless, this open channel for policy scrutiny has left historians with a record of the rationale a wide spectrum of British political thought held towards the German question. Furthermore, the somewhat rare debates about foreign policy clearly exhibit the

²⁹ The diplomat Lord Ponsonby is a prime example of this insecurity, “Your Lordship, I hope you will excuse me for expressing a strong opinion”, Ponsonby to Palmerston, 18 June, 1848, FO 7/350 in Markus Mosslang, Torsten Riotte, Hagen Schulze, *British Envoys to Germany, 1816-1866, Vol III: 1848-1851*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press for the Royal Historical Association with the German Historical Institute London. 2006) 412-413.

³⁰ Earl Westmorland exemplifies this as the reports he sent from Berlin during the 1848 Revolution were purely descriptive and devoid of analysis, Westmorland to Palmerston, 15 June, 1848. FO 64/288 in Mosslang et al (2006) 124.

³¹ Mosslang et al (2006); Markus Mosslang, Chris Manias, Torsten Riotte, *British Envoys to Germany, 1816-1866, Vol IV: 1851-1866*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press for the Royal Historical Association with the German Historical Institute London. 2010).

dividing lines between balance of power realists and liberal idealists.³² Lastly, some of the most important actors for this investigation (e.g. Lord Palmerston, Richard Cobden, John Bright, Benjamin Disraeli, Lord Russell, and Lord Salisbury) contributed frequently in the Commons and Lords. In turn, this provides more useful evidence about how British observers perceived the Zollverein and the German question. This is also in consideration that parliamentary speeches were frequently reproduced by newspapers and thus informed the wider political class of Victorian Britain.

Lastly, two academic review journals shall present the views of British non-state – and often state - actors. These journals devoted meagre space to international politics generally, and German events particularly, as more often you would find articles about the work of Shakespeare or the classics throughout their quarterly editions, yet a good selection of views relevant to the Zollverein and the German question can still be extracted. The *Edinburgh Review* upheld liberal-Whig principles and was edited by William Empson (1847-52), George Lewis a former financial secretary to the Treasury (1852-55), and Henry Reeve (1855-95) a former Privy Council clerk and a political writer to the *Times*.³³ The *Quarterly Review*, rival of the *Edinburgh*, was an arch-Tory journal which followed the practice of leaving articles unsigned; yet this has not deterred a number of resourceful historians in discerning the origins of many publications. The significance of these journals for this investigation has been nicely articulated by Andrew Rygh: “They were the organs through which the governing classes of England addressed their peers.”³⁴ Although, it must be recognised both the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* had already hit their circulation zenith in 1817-1818 (each totalling around 13,000) which steadily declined thereafter.³⁵

Although imperfect, in unison these sources constitute what this thesis refers to as British public opinion.³⁶ Similar to how an economist might utilise indicators such as gross domestic product to create a proxy for vague concepts like economic ‘growth’, these sources shall shine a light upon ‘public opinion’. They provide us with a range of perspectives British observers held towards the Zollverein and the German question, in which this thesis shall discern the orientation of each actor in terms of idealist or realist preferences, and how their understanding of British identity informed the positions they reached. Throughout analysis it will be probed what significance potential continuities within perspectives between state and nonstate actors, as well as between the genres generally, hold. Through this it will be possible to draw conclusions about whether British public opinion understood the quest for economic unification intertwined with bids for political mastery over Germany.

Historiographical Debates

Within the historiographical nebulas of Britain and the Zollverein the work of Henrich von Treitschke constitutes a proverbial big bang. The lasting influence of this Prussian historian has resulted in the propagation of the myth that Britain actively opposed German unification and attempted to dismantle the Zollverein.³⁷ In his regular overzealous fashion, von

³² Admittedly the vast majority of rich debates centred upon the two Schleswig-Holstein Crises and statements relevant to the Zollverein are lacking in comparison, furthermore, the online Hansard archives are missing multiple entries due to the original selective recording methodology.

³³ Peel, “*British Public Opinion*”, 152.

³⁴ Numerous British ‘great men’ contributed to these journals, such as William Gladstone, Benjamin Disraeli, Lord Salisbury, and Walter Bagehot, Andrew Robert Rygh, “English Periodicals and the Democratic Movement: 1865-1885” (Phd Dissertation, University of Southern California, 1960) 17.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Ideally a more grassroots approach should be taken by incorporating sources such as travel guides and journals, however finding passages relevant to the topic at hand has proven to be unfeasible.

³⁷ Heinrich von Treitschke, *History of Germany in the Nineteenth Century*, translated by Eden Paul, Cedar Paul, vol 5 (New York, Robert C. Bride & Company, 1919).

Treitschke painted the Zollverein as the vehicle of Prussian predominance over Germany - which has an element of truth to it as Austria's isolated position became unbearable - and that the Zollverein successfully resisted British attempts to strangle the German economy in the crib.³⁸ This latter claim builds upon the views of economic nationalist Friedrich List.³⁹ The distinguishing characteristic of List's doctrine was *nationality*: the development of the culture and power of the community of the nation remained paramount.⁴⁰ List can be epitomized as the antithesis of Adam Smith, he was a staunch believer of restrictive tariffs to protect infant industry from foreign competition, specifically, from cheap British exports. List argued the conspiracy of British free trade would "remove the ladder by which it had mounted in order to prevent others from following."⁴¹ John Ward, whom during 1843 was introduced to List at Augsburg, described him as "a fat, florid man," but he nevertheless "possessed a great deal of knowledge" and was "full of enthusiasm for schemes of improvement."⁴² Ultimately, after witnessing first-hand the repeal of the Corn Laws and the ascension of free trade at the British Houses of Parliament, a grave depression befell List and upon returning to Germany he took his own life.⁴³ Yet the ideas of List lived on in the history of von Treitschke, who enshrined the former as the intellectual architect of the German customs union, which in turn created the orthodox anti-British German historiography of the Zollverein. Gradually, throughout the twentieth century, challenges to the myth began to emerge as a handful of scholars recognized the story as more complex than what von Treitschke asserted.⁴⁴

For example, W.O. Henderson in *The Zollverein* (1939) – a monograph that has been reprinted in at least four editions and which remains highly influential within the historiography – argues progress towards economic integration brought by the Zollverein in transport, commercial law, and monetary policy since the 1830s cemented the political necessity of the Customs Union.⁴⁵ Furthermore, in 1994 Rolf Dumke demonstrated particularism, in terms of potential financial advantages arising from customs duties, played an important role behind the decision of some of the Lesser States to enter the Zollverein.⁴⁶ Yet these scholars have been too absorbed in analysing the Zollverein as an entirely German question; those few studies which have addressed the international dimension of the customs union have done so entirely using a commercial diplomacy approach.⁴⁷ As a result only

³⁸ Toni Pierenkemper, Richard Tilly, *The German Economy During the Nineteenth Century*, (Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2004) 31.

³⁹ See, Friedrich List, *The National System of Political Economy*, translated by Sampson S. Lloyd (London, Longmans, 1909).

⁴⁰ Eric Helleiner, "Economic Nationalism as a Challenge to Economic Liberalism? Lessons from the 19th Century," *International Studies Quarterly*, 46:3 (2002) 308, 311.

⁴¹ Friedrich List quoted in, Marc-William Palen, *The "Conspiracy" of Free Trade: The Anglo-American Struggle Over Empire and Economic Globalisation, 1846-1896*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016) 6.

⁴² John Wad, *Experiences of a Diplomatist, 1840-1870*, (London, Macmillan, 1872) 32.

⁴³ On the evening of 30 November, 1846 List's body was found covered in snow after he had shot himself, Palen, *Free Trade*, 1-2.

⁴⁴ Jacob Viner, *The Customs Union Issue*, (New York, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1950); David T. Murphy, "Prussian Aims for the Zollverein, 1828-1833", *The Historian* 53:2, (1991) 285-302; Wolfgang Keller, Carol H. Shiue, "Endogenous Formation of Free Trade Agreements: Evidence from the Zollverein's Impact on Market Integration", *The Journal of Economic History* 74:4, (2014) 1168-1204; Kathleen J. Hancock, *Regional Integration*, (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 88-89; Florian Ploeck, "The Zollverein and the Sequence of a Customs Union", *Australian Economic History Review* 55:3 (2015) 277-300.

⁴⁵ W.O. Henderson, *The Zollverein*, 3rd edition, (Abingdon, Frank Cass, 1984) XIV.

⁴⁶ Rolf H. Dumke, *German Economic Unification in the 19th Century: The Political Economy of the Zollverein*, (Munich, Bundeswehr University Munich, 1994) 4.

⁴⁷ Asana Iliasu, "The Role of Free Trade Treaties in British Foreign Policy, 1859-1871", (PhD Thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, 1965); J.H. Clapham, "Commercial Relations 1828-1865" in A.W.

detailed accounts of the negotiations behind the MFN treaties of the early 1860s have been produced - as though the Zollverein held no international significance prior to the 1860 Cobden-Chevalier Treaty.⁴⁸

More recently, John R. Davis, via his monograph *Britain and the German Zollverein* (1997), produced what constitutes the definitive contribution regarding the subject matter of this thesis.⁴⁹ Davis' overarching, though somewhat contrived, argument is that Britain's commercial policy can hardly be called a policy because it was ideological and dogmatic. Yet the story remains more intricate than this assessment. Notwithstanding this the work remains laudable; indeed Davis was successful in his mission to elucidate what Britain's free trade commercial policy entailed in respect to the Zollverein, and he presents cases neglected throughout the historical record. Davis provides an unrivalled account of the development of the Stade Tolls – the dues which regulated traffic along the Elbe – and introduces historians to the complex issue of Austria's entry into the Zollverein both in 1851-53 and 1862-65. Yet, especially for the former of these two 'Zollverein Crises', a rather shallow narrative has been presented which fails to interrogate the particular developments of the political crisis. Furthermore, Davis relegates British opinion of the affair as merely being dictated by free trade dogma. This reductionist conclusion has been drawn from the correspondence of numerous agents from the Board of Trade, British consuls and diplomats, and representatives of various Chambers of Commerce. In particular, the incorporation of John Ward's reports remains impressive and constitutes high quality material. Nevertheless, the pool of sources utilised remains too shallow to draw such absolute conclusions about British perceptions of the Zollverein. The focus upon commercial policy has resulted in the neglect of newspapers, whereas, these sources contradict the overarching conclusion of the monograph: "Britain's support for the Zollverein was, therefore, simply produced by economic circumstances."⁵⁰ As will be demonstrated here, concern for the balance of power in Europe and how a united Germany would alter it was of equal, if not greater, consideration. A significant proportion of British observers desired a strong, united Germany at the heart of Europe to act as a bulwark against revisionist France and Russia – thus minimising alterations to a beneficial *status quo*. This is a fundamental oversight of Davis and can be attributed to his decision not to directly embed his contribution within the historiography of the German question.

It is necessary to specify what exactly the 'German question' means and how scholars within the field have inspired this thesis. Organizing the geographical region of Germany into a stable body has been a perennial issue of European geopolitics. The 1806 dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire by Napoleon led to the birth of the German Confederation by the 1815 Vienna Settlement. It became a matter of international law for the European Powers to guarantee the independence and integrity of Germany. Yet as the nineteenth century progressed the Confederation increasingly became perceived as feeble, and the rising tide of German nationalism created what some observers called the "phantom of the Germanic

Ward, G.P. Gooch, *The Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy 1783-1919*, Vol II (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1923).

⁴⁸ Named after its architects Richard Cobden and Michel Chevalier, the 1860 commercial treaty was negotiated between Britain and France against the backdrop of rising bilateral tensions involving an invasion scare and subsequent coastal fortification scheme, see Asana Iliasu, "The Cobden-Chevalier Commercial Treaty of 1860", *The Historical Journal* 14:1, (1971) 67-98.

⁴⁹ There is a tendency amongst historians to be overly critical, in a somewhat arbitrary sense, to inflate the significance of their own contribution, whilst this thesis creates an antagonist out of Davis' conclusions his work should nevertheless be valued for its high quality as well as for its role in filling an important historiographical gap. See, John R. Davis, "The British Sonderweg: The Peculiarities of British free trade, 1845-80", *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 8:3, (1997) 68-90; John R. Davis, "Trade, Politics, Perspectives, and the Question of a British Commercial Policy Towards the German States 1848-1866", (PhD Thesis, Glasgow, 1994).

⁵⁰ John R. Davis, *Britain and the German Zollverein, 1848-66*, (Basingstoke, MacMillan, 1997) 171.

Empire.”⁵¹ However, unity was a complex issue as numerous versions were possible, and Germany’s neighbours could only speculate answers to the following questions: by what methods will the German people unite? Who will lead the unification process, Prussia, Austria, or a ‘third Germany’? Would there be a *großdeutsch* or a *kleindeutsch* solution? What geopolitical changes will arise from a new strong nation in the heart of Europe? What character will the new German nation have, liberal or autocratic, Western or Eastern? We have explanations *ex post facto* of the result to some of these questions, yet between 1830-1871 contemporaries were often left dumbstruck as developments, such as the 1848 Revolutions, uprooted any conjecture they might have formed.

Through the combined efforts of numerous historians a rich scholarship has blossomed concerning this German problem.⁵² However, the relevant strand we are concerned with here is what Britain thought of the German question.⁵³ The core debates which comprise the field discuss the following issues:⁵⁴ did Germany follow a Sonderweg?⁵⁵ What kind of German unification did Britain prefer?⁵⁶ What was Britain’s position regarding the Zollverein?⁵⁷ Did Britain prefer Prussian supremacy?⁵⁸ Was Britain’s German policy pragmatic or ideological?⁵⁹ What role did Britain see for Germany in the European states system?⁶⁰ And what was Britain’s position on the Paulskirche?⁶¹ As a result a sizeable

⁵¹ *Times*, 7 April 1849.

⁵² Anne-Marie Burley, “The Once and Future German Question”, *Foreign Affairs* 68:5, (1989) 65-83.

⁵³ The historiography of Britain and the German question is at least a century old, see J.A. Cramb, *Germany and England*, (London, John Murray, 1914); Charles Sarolea, *The Anglo-German Problem*, (London, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1912).

⁵⁴ I have discussed these debates in more detail elsewhere, see Thomas Rayner, “Did Britain Have a Germany Policy, 1830-1871?” (Unpublished, 2020).

⁵⁵ Scott W. Murray, “The Origins of an Illusion. British Policy and Opinion and the Development of Prussian Liberalism, 1848-1871”, (MA Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1990) 12-13; J.L. Snell, H. Schmitt, *The Democratic Movement in German, 1789-1914*, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1976); James Sheehan, *German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1978); A.J.P. Taylor, *The Course of German History: A Survey of the Development of Germany Since 1815*, (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1945).

⁵⁶ Scott W. Murray, “In Pursuit of a Mirage: Robert Morier’s Views of Liberal Nationalism and German Unification, 1853-1876” *The International History Review*, 20:1 (1998) 33-67; Mosse, *German Question*, 360; Kenneth Bourne, *The Foreign Policy of Victorian England 1830-1902*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970) 385; Werner E. Mosse, “The Crown and Foreign Policy. Queen Victoria and the Austro-Prussian Conflict, March-May, 1866”, *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 10:2 (1951) 205-233.

⁵⁷ Hans-Werner Hahn, *Geschichte des deutschen Zollvereins*, (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1984); Davis, *Zollverein*, 4; Dumke, *Economic Unification*, 4; Henderson, *Zollverein*, 286, XII.

⁵⁸ John Clarke, *British Diplomacy and Foreign Policy 1782-1865*, (London, Unwin Hyman, 1989) 281; Mosse, *German Question*, 46, 8; Frank Lorenz Müller, *Britain and the German Question: Perceptions of Nationalism and Political Reform, 1830-1863*, (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) 111, 93; Orr, “British Diplomacy” 218.

⁵⁹ Stacie E. Goddard, “When Right Makes Might: How Prussia Overturned the European Balance of Power”, *International Security*, 33:3 (2009) 120; Richard Smittenaar, “‘Feelings of Alarm’: Conservative Criticism of the Principle of Nationality in mid-Victorian England”, *Modern Intellectual History*, 14:2 (2017) 365-391; Sontag, *Germany and England*, 28; Kennedy, “Idealists and Realists”, 138.

⁶⁰ Müller, *German Question*, 3-4; J.L. Herkless, “Lord Clarendon’s Attempt at Franco-Prussian Disarmament, January to March 1870”, *The Historical Journal*, 15:3 (1972) 466; Mosse, *German Question*, 359; Otte, “Better to Increase the Power of Prussia”, 291; Murray, *Liberal Diplomacy*, 102-103.

⁶¹ Hans Precht, *Englands Stellung zur deutschen Einheit 1848-1850*, (München-Berlin, 1925); Alexander Scharff, *Die europäischen Großmächte und die deutsche Revolution. Deutsche Einheit und europäische Ordnung 1848-1851*, (Leipzig, 1942); Gunther Heydemann, “The ‘Crazy Year’ 1848: The Revolution in Germany and Palmerston’s Policy”, in Hagen Schulze, *Nation-Building in Central Europe*, (Lemington Spa, Berg, 1987) 167-182; William J. Orr, Jr., “British Diplomacy and the German Problem, 1848-1850”, *Albion*, 10:3 (1978) 214, 217, 218; Frank G. Weber, “Palmerston and Prussian Liberalism, 1848” *The Journal of Modern History*, 35:2 (1963) 135.

historiography has amassed providing us with a widespread collective knowledge of the German question. Although the work of two historians in particular have greatly influenced the design of this thesis. Raymond Sontag and Frank Müller have both taken a perspectives approach within their research upon Britain and the German question. Sontag's *Germany and England Background of Conflict 1848-1894* (1964) examined the work of newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, poets, and novelists to construct an image of British public opinion in relation to Germany. This resourceful method robustly challenged the Sybel and Friedjung led German historiography which portrayed Britain as an enemy of German unification. However, Sontag's decision to dispense with the "paraphernalia of scholarship", or in other words extensive footnotes, has left room for improvement.⁶² Müller's *Britain and the German Question: Perceptions of Nationalism and Political Reform* (2002), on the other hand, features imposing source work which constructs a comprehensive account of how British observers viewed the German question as a political issue. In a categorical manner, Müller deconstructs the ways in which Britain's foreign policy elite perceived the struggle for political reform and national unity in Germany.⁶³ A synthesis of these approaches shall be applied within this thesis to demonstrate how British public opinion perceived the Zollverein as a political issue, explicitly, regarding the balance of power of Europe. Here, this thesis can be seen as novel since no other study has been found which overtly researches British public opinion towards the Zollverein.

Relevance

Although the field of Britain and the German question has been long dormant, in consideration of the profound societal and academic relevance this research holds it is a prime time to revitalise the scholarship. Again, comparable to the nineteenth century, the internal organisation of Germany and its role in the European states system is being questioned. The vitality of liberal democracy in Germany is in the process of being sapped by the leading far right opposition party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) – evocative of Prussia's undermining of liberal development during the 1860s. This internal threat, coupled with the lingering memory of Germany's Prussification and Nazification, has translated into an insecurity which in turn is destabilising European unity. It has led Germany to become reluctant to assume the political hegemony that economic predominance garners, and as some observers have remarked, Germany is now perceived by its neighbours as a "baffled hegemon."⁶⁴ The crux of the issue is how to integrate Germany, with its disproportionate size and power, into the European states system – analogous of the nineteenth century German question. A correspondent for the *Financial Times* has once again called attention to this perennial conundrum Europe faces: should we seek a European Germany or a German Europe? "Germany," Phillip Stephens writes, "more often wants to close its eyes to the world. The facts of German power and geography, however, cannot be brushed aside. Sitting at the heart of the continent, Germany, by a margin, is the continent's richest and most populous state. To that extent, a German Europe is unavoidable."⁶⁵

The cultural memory of the British, whose national curriculum primarily fosters ignorance and animosity by its lingering obsession with World Wars, has resulted in a widespread refusal to acknowledge the character of modern Germany.⁶⁶ As Patrick Major has

⁶² Sontag, *Germany and England*, XII-XIII.

⁶³ Müller, *German Question*, 3.

⁶⁴ Constanze Stelzenmuller, "Germany: Baffled Hegemon" *Democracy & Disorder*, (2019).

⁶⁵ Philip Stephens, "The EU's fate rests on Germany's identity crisis", *Financial Times*, 21 May, 2020.

⁶⁶ This is not to deny the momentous historical significance of the two World Wars, rather, a disproportionate amount of public history remains devoted to these episodes which has resulted in suppressing other periods of German history.

noted, “large parts of the British media have been in historical denial of the changes which have occurred in Germany since 1945.”⁶⁷ Such oversimplified narratives of the past, as stated by Scully, have also had a disastrous effect upon political relations. Little has changed in British perceptions of Germany since 1990 where Trade and Industry Secretary Nicholas Ridley claimed the European Economic Community was a “German racket” whilst he simultaneously compared Helmut Kohl to Adolf Hitler.⁶⁸ Brexit can be seen as a continuation of this British sentiment to resist a ‘German Europe’, however, it would be more accurate to attribute this to Britain’s longstanding trouble to come to terms with its European identity. Britain’s unwillingness to prioritise its standing as a European Power, and instead pursue the status of a World Power, is historic. Presently, the Johnson administration widely espouses rhetoric calling for a ‘global Britain’ which ignores geography and the inherent European responsibilities it imposes. Again, this is reminiscent of nineteenth century dynamics during which Britain’s retreat from the Concert of Europe in the 1860s destabilised the German question which in turn partly induced the Wars of German Unification. In both instances Britain unwittingly nudged Germany into the position of hegemony, whereas, cooperation would be the favourable avenue to secure British interests as well as collective European security interests.

Furthermore, as current affairs dictate, this research holds topical relevance. Britain’s ongoing negotiation with the European Union (EU) for a free trade treaty lays bare how politics underpins commercial relations: access to fishing rights might well decide to what extent the EU wishes to cooperate with Britain on future security matters. Historically researching similar episodes of Britain negotiating commercial treaties, or ‘trade deals’ as they are now known, with a neighbouring customs union might better inform British policymakers as to the political significance of free trade within international relations. Lastly, cyclical economic nationalism, a symptom of an increasingly chaotic international system, is a zero-sum-game to the detriment of maintaining mutually beneficial liberal institutions. This dynamic is again resurgent, ‘America first’ constituting a case in point, and British policymakers should be warned that compromising free trade equates to dismantling the international liberal order.

The following chapters delve into two crisis moments within the development of the Zollverein. The First Crisis of 1850-53 involved the question of the renewal of the Zollverein Treaties based upon a more liberal tariff negotiated with the Steuerverein (a north German tax union led by Hanover) that would, in turn, become amalgamated into the Zollverein, and the attempt of Austria to force entry into the Customs Union by rallying the Lesser States to its cause. The Second Crisis 1860-65 entailed the renewal of the Zollverein Treaties upon the basis of the Franco-Prussian Commercial Treaty 1862 and again the issue of Austrian entry into the Union. This thesis is not an economic history of the Zollverein as the Customs Union is seen primarily as a political issue, rather, an international relations focus is taken in analysis of the role of the Zollverein within the wider German question.

⁶⁷ Patrick Major, “Britain and Germany: A Love-Hate Relationship?” *German History*, 26:4 (2008) 468.

⁶⁸ Richard Scully, *British Images of Germany: Admiration, Antagonism & Ambivalence, 1860-1914*, (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 3.

Chapter 2: The First Zollverein Crisis, 1850-1853

Introduction: The Aftermath of 1848

Before discussing what British public opinion thought of the Zollverein during the sequence of conferences dedicated to the issue of its renewal in 1853, it is necessary to provide an introduction of the events that established the scenario. The Paris revolution in February, 1848, which ultimately led to the fall of the French monarchy (Louis Philippe's throne was burnt on the Place de la Bastille on 24 February), had by March catalysed similar uprisings across the German States. The demands of the German revolutionaries, besides freedom of the press and constitutional rights, called for national unity, or more specifically a German nation-state. This was a sentiment born from Napoleonic occupation, which erupted into a wave of nationalism during the 1840-41 Rhine Crisis, but notwithstanding remained generally unacknowledged by British public opinion.⁶⁹ Across Third Germany new liberal 'March governments' arose to placate the unrest - although the abdication of Ludwig I of Bavaria constituted the exception. A rising in Berlin compelled King Wilhelm to appoint a new liberal cabinet and to promise to lift censorship and enact a constitution. In Vienna Prince Metternich, who constituted the beating heart of the European territorial order, was forced to resign and go into exile in London. The rest of the Austrian Empire, from Italy to Hungary, was within the throes of revolution, and the existence of the Empire itself had been placed on a knife-edge. In Frankfurt, the new Vorparlament convened and planned for a newly elected German parliament. The National Assembly, otherwise known as the Paulskirche, was elected on 1 May and came to replace the defunct German Confederation as the new central power.⁷⁰

The revolutions that spread like wildfire across Europe during the spring of 1848 looked apocalyptic to British observers.⁷¹ Initially, by March 17, the *Times* hailed the beneficial prospects a united German Empire would bring to European tranquillity and towards the continental interests of Britain.⁷² Yet the mobilisation of the Prussian army heralding the invasion of the Danish Jutland swiftly revised this sanguine position. Calling attention to the territorially 'hungry' Powers of Russia in the east and France in the west, the *Times* decried a "northern quarrel" as "alienating the goodwill and respect of England when they might be most useful to Germany."⁷³ An article in the *Edinburgh Review* titled *The Germanic Empire* further condemned German aggression towards Denmark. Yet despite this

⁶⁹ The Rhine Crisis involved the threat of a French invasion of the Rhine which in turn sparked a wave of mass nationalism in Germany. The Rhine Crisis was referred to only once by the *Times*, more than nearly all the rest of the British press, and this regarded a silver tankard gifted to Nikolaus Becker, the author of the poem 'Rheinlied' which called for the defence of the territory, by the King of Bavaria, Müller, *German Question*, 42-43.

⁷⁰ In the election of 830 members over 600 had a university education; 124 were teachers; 106 were lawyers; 312 were civil servants or judges; 60 were from trade and commerce; and only 46 were from agriculture, Thomas Nipperdey, *Germany from Napoleon to Bismarck, 1800-1866*, translated by Daniel Nolan (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996) 541.

⁷¹ It was only later in the 1850s that a feeling of superiority from not having succumbed to revolutionary fervour like the continent arose from the British, but "In 1848-50 the atmosphere was more apocalyptic", Jonathan Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe 1830-1866*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006) 172.

⁷² "Whatever tends to strengthen an Imperial or Federal Power in Germany is an auspicious event for the peace and prosperity of Europe, and is in all respects conformable to the permanent continental interests and policy of Great Britain", *Times* 17 March, 1848.

⁷³ *Times* 15 April, 1848.

denouncement, the author endorsed the substitution of an “unconquerable nation” in the place of the divided Confederation between Russia and France; the benefits of a strong united Germany to check the expansion of its neighbours took precedence over the means of unification.⁷⁴ Whilst a Whiggish propensity characterised this article – the author believed this aggression was not the true German character, but rather the invasion was a part of the popular yearning for a constitution. This coinciding view held with the *Times*, regarding the balance of power, demonstrates the primacy of strategic utility within British perceptions of a united Germany. Although contradicting the line of official policy, which was to mediate in the affair, Fox-Strangways (minister plenipotentiary to the German Confederation in Frankfurt) went so far as to call for Denmark to enter the Confederation. Strangways argued such a move would consolidate the security of North Germany and would prevent Denmark from becoming an instrument of Russia to close the Sound.⁷⁵

By the summer of 1848 conflict arose in Holstein as it was felt the rights of the German minority residing there had been compromised by Denmark, and this spurred a wave of popular German nationalism that called for the defence of their liberty. Denmark requested that Britain, who had guaranteed in 1721 to defend the integrity of that country, to intervene in the conflict and come to its defence to which Britain offered only mediation both to Germany and Denmark in the dispute. The First Schleswig-Holstein Crisis had the important effect of stirring misgivings in Britain. Public opinion began to question whether German unity or rather German nationalism was a volatile or stabilising force for the peace of Europe.⁷⁶ The war with Denmark, as Lord Cowley wrote, had shown “a laxity of political morality among the Germans, which, if repeated, must destroy all confidence in them as a Nation.”⁷⁷ In July 1848 Cowley had been dispatched to Frankfurt by Palmerston to report on the condition of Germany. A detailed account befitting the vigilance and talent of this diplomat, who would attain the post of British ambassador to France in 1852, was sent back to the foreign office in August. Cowley found difficulty in tracing the origins of the March disorganization: the German economy was flourishing, the Sovereigns seemed inclined to grant free institutions, and religious freedom was guaranteed everywhere. Yet the middle classes had come under mob-rule, and, as Cowley wrote: “At this moment, there is not a corner of Germany that is not in a state of Confusion and demoralization, from which it may require years to recover.”⁷⁸ The National Assembly, Cowley found, was comprised of “mere theorists” who were unacquainted with the working of the state, let alone the development of a constitution. Beyond the object of German unity, there were no principles that united the Paulskirche: there existed a Foreign Minister without diplomatic agents; a Minister of the Interior without jurisdiction in Frankfurt; a Finance Minister without a treasury; a Minister of Justice without laws; and a Minister of Commerce without an approved policy from the Central Parliament.⁷⁹ Austria, meanwhile, distracted in her attempts to restore order to the

⁷⁴ “The Germanic Empire”, *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. LXXXVIII (1848) 284.

⁷⁵ Strangways to Palmerston, 10 May 1848. FO 30/106 in Mosslang et al. (2006) 25.

⁷⁶ The issue of Schleswig-Holstein has a long convoluted history, a quotation is often attributed to Palmerston as saying only three people understood it, one had died, one had gone mad, and the third, himself, had forgotten it. In 1846 a group of professors in Heidelberg claimed due to historical precedent the territory of Schleswig-Holstein belonged to Germany. The *Times* lambasted the professors reading of history, writing “nothing in nature burns with more furious intensity than a German Professor when he is once really kindled” ... “he will only take fire at high temperature, and that his explosive properties must be developed by a tedious and gradual secretion of combustible matter; but at last bounce he goes.” *Times* 25 August, 1846.

⁷⁷ Cowley to Palmerston, 17 September 1848. FO 30/110 in Mosslang et al. (2006) 37.

⁷⁸ Cowley to Palmerston, 20 August 1848. FO 30/109 in Mosslang et al. (2006) 29.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 32.

Empire, did not get involved at Frankfurt. Ultimately conceding to a pessimistic outlook, Cowley saw no men of talent at the National Assembly nor a future for the Central Power. He predicted Germany would be divided into two distinct Northern and Southern Powers, yet whether this would be obtained peacefully or not remained uncertain.⁸⁰

As 1848 concluded Cowley's view of German unity, as "construed by the words, confusion, anarchy, and misery," may have been representative of the difficulty British public opinion found in comprehending this new era of the German question.⁸¹ Within the National Assembly, the question of the future composition of Germany took precedence during the autumn and winter. Whether there would be a *grossdeutsch* solution, in which Austria would attain supremacy and form an 'Empire of 70 million' with all its non-German territories included, or a *kleindeutsch* solution, whereas Prussia would lead a more compact union of Germany without Austria, constituted the two possibilities of unification. On 28 March, 1849, Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia was elected as the new German Kaiser by the Paulskirche. Speculating in January on this eventuality, the *Times* asserted Britain had much to gain from Prussian predominance in Germany: "for between England and Germany there is no probable cause of hostility, but, on the contrary, very extensive common interests."⁸² Nevertheless, the paper continued it remained likely the King would reject the throne as Germany itself would be divided against him, and simultaneously, such a fundamental change to the balance of power would incur the hostility of Europe. Cowley, in principle, approved of the Prussian *kleindeutsch* solution as he believed it would produce strong central governance without which peace in Germany would be impossible. Furthermore, Cowley, whose priorities deviated somewhat from the *Times* which focused more intently upon the European dimension of the question,⁸³ believed neither the Sovereigns of the Lesser States nor Austria would allow such a move. Instead, it was likely Prussia and Austria would head into collision; the former would champion the cause of constitutional liberties, the latter being the opponent, and that a united Germany would, in the end, expel Austria who could not abide by constitutionalism.⁸⁴ Ultimately, Friedrich Wilhelm declined the mantle of Emperor and Austria, Prussia, Bavaria, Hanover and Saxony rejected the imperial constitution drafted by the Paulskirche. By May the bubble had burst, the National Assembly imploded and succumbed to irrelevancy amidst a wave of counter-revolution across Germany.

A new scheme to settle the internal organisation of Germany arose from Prussia on 26 May known as the Three King's Alliance. Saxony and Hanover aligned with Prussia to attain a *kleindeutsch* solution to the German question and twenty-eight German States later joined what would come to be known as the Erfurt Union. John Duncan Bligh (minister plenipotentiary to Hanover) thought the Union constituted a decisive step within Prussian ambitions to consolidate Northern Germany under its grasp. "The die is cast," he wrote to Palmerston on 12 July, "which may eventually make Hanover the loser of her independent Sovereignty, and Position and that she will become politically and commercially a portion of a north German Union."⁸⁵ Palmerston, who until this point ordered British diplomats to

⁸⁰ Ibid. 35.

⁸¹ Cowley to Palmerston, 4 November 1848. FO 30/113 in Mosslang et al. (2006) 43.

⁸² *Times*, 26 January, 1849.

⁸³ "England, careless as to the change itself, would observe with regret so wide a departure from the principle of the general peace; so that, to sum up this objection in one sentence, for Prussia to accept the Imperial Crown of Germany is to oppose herself single-handed against the whole array of European Powers, more or less united against herself, but none being disposed to assist her undertaking", *Times*, 7 April, 1849.

⁸⁴ Cowley to Palmerston, 17 February, 1849. FO 30/123 in Mosslang et al. (2006) 56-57.

⁸⁵ Bligh to Palmerston, 12 July, 1849. FO 34/57 in Mosslang et al. (2006) 245.

outwardly maintain strict neutrality upon German developments between 1848-49, presented a remarkable change of course on 13 July in favour of the Erfurt Union. In a despatch sent to Earl Westmorland, Minister Plenipotentiary to Berlin, Palmerston laid out his definitive support for a kleindeutsch solution to the German question: “Such an extensive organization of Germany, would no doubt be advantageous to the German people, with reference both to their internal interests, and to their foreign relations, and it would consequently on that account be advantageous to Europe at large”.⁸⁶

Palmerston’s despatch can be explained by both the pragmatism that characterised his foreign policy - the Confederation had entered the ranks of extinct European institutions and the Erfurt Union appeared to offer some semblance of retaining the balance of power in Central Europe – and by the criteria he had previously defined of British interests in Germany. In a House of Commons speech on 2 August 1832 Palmerston declared the *raison d’être* of the German Confederation formed by the Treaty of Vienna “was not only the internal and external safety of the States which compose it, but also the maintenance inviolate of their individual independence. It, therefore, cannot be denied, that anything which threatens to destroy or violate that independence, would be inconsistent with the principles on which the Confederacy was established, and would so far be a departure from the Treaty of Vienna, to which all the great Powers of Europe were contracting parties.” He continued his stance remained that “as long as our commerce is of importance to us—as long as Continental armies are in existence—as long as it is possible that a power in one quarter may become dangerous to a power in another—so long must England look with interest on the transactions of the Continent, and so long is it proper for this country, in the maintenance of its own independence, not to shut its eyes to anything that threatens the independence of Germany.”⁸⁷

Thus for Palmerston, and those in Britain that followed his ideas of territorial conservatism, the integrity and independence of Germany was the keystone to European security. Strife within Germany would invite the meddling of France and Russia and escalate into European conflagration, whilst a robust Germany would deter either of these Powers to make bids for territorial aggrandizement. This security prevented Britain from becoming dragged into Continental conflicts which could only ever be detrimental to her commercial and extra-European interests; although the tightrope walked between interventionism and non-intervention to achieve this did not always produce the desired result.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, the maintenance of peace, or in other words the status quo, remained paramount to Britain’s European policy. This functionalist view of Germany within the European states system also acted as the leitmotiv of the views held by British public opinion towards the German question. As will be further shown, it resulted in tacit support for Prussian predominance that became a recurrent and widely held viewpoint by a majority of British actors. This sentiment also dictated how Britain perceived the Zollverein, for instance, Bligh had called the Zollverein the “foundation stone” of Prussia’s “long cherished object of her ambition ‘the consolidation of Germany under her supremacy.’”⁸⁹ Throughout this chapter, this dominant

⁸⁶ “The Central Power at Frankfort, which has to have been the nucleus around which German unity was to have been formed, seems to have crumbled to pieces. [...] The scheme of German unity which has led to no result at Frankfort has been taken up at Berlin and [...] has, provisionally at least, been worked into a practical measure.” Palmerston to Westmorland, 13 July 1849. FO 519/165 in Müller, *German Question*, 117.

⁸⁷ HC Deb 02 August 1832 vol 14 cc1030-71.

⁸⁸ Richard Millman, *British Foreign Policy and the Coming of the Franco-Prussian War*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1965) 227.

⁸⁹ Bligh to Palmerston, 6 September. 1849. FO 34/57 in Mosslang et al. (2006) 248.

tendency continuously reveals itself during the question of the 1853 renewal of the Zollverein. Although other strands of perceptions are demonstrated, often focused upon the question in purely economic terms, the balance of power remained the bottom line.

The Cassel Conferences, 1850

Austria's relative absence from German affairs between 1848-49 pressed British public opinion to support a Prussian kleindeutsch solution to the German question. However, by 1850 Austria had quelled the insurrections spread throughout its dominions with the aid of Russian intervention. The British ambassador to Austria, Viscount Ponsonby, – an Austrophile who advocated British moral support towards that Empire, as he believed sustaining the territorially conservative and military power might be advantageous to Britain when a crisis emerged – whilst acknowledging the relationship between Austria and Russia was intimate, did not believe this equated to submission of the former to the latter.⁹⁰ However, this was not a sentiment representative of the Austrophobia prevalent throughout British public opinion.

At the beginning of 1850, an article titled *Germany and Erfurt* appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* recounting the events that had transpired over the prior two years. The author began by lamenting the missed opportunity of the King of Prussia to unite Germany under a constitutional monarchy. Such a move would have impressed the desires of the German people on the history of Europe, instead, the article continued, “of the nullity of the diplomatic equilibrium, which may represent, indeed, contending principles, but which expressed only rival interests.”⁹¹ This was a turning point in history unavailable to Austria who as an absolute and centralised state was incompatible with the circumstances of the Revolution. Furthermore, Austria's decision to call in Russian troops to suppress the Hungarian Rebellion “was an odious characteristic in the judgement as well as instincts of all true Germans.” Now, as a result, “Prussia was winning national laurels all her own, while Austria was receiving Cossack aid.”⁹² This extract highlights the point that British Austrophobia can also be construed as Russophobia. For Britain, “whose commercial interests are so intimately bound up with the peace of Europe,” Austrian exasperation and Russian wrath constituted elements of distress. This is an especial point of significance as Britain's commercial interests are directly linked to the balance of power of Europe and the German question. Ideally, the author continued, a liberal alliance between Prussia and Austria based upon nationality would be the most desirable outcome. However, in reality, Austria's diverse distractions – which may lead to war with France or Piedmont for Lombardy, or Russia for Transylvania or Gallicia – threatened to compromise the rest of Germany.⁹³

On 14 January, 1850, the *Times*, whilst expressing its support for German unity generally and the Erfurt Union specifically, thought it unlikely unity would be achieved by amputating Austria. Prussia alone could not resist French ambitions upon the Rhine, nor Russia's hostility towards the revolutionary cause. The paper concluded: “for the military security of Germany on the west and on the east depends, now and at all times, on the union of the Austrian and the Prussian forces, which can never be detached from each other, or opposed to each other, without the most fatal consequences and the crowning humiliation of

⁹⁰ Ponsonby to Palmerston, 18 June, 1848. FO 7/350 in Mosslang et al. (2006) 412-413; Ponsonby to Palmerston, 17 January, 1850. FO 7/379 in Mosslang et al. (2006) 440.

⁹¹ “Germany and Erfurt”, *Edinburgh Review*, Vol XCI (1850) 305.

⁹² *Ibid.* 309.

⁹³ *Ibid.* 311.

foreign conquest.”⁹⁴ Dualism, therefore, was a desirable outcome for these observers in the abstract, but in practice as the Austro-Prussian rivalry intensified during the early 1850s British public opinion came to sympathise more with the Prussian course. For British observers the Zollverein constituted a clear example of Prussia providing tangible national consolidation in Germany; for British public opinion, who supported the overall goal of a German nation-state to guarantee the balance of power in Europe, unifying Germany economically further bolstered its independence and integrity. Both the German Powers and a majority of British observers appreciated the political influence the Zollverein had so far garnered Prussia.⁹⁵ Further within the article *Germany and Erfurt* the anonymous author, after calling attention to the upcoming renewal of the Customs Union in 1853, wrote: “the power of exclusion from the Zollverein, on its revision, is a weapon of force in the hand of Prussia.”⁹⁶ Austria was fully aware of the advantages of economic unity in Germany, yet it could not compel the Lesser States to consent to its system of prohibitive tariffs. Ultimately for this commentator, the Zollverein evidenced the beneficial future Prussian political predominance could offer Germany in the long term.⁹⁷

To counter Prussia’s leadership in the economic arena Austria constructed its own plan for the commercial union of Germany. Originally the Austrian memorial was published in the *Vienna Gazette* on 26 October, 1849, but only in the following February was the document communicated officially to the other German States.⁹⁸ The architect of the plan was the Austrian Minister of Commerce Karl von Bruck. Bruck, who had been influenced by the writings of List, designed to reform the Austrian tariff from a system of prohibition to protection to put the Empire on a better footing in future negotiations with the Zollverein. Prince Schwarzenberg (Minister-President of Austria) adopted Bruck’s plan of a ‘Mitteleuropa’ – which was primarily concerned with the future economic wellbeing of Central Europe – to gain a political victory over Prussia by forcing it into a subordinate role in the proposed union.⁹⁹ The crux of the Austrian argument was that the Zollverein tariff, originating in 1818, had become obsolete and provided an insufficient amount of protection to German industry against foreign competition.¹⁰⁰ A customs conference would be called, entrusted to the authority of the central power of Germany, in which the other states would send delegates. Austria aimed to make the customs union a federal issue – thus dovetailing its scheme to counter the Erfurt Union by reconstituting the German Confederation in which Austria traditionally functioned as the Chairman – to outmanoeuvre Prussia who deliberately resisted any secession of its influence in the Zollverein to federal jurisdiction. However, reporting to Palmerston from Leipzig John Ward appraised the scheme as a contradiction of

⁹⁴ *Times*, 14 January, 1850.

⁹⁵ For example, the *Economist* reported to its readership it was “the openly expressed opinion of the Austrian Cabinet that the unity of Germany is more likely to be effected by closely uniting the material interests of the several states than by convoking parliaments, whether at Erfurt or Frankfort”, *Economist*, 16 February, 1850.

⁹⁶ “Germany and Erfurt”, *Edinburgh Review*, Vol XCI (1850) 312.

⁹⁷ “From present appearances then, we think, it may fairly be concluded that the political influence of Prussian predominance would not, in the long run, be adverse to the constitutional liberties of Germany”, *Ibid*.

⁹⁸ Austria argued this was because there was no official body at the time that represented Germany.

⁹⁹ Henderson, *Zollverein*, 198-202.

¹⁰⁰ The basis of the treaty to remedy this contained five points: “1. Establishing a reciprocal duty free export and import of native or German produce, in the form of raw materials of fabrics, provisions, and half or partly manufactured articles, if a proportionate protective export duty can be obtained on the frontiers of such states as do not belong to the union. 2. Free transit to and from Austria. 3. A reciprocal diminution of the process of inspection and examination of goods on the frontiers. 4. A regulation of the navigation laws as applying to the German rivers and diminution of the tolls. 5. A further extension and regulation of post and railway communication, the telegraph system, and steam boat traffic”, *Times*, 12 February, 1850.

free trade principles: “it is frequently declared in the Austrian Memorials that the result of a commercial union of the whole Austrian German body can in no case be the introduction of free trade.”¹⁰¹

The Ninth Annual Zollverein Congress had been delayed due to the turmoil of the revolutions in Germany. The Congress, scheduled to be held at Cassel in July, 1850, now became highly politicised following Baron Bruck’s proposal. Prussia faced the dilemma of retaining the Southern German members of the Zollverein who were disposed to greater protection. The *Times*, in an article on 20 April, understood the Austrian scheme promised to “materially diminish the influence that Prussia, as the head of the Zollverein, has so long enjoyed in the north of Germany.” In the following sentence, the article linked the commercial conflict to an upcoming Congress to be held at Frankfurt, where plenipotentiaries from all the German states would be sent, which aimed to resolve the open question of Germany’s internal organisation.¹⁰² British public opinion frequently linked the Zollverein to the wider political issues of the German question, such as federal reform, and can thus be seen to have recognised its far-reaching connotations for unification.

The *Economist*, in an article published on 11 May, further evidences this point. After concluding the separate schemes of Austria and Prussia, which had created “two Diets,” “two federations,” and “two German nations instead of one,” postponed indefinitely the political unification of Germany, the paper called attention to “another kind of union,” which was “more worthy of men’s exertions than the project of making Germany a great political empire.”¹⁰³ The *Economist* advocated the inclusion of Austria and its dominions into the Zollverein – though not the Austrian proposal specifically – as the eradication of custom houses and numerous tolls conformed to the “philosophy of the age.”¹⁰⁴ This is in reference to free trade as a significant proportion of British liberals who followed Cobdenite principles believed, looking back at Britain’s recent tariff liberalisation, it constituted the predetermined eventuality of enlightened governance all states must eventually reach. Furthermore, the author argued, the Zollverein had shown such a project was compatible with the individual sovereignty of the separate states that formed it.¹⁰⁵ This, in turn, implied a federal solution, conforming to the particularism that characterised the Confederation, constituted the ideal outcome – although this may also be interpreted as an example of Cobdenite dogma as the doctrine believed commerce would come to dictate the foreign relations of nations.¹⁰⁶

Three assemblies convened in early May to solve the federal and commercial questions of Germany: on 10 May at Frankfurt the legal revision of the Federal Constitution was to be discussed which Prussia refused to attend; on 8 May the remnants of the Erfurt Union, which had by this point lost most of its momentum, met at Berlin;¹⁰⁷ and on 10 May a preliminary meeting of the Zollverein delegates also gathered at Berlin. An editorial in the *Times* passionately called for Prussia to cease its isolated course and participate in the

¹⁰¹ Ward to Palmerston, 28 November 1850. FO 68/97.

¹⁰² *Times*, 20 April 1850.

¹⁰³ *Economist*, 11 May 1850.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ In a speech made at London on 28 February, 1843, Cobden elaborated upon the moral revolution his doctrine pursued: “Free Trade! What is it? Why, breaking down the barriers, behind which nestle the feelings of pride, revenge, hatred, and jealousy, which every now and then burst their bounds, and deluge whole countries with blood” in Richard Cobden, *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy*, ed. John Bright, James Thorold Rogers, (London, Macmillan, 1878) 40.

¹⁰⁷ On 21 February Hanover withdrew from the Erfurt Union, followed by Saxony on 24 May, Hesse-Cassel on 22 June, and Hesse-Darmstadt on 4 July.

reconstitution of the German Confederation. The *Times*, which fluctuated between overt support for Prussian leadership on the one hand and dualism on the other, in this instance emphasised the two Great Powers must repair their schism for the sake of the independence of Germany: “There may be jealousies, there may be differences, for Germany is fitly represented by a bicephalous eagle; but when those two heads are turned against each other all national security is lost, and the exigencies of the time infallibly drive one party or both into too close a dependence on a foreign alliance. To avert that evil was the grand object of the treaties of 1815, and Prussia is held responsible to Europe for strict obedience to those engagements.”¹⁰⁸ The *Economist*, analogues to the *Times*, further condemned Prussia’s pursuit of its own interests above those of Germany: “the Zollverein satisfied her own ambition to the same degree that it profited Germany, otherwise it would not have been constituted; all her proceedings had sought the prize of aggrandisement, as the Erfurt Union was formed to this end; and the Northern German States would lose their independence to Prussian ambition which ran counter to securing the peace of Germany.”¹⁰⁹ This criticism of the Prussian course by the press is significant to recognise, without going so far as to say the British press was fickle, which would not be an inaccurate conclusion, the important point is support for Prussia was not unconditional and it occasionally wavered. Whilst the British press from time to time recognised ‘the Emperor has no clothes,’ in that Prussia primarily pursued a cynical path of its own self-aggrandisement, it is curious to note how quickly this fundamental point became forgotten. This might be explained, as argued by Goddard, by Prussia’s effective legitimisation strategies that appealed to shared rules and norms to prevent coalitions from forming against it.¹¹⁰ Alternatively, the prevalent hope of convergence held in Britain, that increased economic ties with Prussia would make it more liberal and Western, may be identified as an ‘unspoken assumption’ which held pervasive influence during perception formulation.

August von der Heydt, the protectionist leaning Prussian Minister of Commerce, opened the proceedings of the twenty-seven delegates of the manufacturing and commercial interests of the Zollverein at Berlin. Von der Heydt presented the Prussian plan for the next revision of the Zollverein tariff: the duty of linen and woollen yarns was to be raised; the tolls on the rivers were to be reduced by half; whilst the import duty on corn, cattle, and flax would also be reduced.¹¹¹ Followingly, by 17 May all the proposals were approved by the Zollverein delegates.¹¹² Upon hearing the news of this resolution the agricultural class of Prussia erupted into a fervour and flooded the Minister of Commerce with petitions demanding the reductions be dropped. The *Times* observed the Prussian agriculturalists repeated “all the arguments and many of the phrases of the English Protectionists.”¹¹³ This framing of the Prussian agricultural interest in terms of Britain’s own Corn Law debate reveals why the Zollverein received a significant amount of attention by the British press. It resonated with the recent political crisis of Repeal in 1846, furthermore, the international context at this point in time placed heavy emphasis upon industrialisation and trade, and this captivated the interest of British readers who could identify with the ongoing free trade debate in Germany.

¹⁰⁸ *Times*, 8 May 1850.

¹⁰⁹ *Economist*, 18 May 1850.

¹¹⁰ Goddard, “When Right Makes Might”, 112.

¹¹¹ *Times*, 14 May 1850.

¹¹² *Times*, 17 May 1850.

¹¹³ *Times*, 20 May 1850.

The tariff proposed by Prussia laid bare its inconsistent commercial policy of championing free trade on one hand whilst increasing protection with the other. This can be explained by the quandary Prussia faced of having to appease both the free trade orientated Northern German States and the protectionist South. The vested interests of these two groups, noted the *Times*, added “to the intricacy and perplexity of the “German Question,” and even within the Zollverein itself it is likely to introduce disunion.”¹¹⁴ In further expounding this dynamic the *Times* used the case of the Zollverein as a nexus for the wider political conflicts of the German question. The article, written by the *Times*’ own correspondent in Prussia and published on 24 June, remarked: “Whether Germany is regarded politically or commercially, in every respect its tendency is not to union, but difference: North against South is free trade against protection; East against West is Prussia against Austria, with a natural disposition to still smaller divisions.”¹¹⁵ The advanced understanding of the *Times* towards the nature of the German question can be traced to its hegemonic position within the British press. The comprehensive network of foreign correspondents it maintained was incomparable to its rivals – the *Guardian* and the *Observer* did not report at all upon the First Zollverein Crisis. Specifically, the *Times*’ Prussia correspondent demonstrated an attentive appreciation of the political developments of the German question and composed their analysis in relation to Britain’s perceived interests in Europe. This can be explained by the *Times*’ view of Britain as the ‘arbiter of Europe’ which, in line with the policies of Palmerston, involved ceaseless advocacy of Britain’s geopolitical interests through the maintenance of the balance of power.

On 6 July, the Zollverein Congress commenced at Cassel and comprised of delegates from the following states: Prussia, Bavaria, Wurttemberg, Saxony, Baden, the Grand Duchy of Hesse, the Thuringian states, Brunswick, Nassau, and the free city of Frankfurt. John Ward, who was appointed as Britain’s consul-general to Leipzig by Lord Aberdeen in 1845, was charged with the duty to attend the annual Zollverein conferences and report upon their proceedings. Upon his arrival at Cassel Ward found commissioners from other foreign states (Belgium, Switzerland, and Luxemburg) had been dispatched with the same objective. Ward noted the political climate in Germany had given the Conference an unusual significance. Prussia, in its attempt to maintain the integrity of the Zollverein, had proposed to increase the tariffs on articles of foreign manufactures; Austria, who coveted the formation of a German customs union with its own Empire, thought the Conference an obstacle to this end and desired the new duties should be halted so the Southern States would continue to be disgruntled with the Zollverein and side with its own scheme instead. Bavaria and Wurttemberg attempted to advance the proposals of Prussia, to which Prussia itself half-heartedly pursued, whilst the delegates of the foreign states, spurred by their own economic interests, assisted Austria in torpedoing the proceedings aiming for the dissolution of the Conference without producing any changes.¹¹⁶ As Davis has rightly illustrated, British diplomats perceived the situation at Cassel in primarily economic terms. This outlook was encased within a free trade gusto, as dictated by the Board of Trade, which took great offence at Prussia’s contradiction of tariff liberalisation.¹¹⁷

To this end, Ward presented a protest on Britain's behalf at the Congress.

¹¹⁴ *Times*, 24 June 1850.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Ward, *Diplomatist*, 98.

¹¹⁷ Davis, *Zollverein*, 80; On 16 July Stanford questioned the Government in the Commons whether any news of the Conference had arrived, anxiety was raised towards the possibility of Austria entering the Zollverein with all its possessions, however, it is not possible to recount the Government’s response as volume 112 of the third series of Hansard is missing from the archive, *Times*, 16 July 1850.

Surprisingly, he recounted in his autobiography, he found more allies than he had expected; the government of Hesse-Cassel, who were politically anti-Prussian, whilst claiming to support the tariff revision actually plotted against it.¹¹⁸ After the proceedings had sat for four months – which whilst secret Ward managed to relay detailed reports of their advancement to the foreign office – Ward had learnt, to his astonishment, the Prussian proposals had been rejected not by a state aligned with the Austrian interest, such as Saxony or Hanover, “but by the single vote of the representative of the duchy of Brunswick!”¹¹⁹ Thus one of the weakest states in the Union had blocked Prussia’s objectives at Cassel – since the Zollverein functioned on a system of unanimity, or ‘one state, one vote’ with universal veto privileges. The *Economist*, speculating Brunswick might leave the Zollverein and enter the orbit of the free trade Hanoverian Steuerverein (the ‘tax-union’ of Northern German States separate to the Zollverein), condemned the protectionist policies of von der Heydt. “The Zollverein is a lasting benefit to Germany,” it wrote on 26 October, “and must not be permitted to lose the slightest chance of increase through the vagaries of a Minister of Commerce who appears to watch over the interests of his own house in Elberfeld more than over those of the country in general.”¹²⁰ Eventually, as Prussia could not hope to unravel the collusion that led to Brunswick’s veto, the Conference dissolved in November. In concluding upon this episode Ward expounded: “The Austrian policy therefore prevailed, less by reason of its own strength than because the Prussian government did not think it worth while to raise the tariff in order to please the governments of Bavaria and Wurtemberg, which were becoming every day more Austrian.”¹²¹

The Zollverein Congress had also separated for another more immediately volatile reason: the Frankfurt Rump Diet¹²² ordered federal troops to enter Electoral Hesse to resolve an ensuing constitutional crisis, Prussian troops also occupied the State and came into open conflict with the federal forces.¹²³ The crisis in Hesse-Cassel received fierce condemnation from the British press directed primarily at the Prussian course. An editorial in the *Observer*, after belittling the “Germanicism” of its more “liberal contemporaries,” decried the despotism and self-aggrandisement of the King as revealing Prussia was not the “friend of constitutional progress” it claimed to be.¹²⁴ A similar editorial in the *Manchester Guardian* criticised Prussia’s decision to prioritise the military roads crossing Hesse over the constitutional rights of that state. “There was not to be found in all Europe a man of weight,” the *Guardian* wrote, “who placed any confidence in her liberal professions.” In short, it concluded, “Prussian liberalism is ‘used up.’”¹²⁵ In contrast, an article titled “The Menace of War in Germany” which appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* sympathised with Prussian resistance of Austria; and it can be seen the *Edinburgh Review* generally, or the anonymous author(s) specifically,

¹¹⁸ Ward, *Diplomatist*, 99.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Economist*, 26 October 1850.

¹²¹ Ward, *Diplomatist*, 99.

¹²² An Austrian led coalition reconstituted the Germanic Diet on 2 September, 1850 in which only twelve of the thirty-six German states acceded.

¹²³ The Landstände refused to grant the Elector taxation supply and in response, the assembly was dissolved on 2 September, 1850, an emergency tax decree was declared on 4 September, and martial law was declared on 7 September. The Elector requested the Federal Diet’s support to quell the resistance of his subjects. On 26 October the Frankfurt Rump Diet ordered federal troops to Electoral Hesse, a Prussian army corps under General de Tietzen also occupied that State on 1 November to guarantee the right of Prussian troops to use military roads in that territory which served the important function of connecting East and West Prussia.

¹²⁴ *Observer*, 24 November 1850.

¹²⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 4 December 1850.

supported a kleindeutsch solution to the German question. In recounting the political developments within Germany since 1848 the author argued against the dangers of Austrian predominance in Northern Germany: an Austrian Zollverein would exclude British goods in favour of Slavonic and Lombard manufactures; Austria's censorship of the press would bind Leipzig and Hanover to Vienna; and Catholic suppression would trample over Germany's religious freedom.¹²⁶ The intervention of the Diet in Hesse-Cassel had exemplified the warlike conduct of the Austrian Emperor and, if war should be averted, it was due to Prussia's mobilisation of the army.

The crux of the argument exhibited in the *Edinburgh Review* can be summarised by the extract: "Prussia could only increase her power by extending liberal principles. Austria can only extend hers by destroying them."¹²⁷ As can be seen, British public opinion evaluated Prussia with a liberal criterion which also dictated how it perceived its position in the German question. The key focus points within this liberal view rested upon constitutional liberty, free trade, and Protestantism. The balance of power in Europe also held a prominent position within this equation. The *Edinburgh Review* continued the "tranquillity of Europe," besides what "any lover of peace, nor Mr. Cobden himself, believe," rested upon Prussia's defiance of the "Absolutist Powers" of Austria and Russia.¹²⁸ Comparing this resistance to those of chivalrous Teutonic knights, the article concluded the individual German States must not submit to a Federal Power, and should instead prevent the inclusion of Austria's non-German provinces into the Diet.¹²⁹ In contrast, an article appearing in the *Quarterly Review* titled "Germany and the King of Prussia" regretted both the political schemes of Austria and Prussia. A defence of the traditional German Confederation was expounded as, although imperfect and cumbersome, it had served the function of keeping the peace between the German States.¹³⁰ The Confederation had kept the balance, and thus demonstrated its utility, by presenting resistance to the ambitions and self-seeking designs of the individual states. This can be exemplified, the author argued, by the Zollverein in that Prussia's schemes for aggrandisement pursued extra-federal alliances. Prussia through the Zollverein had excluded Austria and sidestepped the Confederation, it had amalgamated most of the Lesser States, "and even placed them to some extent in financial dependence on her exchequer."¹³¹ It is significant to note how the Zollverein is often discussed in tandem with matters of war and peace in Germany. It was thus perceived by British public opinion as a core issue within the German question, or at least as much so as federal or domestic political reform. Furthermore, the Zollverein is overtly recognised as a vehicle of Prussian predominance, which further evidences British public opinion appreciated the customs union had garnered Prussia significant political capital.

The Dresden Conferences, 1850-51

The crisis in the Electorate of Hesse that had brought the Austro-Prussian rivalry to the brink of war had been mitigated by the Punctuation of Olmutz on 29 November, 1850. The Treaty signed by Austria and Prussia agreed the Erfurt Union would disband and the German Confederation would be reinstated. Cowley found it difficult to assess who the ultimate victor as Olmutz was, but looking on with the interests of Europe in mind he pondered which

¹²⁶ "The Menace of War in Germany", *Edinburgh Review* Vol XCII (1850/1851) 101-102.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* 102.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* 103.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ "Germany and the King of Prussia", *Quarterly Review* Vol LXXXVIII (1850/1851) 180.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* 181.

outcome was preferable: “such a Convention as has been signed at Olmutz with peace, or the continued estrangement of the two great German Powers with the horrors, ruin, and misery of international war.”¹³² Within the Convention – which ultimately marked a resounding capitulation on Prussia’s behalf – a series of ‘free conferences’ were to be held in Dresden to arrange Germany’s internal organisation. The British press eagerly anticipated the Dresden Conferences. An editorial in the *Manchester Guardian*, analogous of Cowley, hoped Dresden would secure the preservation of peace in Europe. The article also commented on Austria’s dependency upon the “will of Russia,” as the Tsar had sided with Austria at Olmutz in an attempt to pour cold water over the crisis in Cassel, which echoes earlier views presented by the *Edinburgh Review*.¹³³ As the independence of Germany was broadly sought by British public opinion, Russian interference on the side of Austria tarnished the standing of that Power and diminished its position within the contest for German leadership.

One of the many issues to be discussed at the Dresden Conferences, which opened on the 23 December, 1850, was the commercial unity of Germany. The *Times* and the *Economist* were attentive towards the significance the Zollverein held within the political issues of Germany’s internal organisation. The *Economist* – which perceived the present internal divisions of Germany in terms of free trade versus protectionism – supported the ascension of a northern Prussian Zollverein, including Saxony, Hanover, Mecklenburg, and the Hanse Towns, above an Austrian Union founded upon protectionist principles. It asserted the extension of the Zollverein, which had imposed “Prussian political influence so far beyond the line of the Maine” and into Bavaria, Wurttemberg and Baden, “has long been a subject of great discontent to Austria.”¹³⁴ However, this political influence had resulted in inertia as the conflict between northern free traders and the southern protectionists engendered deep animosity within the Zollverein. The *Economist*, in calling for the severance of the Southern States from the Union, argued: “Prussia will be able to develop the liberal maxims of political economy which her statesmen were the first to acknowledge.”¹³⁵ As a result, once pitted against each other the system of free trade would reign supreme in Germany: “the North would, by its freedom, become the land of industrial promise for our Swabian brethren, as the Western hemisphere now is that of political release; and as soon as that fact became notorious, as it soon must, the game of Protection would be upon the whole Continent, as surely as it is in England.”¹³⁶ Thus for the *Economist* free trade promised a liberal, Northern Union of Germany under Prussian leadership that would become integrated into the Western bloc of nations. In turn, it can be seen the publication superimposed its idea of British identity, as well as its Radical free trade idealism, onto the ideal outcome of Germany’s internal organisation. The article concluded by predicting the Zollverein would foster representative institutions within Germany, believing the governance of the Commercial Union would accede to an elective body and would induce closer unity through the common regulation of tariffs, post, railways, river and canal navigation, currency, banking, and policing.¹³⁷

The *Times* thought the outlook for the Zollverein at the Conferences appeared gloomy: the German press had reported Count Alvensleben, one of the earliest proponents of the Union, would represent Prussia and it seemed “the two leading Powers of Germany intend to appear in full force at Dresden.”¹³⁸ Furthermore, the *Times* frequently speculated

¹³² Cowley to Palmerston, 9 December, 1850. FO 30/143 in Mosslang et al (2016) 101.

¹³³ *Manchester Guardian*, 11 December 1850; see footnote 24.

¹³⁴ *Economist*, 21 December 1850.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Times*, 23 December 1850.

upon the job security of von der Heydt and believed he would be forced to resign since his protectionist policy for the Zollverein had almost led to its dissolution (this view was based on an unsubstantiated rumour which ultimately proved incorrect). Instead, it believed Prussia would be compelled to entirely abandon protection and von der Heydt's resignation would signalise a new phase in its commercial policy.¹³⁹ The *Economist* further speculated upon the course the Great German Powers would pursue at Dresden regarding the commercial question. Austria would again push for a general Zollverein including all of the Confederation, Hungary, and Lombardy which, unless Austria dropped its protectionism, would be an impossibility. Prussia would form a new customs union with the Northern German States and let Bavaria, Wurttemberg, and Baden decide whether they would either accede or join the Austrian tariff instead. The *Economist* explained it had returned to the same subject as the article published a week prior because: "it is the grand question, and, in reality, more important than the arrangements of a mere political nature, which engross the public attention."¹⁴⁰ Thus for the *Economist* economic union rather than federal reform would be the true vehicle of German unification.

The Third Committee of the Dresden Conferences had been charged with the deliberations of the commercial question. Simultaneously, the Annual Zollverein Congress which had been disrupted the previous November reconvened at Wiesbaden. Saxony, in accordance with the particularist policy of Baron Beust,¹⁴¹ attempted to play the Great Powers against each other by submitting a memorandum to the Dresden Conferences calling for the total economic unification of Germany – including Austria, the Zollverein, the Steuerverein and any other unaffiliated state. In addition, Saxony, which was also supported by the Bavarian Government, proposed at the Annual Zollverein Congress there should be no overlap of agendas and called to defer negotiations at Wiesbaden to Dresden instead. In response, the Prussian Liberal party denounced the proposition as an Austrian scheme to break up the Zollverein. The *Times'* Prussia correspondent argued Prussia's opposition towards German commercial unity was a retrograde step. "A real commercial union of Germany," wrote the correspondent, "would prepare the way for their political fusion." Yet the extension of the "salutary principles of the Zollverein" was blocked by the jealous Prussian Constitutionalists who decry it as robbing Prussia of its rightful supremacy in Germany.¹⁴² The author continued "the preservation of peace had been a dreadful blow to it," and "if its existence as a Power really required war as a necessity and excluded all further improvement of the commercial interests of Central Europe," Prussia constituted a "barbarizing Power – a European calamity."¹⁴³

Whether there would be a Zollverein encompassing the entirety of the Confederation or a system of separate financial leagues formed the core division at Dresden. Count Alvensleben, whose position was supported by Hanover, had been instructed by the Prussian Government to reject any proposal based upon the former principle. The representatives of Austria, in contra, opposed the latter plan of allowing the States to maintain separate commercial unions. John Ward, who had been dispatched to observe the proceedings, reported to Palmerston on 22 January, 1851, his prediction of what the outcome to this impasse would be. To Ward, it appeared the best policy for Prussia, "both politically &

¹³⁹ *Times*, 27 December 1850.

¹⁴⁰ *Economist*, 28 December 1850.

¹⁴¹ The Foreign Minister of Saxony from 1849; Francis Reginald Forbes later reported during the zenith of the crisis a conversation with Beust whom expounded Saxony had disrupted the renewal of the Zollverein to limit Prussia's economic influence and acquire more autonomy for itself, Forbes to Malmesbury, 23 September 1852. FO 68/84 in Mosslang et al. (2010) 289.

¹⁴² *Times*, 18 January 1851.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

commercially,” would be to reduce its own tariff and approximate it with those of the Northern German States thus employing them as allies against the Austrian proposal.¹⁴⁴ By 29 January Ward was pleased to report Prussia would pursue this strategy: “it is a fortunate circumstance for the general interests of commerce, that the Prussian Cabinet should have been led, either by political considerations or otherwise, to change its views so decidedly in regard to the protective system, and to decide upon the introduction of a [the word ‘liberal’ is crossed out] moderate tariff, like that of Hanover.”¹⁴⁵

Britain’s foremost expert on the Zollverein therefore supported its union with the Steuerverein at the Dresden Conferences. This perception matches the views of the *Economist*, and it can be seen only the *Times* expressed the opposing view of condoning the complete commercial unity of Germany. These three actors formulated their positions for contrasting reasons: Ward had been instructed to protect Britain’s commercial interests at the Conferences and thus apolitically supported whichever party reduced tariffs;¹⁴⁶ the *Economist*, believing it would result in a liberal and Western outcome, supported a kleindeutsch solution to the German question; whilst the *Times* advocated dualism in line with its belief the present internal divisions of Germany had spurred chaos and destabilised the balance of power. Therefore how these actors perceived the conflict surrounding the Zollverein also represented how they viewed the wider German question. British policymakers were undecided as to what outcome the internal order of Germany should take.¹⁴⁷ The preservation of peace – besides the pursuit of free trade which functioned as a universal consensus point within British domestic politics – constituted the only consistent tenet of Britain’s Germany policy at this point.¹⁴⁸ Thus by early 1851 British public opinion exhibited a disparate range of views. Although no perception had yet attained privileged status, public opinion had recognised the Zollverein garnered Prussia significant influence and had the potential to determine the political organisation of Germany.

The Third Committee adjourned from 22 January until 1 February without producing any progress. In an editorial dated 4 February the *Times* aligned its views more intimately with the Austrian proposals. The editorial began by stating it looked with indifference towards the issue of federal reform at Dresden since the Diet would most certainly be reconstituted on the basis of the 1815 Vienna Settlement, rather, the commercial policy of Germany was “of incalculably greater interest and consequence.” The position of the *Times*, which supported “the collective interests of Germany,” surmised the practical solution to the turmoil of the last three years would be the “complete commercial union of the whole Confederation.”¹⁴⁹ The *Times* argued Austria’s scheme, which would place the commercial policy of Germany under federal authority, would complete the Zollverein rather than destroy it. Whilst Prussia, which attached itself to free trade to claim the respect of Britain, was the chief obstacle to the enlarged proposals of Austria which aimed to abolish all customs houses and internal duties throughout Germany. “Austria has resumed the command over her own dominions and her position at the head of Germany,” the editorial continued, and Austria was “earnest in the application of those principles which most concern the common welfare of the land.”¹⁵⁰

On 11 March the *Times* reprinted the article “Spread of Free Trade Principles” from

¹⁴⁴ Ward to Palmerston, 22 January 1851. FO 299/5.

¹⁴⁵ Ward to Palmerston, 29 January 1851. FO 299/5.

¹⁴⁶ Ward to Palmerston, 19 February 1851. FO 299/5.

¹⁴⁷ Müller, *German Question*, 150.

¹⁴⁸ “Free trade has outstanding claims to be considered the single most distinctive characteristic of the British state, joining Protestantism and Empire as an indispensable hallmark of England’s world ‘mission’”, Anthony Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England 1846-1946*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997) 1.

¹⁴⁹ *Times*, 4 February 1850.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

the *Examiner* congruent with its pro-Austrian position. However, the *Examiner* made a distinction between the political and economic dimensions of the question: “let us state, once for all, that we look upon the political union of the non-German states of Austria with the German Confederation as a totally different question from that of the Customs’ Union of all those States.”¹⁵¹ It argued the former would be destructive to the liberty and capability of Germany and the latter would prove a boon to Germany’s economic prosperity. It further observed Prussia embraced the doctrine of free trade for the sake of political opposition to Austrian supremacy. Prussia’s course of liberalising the tariff of the Zollverein to equate it with the Steuerverein would arrest Austrian entry, secure Northern Germany for itself, and thus mitigate the loss of the protectionist Southern States. Nevertheless, the article opined the union of Austria, the Zollverein, and Steuerverein would be the result most beneficial to the commerce of Britain. “Now, when we see such symptoms of the spread of free trade opinion through the States of Europe,” the *Examiner* concluded, “where nothing else free would seem to take root, and this entirely owing to the successful result of the experiment in England, does it not especially behave us to be careful that we do not by any retrograde movement on our own part cast a doubt on the truth or justice of the great principle?”¹⁵²

It appears, although acknowledging the political significance of the economic unification of Germany, the *Examiner* nonsensically divorced politics from economics – in a similar manner to British diplomats who were constrained by free trade essentialism – which ignored the nature of the question itself. Free trade idealism emerged in Britain from a sincere belief it constituted a liberal panacea; Britain’s own experience proved free trade resolved fierce class divisions and garnered domestic stability. The British understood free trade was a vehemently political issue – as the Repeal of the Corn Laws had proved – however, whilst acknowledging it held similar ramifications within the politics of German unification, British public opinion only felt justified in prescribing its own desired outcome on what they viewed as the less controversial half of the issue. The element of non-intervention within the Radical doctrine of free trade would explain this perception.¹⁵³ A speech Cobden gave at Birmingham towards the end of 1850 further clarifies this point: “If there be one thing on which I am more decidedly fanatical than another, it is on my doctrine that it is not well for an inhabitant of one country to interfere with the affairs of another country, which belong peculiarly and solely to the inhabitants of that country.”¹⁵⁴ Davis contends the views of British state actors towards the Zollverein were inherently based in “free trade dogma.”¹⁵⁵ Whilst chunks of the evidence presented so far support this view, and demonstrate parts of the press held an analogous perception, this conclusion is not representative of the divisions present within British public opinion as a whole. As will be shown, by 1852 the balance of power progressively garnered a parallel degree of magnitude within British perceptions of the Zollverein which, in turn, led to pronounced support for Prussian ascendancy in Germany.

By April Ward returned to Leipzig from Dresden as the work of the Commercial Committee remained stalled. Reporting upon developments thus far Ward wrote the “value of those conferences has been that they have been a measure of suspending [...] hostilities between Austria and Prussia which in November were so near breaking out.”¹⁵⁶ Whilst relieved the threat of war had dissipated in Germany, the British Government presented a

¹⁵¹ *Times*, 11 March 1851.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ “Non-intervention may appear to some a cold and negative and a wholly insufficient conception of internationalism. To Cobden, however, it was the only safe and sure condition for the play of the positive forces of human sympathy and solidarity between the members of different political communities”, Hobson, *International Man*, 9.

¹⁵⁴ Cobden quoted in *Manchester Guardian*, 4 December 1850.

¹⁵⁵ Davis, *Zollverein*, 21.

¹⁵⁶ Ward to Palmerston, 25 April 1851. FO 299/5.

remonstrance to the ‘empire of seventy million’ grossdeutsch plans of Schwarzenberg. As Ward further stated in his despatch, “the admission of the non-German Austrian provinces will certainly not be agreed to at Frankfort without the conditions necessary to preserve the purely defensive character of the Confederation.”¹⁵⁷ Thus the views of British state-actors were based upon the maintenance of the 1815 Vienna Settlement, believing this to be the best guarantee of peace following the upheaval of the past three years, as an enlarged Germany would threaten the balance of power in Europe. When questioned in the Commons whether, akin to France, Britain would insist the Treaty of Vienna must be upheld, in that Lombardy, Venice, and Galicia would not be allowed to enter the Confederation, Palmerston replied: “It was, therefore, the opinion of Her Majesty’s Government, when they heard of this intention, that such intention could not be carried into effect consistently with the law of Europe, unless with the consent of all those Powers who had been parties to the Treaty of Vienna in 1815.”¹⁵⁸

The Dresden Conferences ultimately resulted in failure. No agreement could be reached upon federal reform and one by one the German States returned to the system of the old Diet between May and June.

The Berlin Conferences, 1852

An explosive development within the Austro-Prussian commercial rivalry materialised in September 1851: reports began to circulate in Britain a commercial treaty between Prussia and Hanover had been signed on a free trade basis.¹⁵⁹ The Zollverein treaties were set to expire from 1 January 1854, and the members of the Union would decide whether they were to be renewed or not. Hanover would accede on this date which batched the renewal of the Zollverein with its potential enlargement. However, although Prussia had the authority to negotiate treaties on behalf of the Zollverein, it still required their unanimous assent.

The press swiftly perceived the benefits Prussia would accrue from this move. An editorial in the *Times*, which deviated from the stanch anti-Prussian position it presented so far, believed the treaty was a genuine move on Prussia’s behalf of advancing a liberal system in Germany consistent “with the general interests of Europe” and of all “trading nations.”¹⁶⁰ Whilst a sceptical optimism characterised the article, the publication argued Prussia is better suited to be aligned with the Northern German States, whose interests were more compatible with her own, than the Southern States. Thus far, it argued, Prussia sacrificed closer economic and political union with the North in its attempts of “extending her ascendancy over the States of Southern Germany” through the Zollverein.¹⁶¹ The *Times* concluded: “we are the more inclined to receive it [Prussia-Hanover Commercial Treaty] with confidence and satisfaction, in the hope of convincing our neighbours that, although we have laughed at some of their less successful attempts in the art of revolutions, we take a sincere interest in all that concerns their real welfare.”¹⁶² Therefore the commercial treaty had the immediate effect of swaying the *Times*, who a few months prior had been alienated by Prussia’s simultaneous protectionist and free trade policy, to instead perceive the role of Prussia in Germany in a better light.

In an article entitled “A New Zollverein in Germany” the *Economist*, contrasting the *Times*, bluntly stated, “such a prospective treaty is little better than waste paper.” It argued the probability of the treaty coming into effect was minimal, thus it could not share in the

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ HC Deb 10 April 1851 vol 115 cc1354-6.

¹⁵⁹ The information was leaked by the *Kolner Zeitung*, *Times*, 11 September, 1851.

¹⁶⁰ *Times*, 16 September 1851.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

optimism of the statesmen of Hanover and Berlin. Nevertheless, if the treaty were to be carried it would be “a step towards the unity of Germany,” and this extension of free trade would also constitute “a benefit to England as well as Germany.”¹⁶³ It can be surmised the opinion of the press changed with the circumstances, and the Prussia-Hanover treaty proved to British public opinion as a sincere gesture of Prussia’s commitment to free trade. This is further evidenced by the reversal of the views of the *Times*’ Prussia correspondent. The Treaty “is the real object of importance to the commercial interests of Germany,” the correspondent wrote, and Austria, “who does not propose anything positive,” now lagged behind Prussia.¹⁶⁴

The immediate significance of the Treaty for British public opinion was perceived through a free trade lens. This is demonstrated by British diplomats who evaluated the enlargement of the Zollverein in terms of Britain’s volume of trade with Northern Germany. George Lloyd Hodges (Charge d’ Affaires and Consul-General to the Hanse Towns in Hamburg) believed the members of the Steuerverein (Oldenburg, the two Mecklenburgs, Bremen, Lubeck, and Lauenburg) would be forced to raise their tariffs to the level of the Zollverein – to the detriment of British exports. In turn, Hamburg, who would become geographically surrounded by the enlarged Zollverein, would be forced to enter the Union: “thus would fall the last strong hold for Free Trade and British Manufactures in Germany.”¹⁶⁵ Ward took a more optimistic view and believed British manufacturers would be pleased with the free trade direction the amalgamation of the Zollverein and Steuerverein promised.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, Alexander Malet (Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Stuttgart), pointing to Austria’s precarious financial position, took the view Prussia “may fearlessly take her own line of policy.” Baden, Wurttemberg, and Bavaria would not risk the financial difficulties joining an Austrian commercial union would impose and would thus remain in the Zollverein.¹⁶⁷ By November, Prussia gave official notice via a circular despatch to the members of the Zollverein the treaties of the Union would expire in 1853; this action was a mere formality as any revision of the tariffs required presenting the same notice. A new Zollverein Conference would be held in Berlin, however, the internal affairs of the Union would not be discussed, rather the agenda would be dedicated to the question of its renewal upon the basis of the entry of Hanover and its affiliates.¹⁶⁸

British public opinion had reached a consensus in the belief the Zollverein would be renewed without opposition.¹⁶⁹ The *Times* energetically claimed Prussia had seized the initiative in the German question, and Austria would be forced to concede to Prussian economic supremacy. “Prussia, as the head of the Zollverein,” the *Times* wrote on 17 November, “has acquired an immense influence in Germany, which has been extended and increased by the Hanoverian Treaty, and her future course is too distinctly marked to be departed from. The probabilities are that Austria will have to purchase a closer connexion with the Zollverein by larger sacrifices than she is at present prepared to make.”¹⁷⁰ Austria, faced with a perilous loss of prestige, accelerated work on publishing a new tariff system to counter the Prussian initiative. The new tariff was announced on 25 November and would come into effect the following February. A customs conference would also convene in Vienna to negotiate both a commercial treaty and complete economic union of Germany.

¹⁶³ *Economist*, 20 September 1851.

¹⁶⁴ *Times*, 29 October 1851.

¹⁶⁵ Hodges to Palmerston, 30 September 1851. FO 33/131 in Mosslang et al (2010) 182.

¹⁶⁶ Ward to Palmerston, 1 October 1851. FO 299/5.

¹⁶⁷ Malet to Palmerston, 16 October 1851. FO 82/68 in Mosslang et al. (2010) 344-345.

¹⁶⁸ *Times*, 21 November 1851.

¹⁶⁹ *Economist*, 22 November 1851; “there is little fear that it will break up the Zollverein, as Saxony will be retained in it by Leipsic, Wurttemberg by Saxony, and Bavaria by its finances” *Times*, 23 September 1851.

¹⁷⁰ *Times*, 17 November 1851.

Ward noted the Austrian tariff still contained a high degree of both protection and prohibition on numerous articles and would be insufficient to approximate the requisite basis to match the Zollverein.¹⁷¹ Prussia did not attend the January, 1852, Vienna Toll Conference. John Ward refrained from reporting in detail to Earl Granville (the new Foreign Secretary after Palmerston, who had resigned due to the controversy surrounding his unsanctioned approval of Napoleon III's coup)¹⁷² the proceedings of the Conference, as he did not want "to trouble your Lordship with the details of a project which has at present so little chance of realisation."¹⁷³ To Ward, the Austrian projects – which mirrored the draft treaty published by the Third Committee at Dresden but were left unsigned by the German States – would conclude as a dead letter. Ward continued, until Prussia had secured the renewal of the Zollverein "Austria is not likely to make any progress with the Dresden convention, or with her more extended schemes for German customs and commercial-unity."¹⁷⁴

The *Times* took a similar position and perceived "the paying power of Prussia," whose Zollverein generated considerable revenue for its members, "now immensely strengthens its political position."¹⁷⁵ This understanding of economic unification, as dovetailing political supremacy in the German question, became further reinforced following news of the approval of the Prussia-Hanover Treaty by their respective legislatures in January.¹⁷⁶ "We are well aware that political influences and interests have had a large share in the formation of the commercial leagues of Germany," exclaimed a 29 January editorial in the *Times*, "but the Prussian Zollverein is still no more than an enlarged separate interest, instead of being a national union."¹⁷⁷ Further reiterating the consistent position it had advanced, of a dualistic answer to the German question, it argued both the Austrian Empire and Northern Germany must enter the Zollverein. The editorial further linked this view to the wider structural interests it envisioned for Germany in Europe: "The same elements of union and strength which conduce to the commercial prosperity of Germany are the chief pledges of her political independence."¹⁷⁸ The economic union of Germany remained paramount in creating "a common policy in the external relations of the Confederation," and that both "commercial union and united means of national defence are the most essential conditions for the common progress of the whole of Germany in prosperity and in power."¹⁷⁹ Thus consistent with the territorial conservatism of Palmerstonianism, for the *Times* the economic union of Germany would further bolster its independence and would guarantee the balance of power in Europe by deterring foreign intervention.

At the Vienna Conference three plans were concluded. Proposal A constituted a draft commercial treaty of a general customs union; proposal B provided the structure of the union which would be effected from 1859; and proposal C, which had been negotiated in secret by Austria, Bavaria, Wurttemberg, Baden, Saxony, Nassau, and the two Hesses, would form a

¹⁷¹ Ward to Palmerston, 2 December 1851. FO 299/5.

¹⁷² Palmerston, who at this point was lauded as "the most popular man in the country," had been pressured to resign by the Royal Court who had become strongly irritated by his active foreign policy, John Charmley, "Palmerston: 'Artful Old Dodger' or 'Babe of Grace'?" in T.G. Otte, *The Makers of British Foreign Policy: From Pitt to Thatcher*, (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2002) 88.

¹⁷³ Ward to Granville, 27 January 1852. FO 299/5.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ *Times*, 2 January 1852.

¹⁷⁶ "The Commercial Treaty between Hanover and the Zollverein was affirmed on the 23rd by both the Hanoverian Chambers. In the Upper House it was passed by 34 votes against 17, in the Lower House by 43 against 29. This result sets at rest all the apprehension entertained that the influence of Austria would at the eleventh hour prevail with the new Ministry, and either delay or defeat the execution of the treaty", *Economist*, 31 January 1852.

¹⁷⁷ *Times* 29 January 1852.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

customs union between those states if the other proposals failed. After Vienna the Lesser States met at Darmstadt and decided to sign proposals A and B and to push for their acceptance at the upcoming Berlin Conference.¹⁸⁰ This group would come to be known as the ‘Darmstadt Coalition’ and their union formed the dividing line that began the First Zollverein Crisis in earnest.¹⁸¹ This fact had been sensed by the *Times* which reported on 1 April that, before agreeing to the accession of Hanover to the Zollverein, Bavaria, Wurttemberg, and Saxony would demand Austria be admitted to the deliberations, and that the Austrian project for a customs union should be considered.¹⁸² After recounting the assurances made by Baron Manteuffel (Minister-President of Prussia) to Austria, pledging their commercial relations would be finalised following the renewal of the Zollverein, John Ward acknowledged Prussia would never submit to a commercial union with Austria. On 15 March Ward reported: “nobody believes that the Prussian Govt. is really desirous of entering into commercial or customs union with Austria, and the assurances above quoted may so far be considered as nothing more than complimentary phrases.”¹⁸³ However, on the eve of the Berlin Conference on 13 April, believing *prima facie* the declaration of the Darmstadt Coalition, that they would not oppose the reformation of the Zollverein based upon the Hanoverian Treaty, the *Times* predicted: “The Zollverein will be quietly re-organized; and then as a body a distinct treaty or treaties may be made with it.”¹⁸⁴

The evidence thus far exhibits, contrary to the traditional German historiography, Britain actively supported the economic unity of Germany. The optimistic outlook of British public opinion towards the Berlin conference signifies the impact the Prussia-Hanover Treaty of Commerce had made. Britain now became convinced Prussia was committed to free trade policies and this garnered significant moral support from both state and non-state actors. Furthermore, whilst aware of the political ramifications surrounding the enlargement of the Zollverein, British public opinion nevertheless supported Prussia’s economic supremacy.¹⁸⁵ This was tied both to the perceived economic interests of the British, and their desire to see a more robust Germany act as a stabilising influence in Europe. As the crisis developed further British perceptions would come to take more definitive positions on the Austro-Prussian commercial rivalry.

The Berlin Conference convened three days late on 19 April as not all of the delegates arrived on time. Negotiations were conducted behind closed doors, but rumours began to circulate in the British press the Southern States would mount an opposition to Prussia at the Congress. The *Times*’ Prussia correspondent shrugged this off as mere conjecture reaffirming: “The fullest confidence is felt that the Zollverein will be re-established on the basis of the Hanoverian treaty of September last.”¹⁸⁶ Manteuffel opened the deliberations asserting no negotiations with Austria would transpire until the Treaty with Hanover had been accepted by the Zollverein states. Meisner, the Bavarian plenipotentiary, in an act of revenge for Prussia not consulting the other states about the Treaty beforehand, replied

¹⁸⁰ Henderson, *Zollverein*, 218.

¹⁸¹ As Lord Bloomfield reported from Vienna, “It is impossible however that the Prussian Government should willingly give up the Commercial position which they have occupied for so many years in Germany, and which has so greatly added to their political importance”, Bloomfield to Malmesbury, 18 June 1852. FO 64/342 in Mosslang et al. (2010) 98.

¹⁸² *Times*, 1 April 1852.

¹⁸³ Ward to Malmesbury, 15 March 1852. FO 299/5.

¹⁸⁴ *Times*, 13 April 1852.

¹⁸⁵ For example, commenting upon the Austrian claim that it pursued the economic union of Germany purely for its material welfare, the *Times*’ Austria correspondent declared: “neither Prussia nor your correspondent is credulous enough to believe one word of this. Her real object is to extend her political influence!” *Times*, 6 May 1852.

¹⁸⁶ *Times*, 17 April 1852.

modifications should be made to the Treaty and the Zollverein should also be extended southward into Austria. Ward reported from Berlin the combination of both German public opinion, which strongly favoured the continuation of the Zollverein, and the finances of Bavaria and Württemberg, whose treasuries annually received large sums from their continued membership, would cause Prussia to prevail.¹⁸⁷ Ward, who so far inserted little of his own opinions about the Zollverein and merely recounted events, subsequently recommended Britain should support the Prussian position at the Conference: “In so far as any British interests are involved in the proceedings of the present conference, I beg leave to submit to your Lordship that the desirable thing is that the Prussian policy should prevail, for if Austria should succeed in obtaining the principal direction of the commercial affairs of Germany, the tariff must be fixed more or less upon a protective basis, and Prussia would be deprived of the power of carrying out those relaxation which may be confidently anticipated from the renewal of the Customs Union with the modifications of the Hanoverian Treaty.”¹⁸⁸ It can be seen support for the union of the Steuerverein and Zollverein had attained privileged status in British public opinion by the spring of 1852. A diverse range of British observers consistently supported the economic unification of Germany. This was based both on general support of the closer unity of Germany, and a Radical infused free trade essentialism which sought greater access for British exports. Thus for the idealists in Britain a shared free trade identity with Prussia went a long way morally – as this did not translate into action for state actors.

Although the death of Schwarzenberg in the midst of the Vienna Conference threatened to extinguish the hopes of the Darmstadt Coalition, it nevertheless proceeded with its opposition to Prussia at the Berlin Conference. Thus at Berlin the Darmstadt Coalition made proposals A and B from Vienna the basis of negotiations. An editorial appearing in the *Times* swiftly highlighted the root of the conflict: “This contention is no more than a prolongation, on the ground of commercial negotiation, of the long-standing rivalry and recent struggle between Prussian and Austrian ascendancy.”¹⁸⁹ The editorial continued the overlap with federal politics was unmistakable: the Austrian coalition mirrored the party within the Confederation which in the autumn of 1850 supported Schwarzenberg to restore Austria’s position in Germany. Whilst Prussia may lose its commercial supremacy in this quarrel, as Austria held the numerical majority, an alternative path would guarantee both Prussia’s territorial integrity and position in Germany. If Prussia abandoned the old Zollverein, and established a new union of Northern States based on “a more enlightened policy” of free trade, “we do not doubt that such a step would promote in the highest degree, not only her commercial prosperity, but her political concentration and power.” Concluding its position, the *Times* argued: “Prussia would then become the continental representative of those principles of commercial freedom which are destined some day to dispel the prejudices, to correct the errors, and to improve the condition of mankind.” Followingly, “her influence in Germany would stand for something more than a craving for ambition for aggrandizement; and the experiment in which she might thus engage would, in the end, restore by its results the union between herself and other parts of Germany now most opposed to such views.”¹⁹⁰

Britain’s deep attachment to free trade principles, powerful enough to override any harboured fears about Prussian self-aggrandisement, influenced its ideal outcome for German unification. British public opinion, which widely approved of German unification in the abstract, had found its champion in Prussia: it promised to deliver enlightened free trade, and thus liberalism, into a united Germany. However, paradoxically, this would require the

¹⁸⁷ Ward to Malmesbury, 20 April 1852. FO 299/5.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ *Times*, 6 May 1852.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

further disunion of Germany into north and south to allow free trade to prove itself as the superior system which the German nation should incorporate.¹⁹¹ Ward also held this view and believed the commercial question would come to shape the internal organisation of Germany: Prussia would lead a free trade North, and Austria a protectionist South.¹⁹² On 7 June the Prussian Government presented its definitive reply to the Darmstadt Coalition: Prussia absolutely rejected a customs union with Austria; it would not enter into any negotiations about a commercial treaty with Austria until the Zollverein had been renewed; and if a reply has not been made within the next two months, Prussia would re-establish custom-houses across its borders with the states seceding from the Zollverein.¹⁹³ The Zollverein Congress at Berlin, like most negotiations within the Gordian knot of Austro-Prussian rivalry, had hit a deadlock and adjourned until August.

Ward arrived in Berlin on 16 August to observe the continued negotiations, however, he discovered no sittings would transpire that day as the Darmstadt Coalition remained in Stuttgart where they had been assembled for the past week.¹⁹⁴ Reports began to circulate internal division had kept the Coalition stuck at their separate congress, as after five months' negotiations the position of Prussia had remained unmoved.¹⁹⁵ In the meantime, the principality of Lichtenstein, the smallest German State, had joined the Austrian Customs Union. The *Times*, in a display of its usual caustic wit, understood this as heralding the ultimate result of the conflict: "Many people are inclined to ask whether this is not the end as well as the beginning of the much-talked-of German Austrian Zollverein."¹⁹⁶ However, at Stuttgart a partial change of position was decided, and a declaration dated 21 August signed by all seven members of the Darmstadt Coalition was transmitted to Prussia. The Coalition were prepared to accept the renewal of the Zollverein on the basis of its union with the Steuerverein (with modifications), however, Prussia must simultaneously conclude a commercial treaty with Austria.¹⁹⁷ This declaration began an arduous series of notes between Prussia, the Darmstadt Coalition, and Austria, which involved a continuous rephrasing of the positions they had held thus far *ad nauseam*.¹⁹⁸ The British press had little appetite for this kind of pedantry which was characteristic of inter-German diplomacy. By this point the *Economist* had abandoned its attempts to report on the crisis: "We say nothing on the present occasion as to the negotiations in progress at Berlin for the renewal of the Zollverein, which seem to us little more than a mass of intrigues to get political power."¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, the *Times*' Prussia correspondent, who also had run out of patience, remarked: "Luckily there is a

¹⁹¹ A latter editorial further elaborated this view, "the consequence of such a combination would be the formation of a more compact political body in Northern Germany, more closely connected with this country, and gradually extending its influence over the rest of the German nation by the success of this experiment. Prussia would then have a policy of her own, distinct from the surrender she has so frequently been led to make of her own interests and opinions to objects of very questionable importance; and we are so far from thinking the dissolution of the present Zollverein at all prejudicial to her interests, that we are persuaded she would increase her industrial prosperity, her foreign trade, and her political influence, far more by a few years of independent legislation than by rendering her commercial policy dependent on States whose interests and whose intelligence are more contracted than her own", *Times*, 22 June 1852.

¹⁹² Ward to Malmesbury, 27 April, 1852. FO 299/5.

¹⁹³ *Economist*, 19 June 1852; *Times* 11 June 1852.

¹⁹⁴ Ward to Malmesbury, 16 August 1852. FO 299/5.

¹⁹⁵ *Times*, 21 August 1852.

¹⁹⁶ *Times*, 7 August 1852.

¹⁹⁷ Whilst reporting this Ward emphasised the significance of public opinion in Prussia being in favour of maintaining the Zollverein, Ward to Malmesbury, 25 August 1852. FO 299/5.

¹⁹⁸ By 7 September Prussia still maintained a commercial treaty with Austria could not be signed until the Zollverein had been renewed, the *Times* described the Prussian note as "a sad specimen of official style, confused and obscure, the very worst specimen of the diplomatic jargon peculiar to the scribes of the Ministerial departments that has been issued during the negotiations", *Times*, 6 September 1852.

¹⁹⁹ *Economist*, 23 October 1852.

term fixed at which something must be settled, or the tedious interchange of clumsily written protocols and notes might go on for 10 years to come.”²⁰⁰ Yet the October deadline Prussia set was not met and negotiations were subsequently broken off.

As the crisis entered its zenith British public opinion decidedly aligned with the Prussian course and overwhelmingly supported the renewal of the Zollverein. Ward believed Prussia’s decision to suspend negotiations had improved its position; it demonstrated the Cabinet of Berlin remained firm, and the Southern States would be forced either to concede and renew the Zollverein, otherwise, Prussia would “be relieved from the dead weight of the Southern States, enabled to liberalize her own commercial system.”²⁰¹ In concluding, Ward reemphasised that because Austria wished to increase protection in Germany, the Prussian plan must succeed in light of British manufacturing interests.²⁰² This followed the loose strategy – as it cannot rightly be called policy – the British Government instructed its agents to follow in Germany: “that our influence whenever it can be properly used should tend to the encouragement of a liberal Commercial system here, as well as elsewhere upon the Continent.”²⁰³ Bligh, who had recounted these instructions, immediately thereafter requested for more coherent directions in the event he should be interrogated by the Hanoverian Government as to the position of Britain. Bligh reported he had not publicly condoned the Prussian course, which would cause an outcry throughout much of Germany who was distrustful of British influence, but acknowledged: “a consciousness of the importance which her Majesty’s Government must, upon political, religious, and Commercial grounds, attach to upholding the consequence of the only great European Power which does at the present moment, or seems likely to, sympathise with England upon such matters.”²⁰⁴ Bligh’s perspective corroborates sentiments shared by the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Economist*, and the *Times*. British public opinion perceived shared identity and interests with Prussia, based on Protestantism, free trade, and the independence and integrity of Central Europe, and this manifested into overt support for Prussian predominance in Germany.

Thus free trade idealism and the balance of power realism were symbiotic in how Britain perceived the Zollverein. This point is demonstrated with the greatest veracity by the *Times* upon the resolution of the First Zollverein Crisis. By December, 1852, Prussia and Austria had reached a compromise; a commercial treaty would be concluded by both Powers simultaneously with the renewal of the Zollverein. Ward believed this resolution had been concluded because of the meditation of Hanover, conversely, the *Times* speculated the ascension of Napoleon III had reinforced the importance of cooperation between the German Powers.²⁰⁵ Henderson emphasises this latter point and argues the intervention of the Tzar, who pressured Austria and Prussia to reconcile and present a united front against France, created the compromise.²⁰⁶ Indeed the spectre of Bonapartism cannot be underestimated in 1852 however, as regularly argued by British public opinion, it was unlikely the crisis would have resulted in the rupture of the Zollverein. The Southern States were compelled to remain as the customs receipts they garnered by their membership in the Zollverein could not be matched outside the Union.²⁰⁷ Therefore Prussia’s commitment to its own course created an

²⁰⁰ *Times*, 14 September 1852.

²⁰¹ Ward to Malmesbury, 6 October 1852. FO 299/5.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ Bligh to Malmesbury, 29 October 1852. FO 34/67 in Mosslang et al. (2010) 227.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ Ward to Malmesbury, 2 September 1852. FO 299/5; “as the position of things in France is such that it would be sheer madness to sow fresh seeds of discord in Germany “ *Times*, 25 January 1853.

²⁰⁶ Henderson, *Zollverein*, 220.

²⁰⁷ “Bavaria received out of the common fund no less than 2,166,021 Dollars, that Wurtemberg received 899,766 Dollars, and that Baden, the two Hesses, the Thuringian States, and Nassau, were also large recipients. Saxony Stands in a different position, having had to pay over a balance of 786, 761 Dollars to the common fund,

impasse they could not surmount, nor were prepared to reject, and ultimately their loyalty to Austria went only as far as the concessions they could extract from Prussia. Prussia then acquired its revenge for Olmutz, Austria remained excluded from the Zollverein and its renewal was all but confirmed.²⁰⁸

However, for the British Realists, the threat of French and Russian expansion provided the rationale to support Prussia's economic leadership of Germany, as the rupture of the Zollverein had threatened the balance of power by compromising the integrity of the Confederation. In December two editorials published by the *Times* unequivocally prove this point. The first, dated 6 December, argued the commercial rivalry between Austria and Prussia had caused the Lesser States to slip "back into a position which may one day be used by a foreign enemy against the integrity and independence of Germany itself." It continued the legacy of "Napoleon and the greatness of the French empire is disinterred and resuscitated," in turn, the present disunion of Germany would invite aggrandisement following the timeless ambition of France to "weaken the union of the Germanic nation"²⁰⁹ Followingly, the internal composition of Germany should be based upon dualism to deter aggrandisement; however, the renewal of the Zollverein had proven Prussia's liberal track record, and a Germany compiled upon this basis would further match Britain's desired outcome for unification. As the editorial concluded: "For the common welfare of Europe nothing is more essential than to see the whole of Germany united and strong – united by the combined policy of identical interests of its chief powers – strong by the union of the nation with its Governments. The times we live in require strong Governments, to provide against the dangers that surround the world and to act with vigour in emergencies; but among the elements of her power we trust that Prussia will continue to rank the liberal institutions she still retains, and among the elements of union Germany can ill afford to renounce the free commercial intercourse she has so long enjoyed."²¹⁰

In determining the representativeness of this perspective it must be recognised by 1855 the *Times* had a towering daily circulation of 60,000.²¹¹ In combination with its unrivalled network of foreign correspondents, as no other publication reported on the First Zollverein Crisis as frequently or in as much detail, the *Times* formed the opinions of a large proportion of the British public about the Zollverein. Thus the second editorial, published on 21 December, should be recognised as consequential in recounting how British public opinion perceived the Zollverein as a political issue. For the *Times* Prussia's success in the Zollverein Crisis intertwined with the other distinct criteria it envisioned for the role of a united Germany in Europe.

"Her government is not that of an arbitrary power, like the will of the Emperor Nicholas; her faith is not that of the Romish Church, under Ultramontane priests, now wholly dominant in Austria. She has within her keeping the chief intellectual powers of Germany, the defence of the Protestant cause on the continent, and the maintenance of a system of government based on strict principles of legal right and tending to liberal institutions. On these grounds Prussia is in an especial sense the ally of England, though she is as intimately

but the merchants and manufacturers of that state are strongly alive to the general advantages they have derived from the Customs-Union, and are now taking active measures to wage their Government to withdraw its opposition to the Prussian policy", Ward to Malmesbury, 27 April 1852. FO 299/5.

²⁰⁸ As Ward recollected in his memoirs "the object of Prussia was eventually attained, viz. the renewal of the Zollverein without Austria, and a commercial treaty was entered into between the two bodies", Ward, *Diplomatist*, 121.

²⁰⁹ *Times*, 6 December 1852.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ Andrew Hobbs, "The Deleterious Dominance of The Times in Nineteenth-Century Historiography" *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 18:4 (2013) 5.

connected with the Northern Powers. She is, moreover, the nearest neighbour of the smaller kingdoms of Belgium and Holland, in whose welfare and independence this country is bound by many motives to take a very strong interest. These influences give to her policy a character of its own, which it is of great utility to maintain; and although it is her paramount duty and interest to act in concert with Austria and Russia on questions affecting the territorial arrangements of Europe (and, indeed, England is equally bound by these obligations and interests), yet she is neither the subject to their ascendancy nor identified with the reactionary spirit of their Governments. We attach the more importance to this distinction because if ever another day of trial comes for Germany, it is not with the apathy which now enshrouds her that external perils can be met; and to bring forth all her powers of self-defence she must again feel the impulse of the national will and of a popular cause."²¹²

Thus within the nexus of the political issues of the German question, Prussia's course in the Zollverein had proved it to be the suitable harbinger of unification: Prussia was Protestant, constitutional, embraced liberal institutions, free trade, and independent of French and Russian influence. Therefore Prussia could best fulfil the function British public opinion prioritised for Germany: to guarantee the balance of power in Europe by maintaining the territorial system enshrined by the Treaty of Vienna.

Conclusion: The Renewal of the Zollverein, 1853

The Austro-Prussian Intermediate Treaty was the resulting compromise of the First Zollverein Crisis. It was packaged alongside the renewal of the Zollverein and stipulated by article XLI of the agreement the contracting states would work towards the eventual incorporation of Austria into the Zollverein. Constituting a Prussian concession which, however, was far outweighed by the amalgamation of the Steuerverein into the Zollverein and the renewal of the Customs Union on a more liberal basis, it was forced upon Prussia by the Southern States as the condition for its renewal. The outcome was all of Germany – with the exception of the Hanse Towns, Holstein, Mecklenburg, and Austria – were incorporated into the Union, and a promise was made by article XXV of the Treaty to reconsider Austrian entry in six-years' time. Moreover, Austria attained preferential market access with the Zollverein as a semi-German power and a guarantee was given this concession would not be made to any other state.²¹³

This chapter has shown initially the economic and political dimensions of the First Zollverein Crisis were perceived symbiotically by British public opinion. State actors especially took an economic essentialist view as they were ordered to pursue greater market access for British exports in the Zollverein. The press, on the other hand, appreciated both the beneficial economic outcome Britain would derive from the spread of free trade in Germany, often coupled with the notion it would lead to liberal convergence in Germany, as well as the unifying role the Zollverein played both internally and externally. Thus it was perceived the Zollverein further bolstered the independence and integrity of Germany, which was the functionalist object of the British realists, yet the question of Austrian participation did not find consensus within public opinion either way. The *Times* was the most overt commentator on this political aspect and taken by itself would prove the argument of this thesis; that British public opinion supported the Zollverein for primarily power-political reasons. Whilst it held an undoubtedly high degree of influence in Britain, this study is not solely a history of the views of the *Times*. Yet the *Economist*, British politicians, diplomats, and consuls, the

²¹² *Times*, 23 December 1852.

²¹³ Treaty and Tariff Extending Zollverein Union to 1877. FO 881/1286.

Edinburgh Review and *Quarterly Review* all came to appreciate the material benefits Prussia accrued from the Zollverein reinforced its trajectory as the rising German Power.

British public opinion was fully aware Prussia constituted the rising state of Germany, which would dramatically alter the balance of power of Europe, but nevertheless supported Prussia because of the structural position of Germany relative to Russia and France. Unlike Austria, Prussia was consistently perceived as liberal, free trade, protestant, constitutional, and increasingly Western as British observers superimposed their own identity and history onto that State. The Zollverein was a tangible manifestation of this shared identity and evidenced Prussia's liberal character through its incorporation of free trade. Therefore the balance of power and shared identity were the defining dynamics which led Britain to support the renewal of the Zollverein between 1850-53 and thus a Prussian led Germany. The announcement of the Prussia-Hanover Treaty in September, 1851 particularly altered the views of those British observers who were more critical of the Prussian course, embodied by the *Times*, and provided the impetus for others who viewed the question in purely economic terms, such as John Ward, to appreciate the political overtones economic leadership in Germany entailed. Thus ultimately, British public opinion came to see the Zollverein in structural European balance of power terms and overtly accepted Prussian supremacy in Germany.

Chapter 3: The Second Zollverein Crisis, 1860-1865

Introduction: The Cobden-Chevalier Treaty of Commerce, 1860

Whereas the First Zollverein Crisis is seen to have arisen from inter-German origins, the impetus of the Second Crisis was spurred by extra-German causes: Britain and France had signed an MFN treaty in January, 1860. What has come to be known *ex post facto* as the Cobden-Chevalier Treaty (christened after its two architects Michel Chevalier and Richard Cobden) catalysed a free trade treaty network which by 1865 spanned most of western Europe. As free trade became the chic idea on the international stage following Cobden-Chevalier, it provided Prussia the opportunity to renege its commitment to allow Austria to join the Zollverein. By further liberalising the Zollverein tariff through entering the MFN network Prussia, with the help of France and Britain, consolidated its economic unification of Germany.

The Cobden-Chevalier Treaty should be understood as a marriage of convenience between political and economic interests. The 1859 invasion scare – catalysed by the spectre of Bonapartism seemingly resurrected by the 1859 Franco-Austrian War – prompted Cobden to improve Anglo-French relations via a commercial treaty which would function as what he described as a “peace bond” between nations.²¹⁴ The characteristically Whiggish moral foreign policy of Britain caused it to look favourably upon compatible liberal ideologies, thus free trade constituted a principle by which Britain measured its friendship with other nations. As Cobden himself stated: “for the last ten years Free Trade has been the test of other nations trustworthiness & value. – And we have seen the effect produced by the mere letter of the Emperor.”²¹⁵ Cobden and Lord Cowley, now Ambassador to France, acted as plenipotentiaries on behalf of Britain during the treaty negotiations. Lord Russell, the Foreign Secretary under Palmerston, informed them of the “high social and political value” the Government attached “to the conclusion of a treaty with France.”²¹⁶ Cobden, rather than Cowley, took the reins during the tariff bartering process since economic matters constituted his forte. So impressed with Cobden’s knowledge of political economy and congenial character was Napoleon III that he suggested Cobden should be appointed as the new Ambassador to France – an offer he courteously rejected stating such a move would undermine the importance of his role as a “simple citizen” conducting the negotiations.²¹⁷ Indeed, Cobden had initiated the Treaty of his own volition without holding any formal role which permitted him to do so. An off-the-cuff conversation with Achille Fould (French Minister of Finance) snowballed into a commercial Treaty as by September, 1859 William Gladstone became the first British Minister to sanction Cobden’s proposal.²¹⁸

The conclusion of the Cobden-Chevalier Treaty signified a victory for the free trade idealists in Britain. The preferential terms conceded to France – for example within article VI

²¹⁴ Iliasu, “Cobden-Chevalier”, 75-76; the meeting between Cobden and Chevalier at the Paris Banquet of 1846 had already solidified their relationship as both men realised they shared in their free trade idealism, Anthony Howe, “British Liberalism and the Legacy of Saint-Simon: The Case of Richard Cobden,” *History of Economic Ideas*, 17:2 (2009) 115; Richard Cobden quoted in, Howe, *Free Trade*, 87.

²¹⁵ Richard Cobden to William Gladstone, 23 January 1860, in *The Letters of Richard Cobden 1860-1865*, ed. Anthony Howe, Simon Morgan, Vol IV, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015) 10-11; the letter referenced by Cobden was that published by Napoleon to Fould of January 15 in which he revealed political exigencies had made him a Cobdenite, Iliasu, “Commercial Treaty,” 92.

²¹⁶ Russell to Cowley and Cobden, January 17, 1860. FO 146/946.

²¹⁷ Quoted in Howe, *Free Trade*, 96.

²¹⁸ Cobden persuaded Fould by arguing “so far as I was acquainted with the state of public opinion in England, nothing would so instantaneously convince the people of the emperor’s pacific intentions as his entering boldly upon a policy of Commercial Reform.” Quoted in Iliasu, “Commercial Treaty,” 78-79; Cobden met Gladstone at Hawarden in September as Cobden needed a patron within the Government to support his treaty ambitions, Roy Jenkins, *Gladstone*, (New York, Random House, 1997) 218.

containing a reduction of British duties on lighter wines by 80% *ad valorem*²¹⁹ – reveals political considerations took precedence over beneficial terms of trade. Cobden further elucidated this point during a speech to his constituents in 1861: “The object which I have sought, and which those who know me will know right well, has been not merely to promote the physical well-being of these two people – though that in itself is an object worthy of all care – but my aim and hope have been to promote such a change as shall lead to a better moral and political tone between the two nations.”²²⁰ Yet, in some circles of public opinion, this fact did little to dispel ingrained Francophobia. For example, the *Times* compared the treaty to a Faustian deal and argued it had done little to pacify the aggressions of France.²²¹ On the other hand, the *Economist*, understanding the Treaty as the long-awaited instrument free trade proliferation, as no other nation had reciprocated Britain’s unilateral liberalisation of 1846, resolved that “the one concluded is preferable to nothing.”²²²

Whilst Cobden-Chevalier divided British public opinion, the most favoured nation clause of the 1860 Treaty had a tangible effect upon the wider dissemination of free trade. Article XIX containing the clause stipulated: “the two High Contracting Powers engages to confer on the other any favour, privilege, or reduction in the tariff of duties of importation on the articles mentioned in the present Treaty, which the said Power may concede to any third Power.” It continued, “they further engage not to enforce one against the other any prohibition of importation or exportation, which shall not at the same time be applicable to all other nations.”²²³ Therefore, although negotiated bilaterally, the Treaty held multilateral connotations which encouraged further nations to reciprocally lower their tariffs. Through this Cobden-Chevalier launched a network of tariff liberalisation across Europe; as nations reduced their tariffs further treaties were sought to bring new members into the network and thus provide further liberalisation for all who granted similar reciprocity.²²⁴

Cobden-Chevalier provided both the international context as well as the immediate causation of the Franco-Prussian Commercial Treaty which instigated the Second Zollverein Crisis. A similar dynamic to 1860, in which political considerations took precedence in how Britain perceived commercial relations, would unfold during the process of Britain’s simultaneous pursuit of an MFN treaty with the Zollverein. This chapter will uncover to what degree the various elements of British public opinion perceived the Zollverein as either an economic or political question. It will be shown that whilst the various British Chambers of Commerce and Members of Parliament subscribed to an economic essentialist perspective, in contrast, the press, diplomats, and consuls became highly attuned to the political benefits Prussia attained from the Zollverein and recognised it garnered Prussia a decisive edge within the German question.

²¹⁹ France Treaty Commerce, Paris, January 23 1860. FO 93/33/68A.

²²⁰ Cobden gave this speech at Rochdale on June 26, 1861, *Questions of Public Policy*, 428.

²²¹ *Times*, 29 March 1860.

²²² *Economist*, 11 February 1860; the Leeds Chamber of Commerce also supported the Treaty and praised Cobden for his services, *Times*, 24 January 1861.

²²³ France Treaty Commerce, Paris, January 23 1860. FO 93/33/68A.

²²⁴ For an overview of the 1860s MFN network see Markus Lampe, “Effects of Bilateralism and the MFN Clause on International Trade: Evidence for the Cobden-Chevalier Network, 1860-1875”, *The Journal of Economic History* 69:4, (2009) 1012-1040; Charles P. Kindleberger, “The Rise of Free Trade in Western Europe 1820-1975”, *The Journal of Economic History* 35:1, (1975) 20-55; David Lazer, “The Free Trade Epidemic of the 1860s and Other Outbreaks of Economic Discrimination”, *World Politics* 51:4, (1999) 447-483; Olivier Accominotti, Marc Flandreau, “Bilateral Treaties and the Most-Favored Nation Clause: The Myth of Trade Liberalization in the Nineteenth Century”, *World Politics* 60:2, (2008) 147-188.

Franco-Prussian Commercial Negotiations, 1860-62

Before overtures were made between Prussia and France for a commercial treaty, British diplomats had already begun to speculate upon the economic and political importance of the scheduled renewal of the Zollverein in 1866. At Hamburg, George Lloyd Hodges thought the renewal of the Zollverein constituted the likely moment Prussia would move to take the position of the Central Power of Germany. The growing influence of the Nationalverein,²²⁵ coupled with the failure of the Federal Diet to present a united front during the Italian War (1859), propelled the question of unity to the forefront of German national politics. The widespread popularity of the Zollverein and the revenue it garnered the Lesser States led Hodges to conclude: “The fear of loosing [*sic*] these advantages may tend in a great measure to overcome the well known aversion of most of the German Governments to the supremacy of Prussia under any form, particularly if that supremacy should be asked for by the unanimous voice of their Subjects.”²²⁶ This was a view shared by Alexander Malet (envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to the German Confederation in Frankfurt) who understood the Zollverein as “a political bond” which Prussia had “turned to considerable account.”²²⁷ The Zollverein had fostered the growing economic prosperity of Germany – increasing the salaries of Southern German civil servants by 30% in most cases – and Malet believed this detail would not be lost upon its members.²²⁸ Thus upon the eve of the Second Zollverein Crisis Britain’s Germany experts understood the economic benefits of the customs union translated into political power for Prussia.

Within the historiography, it remains unclear whether France or Prussia first proposed the idea of a commercial treaty.²²⁹ Yet the *Economist* reported in April, 1860, France made the proposition, which Prussia initially rejected, and that Prussia did not agree to consult the rest of the Zollverein about the prospect until July.²³⁰ By September Prussia had been given consent to enter into negotiations with France and in November de Clercq (the Sub-Director of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs) arrived at Berlin for *pourparler*.²³¹ Those acting as the Prussian counterparts were the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Delbruck, the Director of the Commercial Department of the Foreign Office, Phillipsborn, and von Pommer Esche. However, negotiations did not begin in earnest until January, 1861, after the conclusion of negotiations for the Franco-Belgian Commercial Treaty, and British public opinion remained muted upon the subject until the following summer. Instead, events such as the Macdonald affair, in which a British Captain was arrested during a train journey across Prussia for attempting to reserve carriage seats with his luggage, gripped British awareness of German developments.²³²

As Ambassador to Prussia Lord Augustus Loftus – whom the Queen’s private secretary

²²⁵ The Deutsche Nationalverein, founded in Frankfurt on 16 September, 1859, was a primarily liberal group of democrats which called for a *kleindeutsch* solution to the German question.

²²⁶ Hodges to Russell, 22 October, 1859. FO 33/162. In Mosslang et al (2010) 195-196.

²²⁷ Malet to Russell, 28 July, 1859. FO 30/187. In Mosslang et al (2010) 61.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ As to who made the initiation in January, 1860, Napoleon III or Schleinitz, remains a matter of contention, Iliasu, “Free Trade”, 334.

²³⁰ *Economist*, 28 April 1860; *Economist*, 14 July 1860.

²³¹ *Economist*, 22 September 1860; *Times*, 16 November 1860.

²³² The affair incited a fierce outcry in Britain which took the form of a general condemnation of Prussia that significantly deteriorated bilateral relations, after an initial lambasting the *Times* took a more apologetic stance, writing “I believe there is more disposition among the Prussians than among any other people in Europe to cherish goodwill towards England, to admire her institutions, and to cultivate a close alliance”, *Times*, 29 May 1861.

surmised as a “pompous blockhead”²³³ which is shown as accurate in light of his dull understanding of German politics – was instructed by Russell to attain the same concessions given to France, and “do all you can about the Zollverein Treaty, to get us at least the most favoured nation clause.”²³⁴ John Ward, now Consul-General at Hamburg, had been dispatched to Berlin to assist Loftus in negotiating a treaty of commerce between Britain and the Zollverein on 26 July.²³⁵ Simultaneously, Ward’s old consular post at Leipzig was under review in the House of Commons. A Member had argued Leipzig, as well as numerous consular positions throughout Germany, were redundant since Dresden was in close proximity. Russell replied the consul at Leipzig fed useful information to the Foreign Office on both the commercial and political affairs of Germany, in consideration of the famous commercial fair held there annually, and maintained a robust network with the manufacturing interest of Saxony. As ongoing Franco-Prussian negotiations threatened to disadvantage British manufactures it remained paramount these missions were kept intact.²³⁶ Therefore, in perceiving the Zollverein as an invaluable market for British exports, the Foreign Office prioritised the maintenance of a comprehensive consular presence in Germany over easing the burden placed upon the exchequer. Yet a further contribution by White, who stated “nothing could be more absurd than the maintenance of a consulate at Leipsic,” represents the ignorance of numerous British politicians towards German affairs – after all Ward, the ex-Consul-General of Leipzig, constituted one of the ablest representatives of Britain in Germany.²³⁷

British diplomats began their pursuit of securing most favoured nation status holding an overly sanguine belief it would be swiftly cut-and-dried. Ward thought obtaining the assent of Prussia and the Lesser States would be relatively straightforward, and that at most there would be “minor objections” to “the wording of particular articles.”²³⁸ Yet if Ward should have learnt anything from his experience of the First Zollverein Crisis it was commercial reform went hand in hand with tremendous political controversy within Germany; notwithstanding the unsettled question of Austrian entry into the Zollverein. Thus British state actors failed to see the storm clouds on the horizon, despite their extensive experience with German affairs, as Loftus received a treaty draft from the Board of Trade to submit to the Prussian Cabinet.²³⁹ This attitude may be partly explained by the zeitgeist of the era, as the *Economist* reported: “Commercial treaties are now the order of the day.”²⁴⁰ In the spring of 1861: France, Belgium, the Zollverein, Switzerland, Italy, the Netherlands, and Russia all were in various stages of negotiating free trade treaties. In contrast, British manufacturers – although existing in a perpetual warlike defence of their economic self-interest – felt concerned towards the possibility of their exclusion from the ensuing treaty network. A collective memorial of the Associated Chambers of Commerce of the United Kingdom, which argued Britain’s full adoption of free trade deprived it of negotiating leverage for future treaties, petitioned Palmerston to prevent such an eventuality. Referencing the Franco-Prussian treaty as an example, it stated if excluded “the goodwill and the friendship of the Government and the people of Great Britain” would be compromised, and if those states “value the sympathy and friendship of the English people they must not slight her just claims nor sacrifice her

²³³ Sontag, *Germany and England*, 26.

²³⁴ Russell to Loftus, 31 July, 1861. PRO 30/22/112/33.

²³⁵ Loftus to Board of Trade, 26 July, 1861. FO 97/336.

²³⁶ This was raised by Dodson, *HC Deb 18 July 1861 vol 165 cc1073-88*.

²³⁷ *Ibid*.

²³⁸ Ward to Russell, 17 August, 1861. FO 33/172.

²³⁹ Loftus to Russell, 24 August, 1861. FO 97/336.

²⁴⁰ *Economist*, 2 March 1861.

interests.”²⁴¹ Thus it is apparent free trade reciprocity carried moral and political weight with the manufacturing interest of Britain, and a free trade treaty with the Zollverein would shape how this element of British public opinion perceived the role of Prussia in Germany.

In reply to the British overture, the Prussian Government asserted no treaty could be signed until negotiations with France were concluded. However, Phillipsborn guaranteed Britain would receive the desired MFN treaty “on the same day, and within the same hour,” as the signing of the French Treaty.²⁴² Yet Franco-Prussian negotiations had hit a deadlock, and in an interview with Ward, de Clercq mentioned Britain was unlikely to gain any concessions through France – since the Prussian plenipotentiaries could not concede the same privileges Austria enjoyed via the Treaty of February 18, 1853.²⁴³ It should be understood Prussia was constrained by three tiers of commercial relations: 1) with the other states of the Zollverein 2) with Austria 3) with foreign states generally. Furthermore, Prussia was bound by the Federal Constitution to realise a general German Customs Union, placing France in a position of equality to Austria would compromise this, and thus threaten to unravel the 1853 agreements which held the Zollverein together. Ultimately, negotiations came to a standstill for the remainder of 1861.

Renewing negotiations required Prussia to test the waters in Germany and ascertain how the Lesser States would react to her gambit of permanently excluding Austria from the Zollverein. Hanover, Oldenburg, Brunswick, Saxony, the Thuringian States, and Frankfurt-am-Main were favourably disposed; Nassau and Hesse-Cassel remained neutral; finally, Bavaria, Wurttemberg, Baden, and Hesse Darmstadt raised opposition on the grounds it would impede future economic relations with the Austrian Empire.²⁴⁴ On December 20, Prussia circulated a kleindeutsch proposal calling for a narrower German Confederation that excluded the Habsburg Empire. Identical notes were sent to Prussia on February 2, 1862, by Austria, Bavaria, Wurttemberg, Saxony and Hanover firmly rejecting the scheme.²⁴⁵ Thus it became clear Prussia did not hold a decisive majority in its bid for supremacy as the Lesser States remained divided in their economic and political loyalties between the two Great German Powers. Notwithstanding this, by February 15, 1862, Loftus reported Franco-Prussian negotiations were approaching their conclusion: France abandoned its demand to be placed upon the same footing as the Austrian Intermediate Tariff, and whereas there had been disagreement on some thirty articles, only four remained to be finalised.²⁴⁶

British public opinion, such as state actors and manufacturers, were disposed to view the Franco-Prussian treaty specifically, and the Zollverein generally, in purely economic terms. Volume of trade and market access constituted the bottom line, yet this was also embedded in an ideological free trade superiority whereas it was believed Britain’s neighbours were bound to follow in her liberal footsteps. Palmerston understood free trade as an instrumental domestic consensus point and subsequently placed tariff liberalisation into the core of Britain’s foreign policy. In a 14 February parliamentary debate regarding commercial treaties, in which numerous members decried the failure of the Government to match the active commercial policy of France, Palmerston recognised British free trade had created a significant degree of anxiety in Germany. Following the popularised ideas of List, Palmerston stated Germans

²⁴¹ Memorial sent by the Associated and other Chambers of Commerce of the United Kingdom to Viscount Palmerston by Henry W. Ripley President of the Bradford Chamber of Commerce, *Times*, 31 July 1861.

²⁴² Ward to Loftus, 31 August, 1861. FO 33/172.

²⁴³ Ward to Russell, 6 September, 1861. FO 33/172.

²⁴⁴ Henderson, *Zollverein*, 278-279.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 283.

²⁴⁶ Lotus to Russell, 15 February, 1862. FO 97/336.

believed “our object was to inundate Germany with British commodities, and so to extinguish and destroy German industry in all its branches.”²⁴⁷ Yet he refuted this premise and called attention to trade as a system of barter. After all, Germany had to exchange goods of equal worth to pay for British commodities. Nevertheless, Palmerston continued “that fear has existed, though I trust it is now about to be dispelled.” The Cobden-Chevalier Treaty would undo this fear as it “will have a material effect in disabusing Europe upon that point.”²⁴⁸ In a political gesture meant to appease the free trade idealists of his Party, Palmerston concluded his statement by praising the efforts of Cobden – who had amassed a messiah following by this point – in negotiating the treaty and regretted Cobden declined royal honours which were offered to him for his service.²⁴⁹

British manufacturers held an analogous Whiggish view in the belief Britain inspired free trade development within Germany. The *Manchester Guardian* reprinted a letter sent to the respective Chamber of Commerce by a Mr. Leppoc. He argued Germany followed a restrictive tariff system because of the prohibitory duties Britain maintained prior to 1846, and concluded “the juster [*sic*] example of England’s more recent policy,” again the Cobden-Chevalier Treaty, “will not be lost on the statesmen of Germany.” Furthermore, pointing to cotton articles as a chief concern, Leppoc continued the Government should “not allow another day to pass” without affirming Britain be placed upon the same footing as France in the proposed Treaty.²⁵⁰ This apolitical, economic essentialist, viewpoint should be considered as representative of the wider manufacturing class of Britain. For example, a February meeting of the Directors of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce with Austen Layard, the Under Secretary of the Foreign Office, regarding the Zollverein tariff made no mention of its political dimension. Instead, purely the desire to improve Britain’s volume of trade with Germany was discussed as Layard reported Ward and Loftus were working to secure Britain MFN status.²⁵¹ The *Times* sympathised with the views of the manufacturers both towards the spread of free trade and Britain’s lack of initiative towards the Zollverein. A 1 February, 1862, editorial stated: “as soon as Prussia comes within the pale of European Free Trade the whole of Central Europe will not improbably be drawn into the system which has been established by the treaty between England and France.” The editorial continued it was no wonder “that Chambers of Commerce should be alarmed at the fact that a treaty is about to be concluded between France and Prussia which will place the former Power in a much better position than our own with regard to German trade.”²⁵² Thus it can be seen the manufacturing class of England through the Chambers of Commerce had a significant effect on creating a free trade essentialist perspective of the Zollverein. They frequently petitioned both the Foreign Office and Board of Trade to represent Britain’s economic interests without sparing a thought towards any political ramifications said demands would incur.

Franco-Prussian negotiations had been satisfactorily concluded on 22 February, 1862, and all that remained was to gain the assent of the other Zollverein States. Followingly, Loftus formally submitted a treaty draft to Count Bernstorff (Prussian Foreign Minister) on 31 March calling for the four same treaties accorded to France: of navigation, commerce, copyright and general concessions.²⁵³ Ultimately the treaties of commerce and navigation were approved in

²⁴⁷ *HC Deb 14 February 1862 vol 165 cc277-91*; this debate was also reprinted in the *Times*, 15 February 1862.

²⁴⁸ *HC Deb 14 February 1862 vol 165 cc277-91*.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 25 January 1862.

²⁵¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 27 February 1862.

²⁵² *Times*, 1 February 1862.

²⁵³ Loftus to Russell, 28 March, 1862. FO 97/336.

principle by Phillipsborn, and if the Lesser States agreed the benefits of the French Treaty would be extended to Britain.²⁵⁴ To this end, a circular despatch was sent to the Zollverein States on April 17, and Phillipsborn personally visited Hanover, Brunswick and Oldenburg, whilst Delbruck went to Munich and Stuttgart, to ensure the requisite endorsements. Thus Loftus could report to Russell that “no fears are entertained here as to the acceptance by Zollverein states,” as although delays were probable in the exchange of ratifications, it would “probably enter into vigour before first of October.”²⁵⁵ However, cracks in the overly optimistic outlook of Loftus began to surface following an interview with Bernstorff. Replying to the issue of the potential dissent of the Southern States, Bernstorff stated: “he did not think that any opposition would be made of it on the part of the Governments but that some of the Southern States seemed to be of opinion that the Treaty could not be ratified by them without the previous sanction of their respective Chambers.”²⁵⁶ Attaining the approval of the Lesser States would become a three-year-long conflict, and the departure of the two Prussian plenipotentiaries marked the conclusion of the preliminary stage of the Second Zollverein Crisis.

Yet, in contrast to the apolitical perspective of their peers, some British elements of public opinion were more attuned to the impending political uproar about to unfold. George John Robert Gordon (accredited to Wurttemberg as envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary) understood commercial union with Austria, rather than “a maintenance of their present Customs-House dependence on Prussia through the Zollverein,” would likely be the pursued policy of the Southern States since Austria was a chief destination for their exports.²⁵⁷ However, Gordon further expounded: “How far this change, if effected, will have been due to political feeling, it is now hard to determine, but it is incontrovertible, that this so far as the Governments are concerned, is not without its influence at the present juncture.”²⁵⁸

Therefore a somewhat vague awareness existed, in conjunction with the aforementioned viewpoints of Hodges and Malet, amongst British diplomats that the Franco-Prussian Treaty threatened to reignite Austro-Prussian rivalry over the economic leadership of Germany. The *Times*' Austria correspondent further expressed this view in a 29 April contribution. The correspondent reported some elements of German public opinion had been roused against the Treaty, as the governmental organs of the Austrian press decried it as sacrificing German interests to France, and this had already incited agitation in Hanover, Wurttemberg, and Bavaria. “The Imperial Government,” continued the correspondent, “must see that the Prussian Cabinet wishes to exclude Austria from the Zollverein, and it will, therefore, hardly fail to persuade the second-rate German States not to accede to the treaty.”²⁵⁹

However, at this stage of the crisis, the political insight of Britain's Germany experts was not representative of wider public opinion, which viewed the Franco-Prussian Treaty primarily in terms of what economic benefits Britain could gain via a treaty of its own with the Zollverein. This took precedence over any concern for the political division free trade created in Germany, as the Lesser States would be forced into an ultimatum between the two Great German Powers, that would call into question both the internal organisation of the German States and their collective role in the European states system. Thus British naivety and lack of

²⁵⁴ Loftus to Russell, 3 April, 1862. FO 97/336.

²⁵⁵ Loftus to Russell, 8 April, 1862. FO 97/336.

²⁵⁶ Loftus to Russell, 12 April, 1862. FO 97/336.

²⁵⁷ Gordon to Russell, 17 March, 1862. FO 82/103. In Mosslang et al (2010) 377.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ *Times*, 29 April 1862.

foresight, in consideration of similar dynamics from the First Zollverein Crisis resurfacing, which had been blinded by reciprocity and market access, characterised the perspective of British public opinion towards the Franco-Prussian Treaty between 1860-62. However, as will be demonstrated, British public opinion as a collective became increasingly attentive of the political dimension of the Treaty as the crisis developed further.

The Second Zollverein Crisis, 1862

By the spring of 1862 opposition towards the Franco-Prussian Treaty intensified within Germany and, subsequently, the apolitical perspective of some elements of British public opinion became altered. On April 26 Loftus interviewed Phillipsborn upon his return from Hanover to discover Count Platen, the Hanoverian Foreign Minister, found complications with the Treaty: “there was a very strong feeling towards Austria and a feeling that the Treaty both politically and commercially would be highly prejudicial to Austria and Austrian interests.”²⁶⁰ Loftus thus disregarded the assurances of Phillipsborn, who stated the Treaty would be swiftly ratified and described him as “over sanguine” – a criticism which would come to impose a more sceptical outlook upon Loftus.²⁶¹ No reply had been received by the Zollverein States regarding the Treaty by early May, and further assertions from the Prussian Cabinet, that “the material advantages which it offered to the industrial interests of Germany” would compel them to accept, were further rebuffed by Loftus as over-expectant within his reports to Russell.²⁶² Yet on 7 May Austria circulated a memorandum denouncing the French Treaty; it argued a free trade tariff for the Zollverein, as the Franco-Prussian Treaty stipulated, would violate the Austrian Intermediate Treaty and prevent any possibility of its renewal.²⁶³ The analysis of the memorandum by the *Time*'s Prussia correspondent accurately represents the anti-Austrian feeling which remained prevalent throughout British public opinion during the Second Zollverein Crisis. The article declared: “A detailed examination of the arguments and sophistries put forward by Austria would hardly have much interest for foreign reads, and is the less necessary, because nothing that has been or can be advanced at Vienna is likely to have the slightest influence in preventing, or even in delaying, the conclusion of the important treaty referred to.”²⁶⁴ Furthermore, within a report which concluded the Zollverein States would ultimately bow to the Prussian course, Loftus attached an impassioned pro-Prussian clipping of the *National Zeitung* (a free trade disposed publication of the commercial and industrial classes). The article stated: “Austria appears to wish to convert a commercially political into a purely political question, casting a doubt as she does with respect to the commercial political autonomy of the Zollverein.”²⁶⁵

Thus with an open eye towards German public opinion, it became gradually more apparent for the British public that Austro-Prussian commercial rivalry was, in reality, the continuation of the battle for political mastery over Germany. However, in comparison to 1853, a new modifying factor internationalised the crisis via the direct intervention of France and Britain. France affirmed no modifications could be made to the negotiated Treaty as, according to de Clercq, it was to either be accepted or rejected “en bloc” by the Zollverein, and the demands of the Austrian memorandum would not be met – even if Prussia had any intention to

²⁶⁰ Loftus to Russell, 26 April, 1862. FO 97/336.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Loftus to Russell, 10 May, 1862. FO 97/336.

²⁶³ Iliasu, “Free Trade”, 291-292.

²⁶⁴ *Times*, 19 May 1862.

²⁶⁵ Loftus to Russell, 17 May, 1862. FO 97/336.

accommodate them.²⁶⁶ A fierce defence of the Prussian policy was sent to William Lowther (British Secretary of the Berlin Embassy) by Count Bernstorff. Bernstorff argued Prussia held a sovereign right to reform the Zollverein tariff if so desired and stated Austrian resistance towards article XXXI of the Treaty – the article Austria claimed was a revision of the relations between the German Confederation to each other and foreign nations as France would be placed upon an equal footing to Austria, a German Power – was legally unfounded. Followingly, Bernstorff concluded his despatch by stating: “we have been led to pursue our present course solely from a referral to our material welfare: we could not – we dared not remain behind when Great Britain and France went before us on the road of great commercial reform, required as it was by the times in which we live – and other nations were already following them.”²⁶⁷

Bernstorff’s reference to the ‘material welfare’ (which should be understood as synonymous to economic strength) of Germany cloaked ulterior motives held by the Prussian Cabinet: to solve the German question without Austria. In referencing the commercial development of France and Britain, Prussia played to the Whiggish sentiments of the latter which would thus give it a free hand to economically unify Germany. This factor holds vital importance within the wider German question because, as Henderson states, “victory in the economic field might well be the prelude to victory in the political field.”²⁶⁸ To what extent Britain realised this is partial; indeed, as evidenced by the dogmatic disposition of the *Economist*, the excitement of witnessing liberal institutions, specifically parliamentary constitutionalism and free trade, spread to Germany often clouded the political judgement of British public opinion. As a 24 May editorial wrote: “Everywhere throughout Europe the parliamentary system is on its trial, and parliamentary growths are struggling for existence, here in the blade, there in the leaf, or in the wood, all deriving secret nourishment in the growing light of English institutions.”²⁶⁹ Therefore Austria’s perceived illiberal character deprived itself of extra-German support on the issue of its membership with the Zollverein. Or in other words, the Prussian Eagle effectively isolated its prey by championing liberalism throughout Germany. It is thus illustrated how powerful an idea free trade became within international relations. Britain, by incorporating the doctrine into the heart of her national interest, legitimised the course that Prussia pursued, and as Bernstorff demonstrated, Prussia utilised this to its own benefit within the question of Austro-Prussian leadership of Germany. Prussia thus successfully expanded the question of the renewal of the Zollverein from a purely German issue into a semi-European one.

Assessing to what degree wider British public opinion acknowledged the Franco-Prussian Treaty was in the process of shaping the internal organisation of Germany is murky. If the *Times*’ Prussia correspondent is to be believed, who on 19 June reported it “does not seem to attract on your side of the water as much attention as its importance may justly claim,” then public opinion was unknowing or apathetic.²⁷⁰ This may have been the case in June, yet as the conflict intensified during the summer, following the rejection of the

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Bernstorff to Lowther, 30 May, 1862, enclosed in Loftus to Russell, 31 May, 1862. FO 97/336.

²⁶⁸ Henderson, *Zollverein*, 279.

²⁶⁹ *Economist*, 24 May 1862.

²⁷⁰ The correspondent continued, “every month’s delay in its conclusion is a real loss to England, who awaits from it that reciprocity she thought it unnecessary to stipulate when making other countries unconditional participators in the benefits of her treaty with France. The Cobden doctrine, that we should give to others and await from their generosity and sense of justice the gifts we have a right to expect in return, may be chivalrously liberal, but practically it has its inconveniences,” *Times*, 19 June 1862.

Bavarian Government to the Treaty on 9 June, it can be seen a wave of captivation spread throughout British public opinion. However, ironically the *Times*' own editorial team would prove the correspondent's fears. A bizarre erroneous editorial published on 18 July brazenly announced Prussia had decided to enter the Zollverein. "Amid the noise of battles in one quarter," the editorial wrote, "and the excesses of servile discontent in another, Germany is slowly pursuing the path which leads at last to freedom and unity. When the Zollverein was first formed there were not wanting those who predicted what is now occurring."²⁷¹ In perceiving the Zollverein as the vehicle of German unity the editorial concluded: "By the Zollverein the Unity of the smaller states had been nearly accomplished so far as concerns the fusing of industry and the bringing together of the inhabitants."²⁷² The following day a somewhat short and embarrassed report, as the tone featured a comparatively mild delivery, clarified that an error had been made and ultimately a *Times* editorial discussing the Zollverein would not appear again for another two years.²⁷³ Although counterfactual, the unfortunate mistake in fact demonstrates the significance the *Times* gave to the Zollverein. It was argued Prussian participation in the Customs Union effected more towards German unity than any other scheme, and the glee in how this was proclaimed signifies the earnestness of this belief.

Meanwhile, a conference of the Southern States had assembled in Munich to organise a unified opposition to the Franco-Prussian Treaty. In an attempt to gain leverage over Prussia they demanded modifications to the Treaty be made; specifically, that Austria's position relative to the Zollverein should be revised establishing this *sine qua non* of their acceptance. Loftus understood the demands of the Munich Conference were impossible as both France and Prussia were adamant no further revision of the Treaty would transpire. Subsequently, for want of a better analogy, he compared the Treaty to "a building from which if you remove a column, you destroy the stability and symmetry of the whole." Furthermore, Loftus realised the Munich demands constituted an Austrian tactic "to delay the conclusion of the treaty and to gain time for her own purposes."²⁷⁴ Yet this would prove a fruitless endeavour as, however inclined Hanover, Oldenburg, and Electoral Hesse were towards Austria, he thought it was preposterous that they would exit the Zollverein since they were constrained by both geography and finance. The Northern States would become surrounded by the remaining Union if they departed and they could not endure the fiscal hit the loss of tariff receipts would impose. Similarly, Loftus believed Baden, Wurttemberg, and Bavaria would follow their financial interests and remain in the Zollverein – thus he predicted the Treaty would ultimately be adhered to.²⁷⁵ However, the Austrian led opposition had roused Loftus and his colleagues who perceived its political intrigues as detrimental to British economic interests. As Loftus reported: "the opposition caused by Austria to the conclusion of the treaty with France amounts virtually to arresting the progress of that liberal commercial policy which has been so wisely initiated and so successfully promoted by Great Britain, and that in refusing to give their adhesion to the treaty of commerce with France Hanover and the South German States are indirectly depriving Great Britain of the advantages which it will

²⁷¹ *Times*, 18 July 1862.

²⁷² *Ibid.*

²⁷³ "An important error occurred in our announcement yesterday respecting the German Zollverein. The negotiations which are on foot refer to the entrance of Austria into the Union, Prussia being not only a member already, but having of late taken a most active part in extending its influence and usefulness by concluding the commercial treaty with France," *Times*, 19 July 1862.

²⁷⁴ Loftus to Russell, 12 July, 1862. FO 97/336.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

confer upon their trade and manufactures.”²⁷⁶

Julian Fane (British Secretary of the Vienna Embassy) held an analogous view to Loftus, albeit incorporating a more penetrative analysis of the power-political dynamics unfolding in comparison. Following Count Rechberg’s circular despatch and speech to the Reichsrath – which communicated Austria wished to join the Zollverein and proposed to unconditionally adopt its tariff (except upon articles of tobacco and salt) – Fane reported: “It bears on its front the impress of a liberal policy; it embodies in its design a resistance to the freedom of trade” [...] “It is at once a revolution of Tariffs, and a Commercial Coup d’etat. Austria becomes liberal in order that she may deal a blow at the liberty of trade. For it cannot be doubted that this sudden resolution of Austria to abandon her old prejudices (or, more correctly perhaps, her old tariffs) is due to the fact that she perceives in the opposition which has been offered by Germany to the Prusso-French Treaty an opportunity for securing to herself advantages both of a political and commercial value.”²⁷⁷ Therefore Austrian attempts to match the perceived liberal pedigree of Prussia were swiftly debunked. For British diplomats, and as will be shown some elements of the press, Austrian opposition towards the Franco-Prussian Treaty was perceived as a cynical gambit to retain its position in Germany. On the other hand, Prussia was praised as legitimately following the path of enlightened liberal development established by Britain; although, this perspective also reigned because Britain had much to gain economically from improved market access with the Zollverein.

Consequently, Britain progressively came to perceive Austria as unfit to participate in the Zollverein. Therefore as Prussia declined Austria’s proposition on 20 July, the viewpoint that Prussia constituted the legitimate economic and thus political leader of Germany became more reinforced. This is further expounded within Fane’s report, which stated: “It may be said that all classes have, with true instinct, seized upon the real significance of the measure [the Austrian proposal], by recognizing in it a political manoeuvre, for the execution of which it has been necessary to expose to some danger Commercial interests which have hitherto been studiously pampered.” In that “it will form, indeed, but another phase of the great controversy which is being waged in Germany between Austria, supported by the majority of the Governments, on one side, and Prussia, supported by the majority of the People, on the other.”²⁷⁸ As British actors often looked to the wishes of German public opinion itself – empathising whenever it was seen as congruent with Britain’s own liberal identity – witnessing a significant proportion of Germans as in favour of the Zollverein generally, and the Treaty particularly, further legitimised Prussia as it was perceived by Britain as genuinely working towards the improvement of Germany’s economic welfare.

This point may be further evidenced by the *Times*’ Prussia correspondent who – although they may be construed as a Prussophile – viewed Austrian plans for junction with the Zollverein as a protectionist anti-Prussian move motivated “more by political than by commercial and financial reasons.” The correspondent continued, if not for Austrian attempts to disrupt the Franco-Prussian Treaty, “the example and influence of Prussia and the general interests of Germany would have prevailed over Protectionist prejudices and over timid apprehensions of dangers for the most part imaginary.”²⁷⁹ In concluding the correspondent determined Vienna and the Southern States would probably fail in dismantling the Zollverein. The reinstatement of custom-house lines across Germany would remain unpalatable to the

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Fane to Russell, 17 July, 1862. FO 7/633. In Mosslang et al (2010) 499-500.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ *Times*, 25 July, 1862.

German public, considering it had been more than forty years established, as impediments to “free intercourse” would run counter to the “spirit of the century.”²⁸⁰ This was also a perspective held by Loftus, who asserted: “It would be improbable after about 30 years of free communication between Northern and Southern Germany, that the ancient customs barrier should be re-established between Prussia and Bavaria.”²⁸¹ Again, it is seen this idea of free trade constituting the zeitgeist of the proto-global era of the 1860s shaped how British public opinion perceived the Zollverein. Yet, this notion ran symbiotically with understanding the Zollverein as an institution of power: it had allowed Prussia to shape the internal organisation of the German states, who became bound to Prussian economic supremacy, and to control the commercial relations of Germany with other nations.

Thus as July concluded it became evident for British public opinion the Second Zollverein Crisis primarily entailed a political conflict between Austrian and Prussian leadership of Germany. July also featured a hardening of positions in Germany as both Houses of the Prussian legislature overwhelmingly approved the Treaty: the lower House voted 264 in favour with 12 against on 25 July, and the upper House on 31 July voted unanimously in favour.²⁸² In an unusual move, Prussia paraphrased the Treaty with France before acquiring the approval of the other Zollverein States. The aim was to show the Lesser States and German public opinion the alternative outcome would be the end of the Union. As Bernstorff told Loftus: “Prussia would never consent to the renewal of the Zollverein except on the basis and in accordance with the principles” of the French Treaty.²⁸³ The Prussian Government had thrown down the gauntlet to Austria and the Southern States by asserting it would not waver in its pursuit of free trade. If the Lesser States did not concede to Prussian demands by 31 December, 1865, the deadline for the renewal of the Treaties of the Union, then the Zollverein would be dissolved. However, the announced refusal of Bavaria and Wurttemberg to the Treaty on August 8 and 10 respectively, as both States demanded negotiations for the admission of Austria into the Customs Union, pushed the Zollverein to the cusp of oblivion.

The British press exhibited a pessimistic reaction to the defiance of the Southern States. The *Economist* believed the Zollverein would implode and that Austria and Prussia would form separate Northern and Southern commercial leagues.²⁸⁴ Meanwhile a correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian* – in a rare example of a subjective analysis of the Zollverein being demonstrated by this publication – ascertained “the Zollverein is thereby dissolved, or at least disunited.”²⁸⁵ In contrast, during a parliamentary debate regarding Austrian entry into the Zollverein British politicians could not see the forest for the trees. Somerset Beaumont (Member of Parliament for Newcastle and President of the Newcastle and Gateshead Chamber of Commerce), in reference to a circular dispatch sent by the Board of Trade to the Chambers of Commerce about a potential Anglo-Austrian commercial treaty, petitioned the Government to improve their respective commercial relations. Beaumont called attention to the aforementioned report of Julian Fane yet, explicitly rejecting the conclusion Austria was protectionist, argued: “Austria had progressed in liberal institutions,

²⁸⁰ Ibid. The correspondent presented a similar argument a week later, stating “the Zollverein has answered too well in Germany for any of its members to finally break with it”, *Times* 31 July 1862.

²⁸¹ Loftus to Russell, 16 August, 1862. FO 97/336

²⁸² Loftus to Russell, 26 July, 1862. FO 97/336.

²⁸³ Loftus to Russell, 2 August, 1862. FO 97/336.

²⁸⁴ *Economist*, 16 August 1862.

²⁸⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 20 August 1862.

and it was to be hoped that her people would adopt free trade.”²⁸⁶ Beaumont failed to realise free trade constituted a ‘third rail’ in Germany and, in representing the manufacturing class of Britain who cared predominantly about market access, he dogmatically called for a free trade treaty with Austria thus ignoring the political obstacles which electrified this goal. In reply, Palmerston reminded Beaumont Austria had been prevented from entering the Zollverein because it was too protectionist. However, the conclusions of the press and various diplomats, that the Zollverein was a tool of Prussian political supremacy which is why Austria was excluded from the Union, were not discussed during the exchange. Instead, Palmerston commented upon Austria’s wealth in natural resources and insinuated they could be exchanged for British commodities.²⁸⁷ The *Economist*, whilst acknowledging it was itself ideologically inclined towards free trade, expressed disbelief towards Beaumont and the Government’s fanaticism. It wrote: “Austria has for so long followed an illiberal and paralysing system of legislation, political and commercial, that we feel at first bewildered and incredulous when we are told that the Ministers who are now at the head of affairs are “fully alive to the advantages of the most perfect freedom of commerce.””²⁸⁸ This episode illustrates the difficulty of drawing any definitive conclusions that represent how the multifaceted structure of British public opinion viewed the Zollverein. Because as a collective it was often contradictory, and that we do not possess modern opinion poll techniques for the nineteenth-century, determining the representativeness or influence of competing perceptions remains a matter of interpretation. Nevertheless, thus far it can be seen those elements more disposed to an economic essentialist view were: politicians, Chambers of Commerce, and the Board of Trade; whilst diplomats, consuls, and the press inclined to view the Zollverein as an interrelated economic and political question.

The noncompliance of Bavaria and Wurttemberg towards the Franco-Prussian Treaty led the Zollverein Crisis to hit a deadlock. Prussia had so far refused to discuss Anglo-Prussian commercial negotiations until the Zollverein had given its unanimous assent to the French Treaty – since adding Britain into the equation would likely exacerbate the crisis as German public was characteristically Anglophobic. Yet because the situation could not deteriorate much further the Prussian Government submitted a Treaty of Law to begin commercial negotiations with Britain on 6 September (passing 232 to 26 votes in the Lower House).²⁸⁹ Furthermore, the Prussian Government campaigned to coerce the Lesser States into remaining in the Zollverein by appealing to their economic interests. Bismarck, the new Minister President, gave a speech to the Prussian Lower House elaborating upon the Government’s position. The speech began by rallying the support of the House towards the French Treaty, as Bismarck exclaimed it was essential that the chamber “remains united in their leadership to support the Government in its endeavours to develop the material welfare of the country.” He continued: “this is no question of power but one of material interests, which each government will no doubt be desirous of promoting for the welfare of their several subjects.” However, in actuality, the question was predominantly one of power. The material interests often referred to by the Prussian Government were emphasised to placate German public opinion. Both factors were symbiotic and were utilised to justify Prussia’s economic consolidation of Germany. This notion is given further veracity by Bismarck’s concluding point: “all doubts however as to the seriousness of the decision of Prussia in this

²⁸⁶ *HC Deb 04 August 1862 vol 168 cc1204-5*

²⁸⁷ *HC Deb 04 August 1862 vol 168 cc1205-8*

²⁸⁸ *Economist*, 15 November 1862.

²⁸⁹ Loftus to Russell, 13 September, 1862. FO 97/336.

affair, all hopes which the rest of the Customs Union Governments may be entertaining that Prussia may well give in at the last – certainly not whilst the present government are at the helm – all these will prove vain – and they are but dangerous illusions – dangerous to the attainment of the great object – one which Prussia is loathe to give up – the renewal of the Zollverein.”²⁹⁰ Improving the economic position of Germany was speculative as what it meant was the adoption of free trade policies. If the Zollverein embraced free trade the Lesser States, without an Austrian presence in the Customs Union to balance the scales against Prussian supremacy, would become more dependent upon it. Or, as Loftus noted: “they [the Southern States] do not wish to exclude Austria from the German commercial system and thereby place themselves entirely under the aegis of Prussia.”²⁹¹

By the conclusion of 1862, Loftus and Ward were recalled from Berlin as the Zollverein Crisis devolved into a stalemate. In comparison to the apolitical and purely commercial perspective taken by some British diplomats between 1860-61, it is shown they collectively came to appreciate the Zollverein constituted a contested institution of power between Austria and Prussia. This may be exemplified by Robert Morier (Secretary of Legation at Berlin) whom Murray has credited as Britain’s “foremost expert on German affairs.”²⁹² Upon his arrival in Vienna, following instructions from Russell to discover “what chance there might be of an agreement being come to on the subject of the Treaty,” Morier realised the Zollverein Crisis had been produced by political causes.²⁹³ He reported: “I have also, though desirous to avoid the political and to confine myself to the commercial aspect of the question, found myself obliged to advert in the accompanying memoir to the political under current which runs below the transactions connected with the subject, and which, though only occasionally forcing itself to the surface of the official correspondence, nevertheless exercised a preponderating influence over the entire question.”²⁹⁴ Furthermore, the press understood the resistance of the Southern States against the French Treaty had been mounted primarily for political reasons; as Austria would not idly sit by as Prussia further consolidated its supremacy over Germany. Ultimately, British public opinion – with exception to politicians and those organisations which represented the manufacturing class of Britain – knew the French Treaty bolstered Prussia’s political position, yet because Prussia was perceived as a liberalising influence in Germany, something which carried great moral weight for the vast majority of British public opinion, it nevertheless supported the Prussian line. During the final stage of the crisis, this outlook would develop into explicit support for Prussian economic leadership over Germany.

The Conclusion of the Second Zollverein Crisis, 1863-64

During the interim of the Second Zollverein Crisis, as the standoff between Prussia and the Austrian backed Southern States perpetuated into 1864, British public opinion continued to dissect the implications of the Franco-Prussian Commercial Treaty. Alfred Guthrie Bonar (Secretary of Legation in Munich) expressed deep concern towards the growing divisions the Zollverein Crisis had sown between the German Powers. Bonar believed the crisis threatened to compromise the balance of power in Germany as the internal cohesion of the Bund would be undermined by competing Northern and Southern blocs. He reported: “the formation of two

²⁹⁰ Bismarck speech translated in Lowther to Russell, 3 October, 1862. FO 97/336.

²⁹¹ Loftus to Russell, 25 October, 1862. FO 97/336.

²⁹² Murray, *Liberal Diplomacy*, IX.

²⁹³ Morier to Buchanan, 17 December, 1862. FO 97/336

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

separate Customs' Unions, one with Austria the other with Prussia at its head, would become at once as much Political as Commercial Confederacies, and bring with them the inevitable disruption also of the Germanic Confederation."²⁹⁵ Bonar predicted the entrenched positions of both factions would lead to a prolonged crisis but ultimately, following the same logic as the *Times* and Loftus, no German Government would risk antagonising public opinion, which broadly supported the Zollverein, by dissolving the union through secession. Initially, Evan Montague Baillie (Secretary of Legation at Stuttgart) shared an analogous view. Baillie reported that although the attitude of the Government of Stuttgart, "guided as they are almost entirely by political motives in dealing with this question, remains the same," the industrial classes who at first ardently supported this position had now awakened to the threat of decreased profits from the disruption of the Zollverein. Several meetings involving "persons of influence" had been held in Stuttgart resolving that the Treaty should be accepted despite its perceived defects.²⁹⁶ However, in deviating from the conclusions of Bonar, Baillie surmised the deeply rooted protectionist principles in Southern Germany made it hopeless to expect free trade would gain ground.²⁹⁷ Within this report, Baillie displayed a vehemently Whiggish outlook whilst attributing the misguided position of the Southern States as stemming from their imperfect understanding of free trade theory. This sentiment, based as it was within an aura of British liberal superiority, is found to be pervasive and it profoundly influenced a significant proportion of British perceptions towards the Franco-Prussian Treaty.

A Whiggish propensity shaped how a wide group of both state and non-state actors perceived the Second Zollverein Crisis. A 22 January speech given by William Forster (Member of Parliament for Bradford) at St George's Hall, Liverpool, which was published by the *Times* evidences this point. Forster called on the Government and the Foreign Office to "make itself a propagandist of the principles of Free Trade," and thus dispel any wrong notions of protectionism, as "those Governments which were most protected were those whose real and true interests were damaged by Protection."²⁹⁸ Using Austria as an example, Forster argued its consumers and its resources had suffered immensely under the protection given to a small number of manufactures. During his concluding remarks, Forster demonstrated a Radical Cobdenite orientation by calling for the wider dissemination of free trade across the world: "it might be said that this was a matter not merely for the Government, but for the press of England and the press of other countries, to take up, in order by every possible means to spread the principles of Free Trade."²⁹⁹ This notion can be understood to have arisen from a pronounced frustration within Britain which thought it an injustice that similar free trade reciprocity had not been extended by other nations. An editorial in the *Times*, which lambasted the Foreign Office for sitting on its hands as France secured the initiative in spreading free trade, exemplifies this point. The *Times* began by asserting: "This is the old story over again, repeated through a thousand pages and with every variety of incident. The Englishman is, in truth, the most confiding and generous of mortals. Nobody in the world so averse to bargaining, so indifferent as to guarantees, so glad to do a grand deed and let it work, so ready to leave all to gratitude and honour."³⁰⁰ Reciprocity had not been extended because, as the *Times* continued, England was "detested by all the nations of Europe."³⁰¹ Indeed, surrounding the Polish Uprising

²⁹⁵ Bonar to Russell, 2 January, 1863. FO 9/158. In Mosslang et al (2010) 429-430.

²⁹⁶ Baillie to Russell, 27 January, 1863. FO 82/108. In Mosslang et al (2010) 377-378.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ *Times*, 22 January 1863.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ *Times*, 22 January, 1863.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

of January, 1863, the sabre-rattling diplomacy of Britain had threatened Russia with war and, in turn, alienated France by withdrawing from an alliance it had itself organised.³⁰² “Yet England goes on to the end of the chapter,” the *Times* concluded, “and will finish by making all Europe rich, happy, and ungrateful.” [...] “we will make the best of it, and proudly and cheerfully wear the crown of unrequited generosity which the envious dullard of the human race are still forcing upon us.”³⁰³

A fiery debate within the House of Commons on 17 February best elucidates the Whiggish predilection encased within British perceptions. Seymour Fitzgerald began the exchange by representing the anxiety manufacturers felt towards Britain’s perceived exclusion from the Franco-Prussian Treaty. Forster, who had not yet taken his seat on the bench as he was so eager to voice his concurrence with Fitzgerald, exclaimed: “There was a popular notion on the Continent that the end and aim of British policy was to promote trade; but, in reality, that was one of those things which they managed better in France.”³⁰⁴ Moreover, Forster continued, “the noble Lord the Foreign Secretary [Lord Russell] might rest assured that by upholding the principles of commercial freedom he was furthering the cause of political freedom more effectually than by offering to other Powers gratuitous advice, no matter how appropriate or vigorously expressed.”³⁰⁵ This highlights the idealist perspective within British public opinion, and also of Lord Russell’s foreign policy, that free trade carried with it a liberalising effect that would culminate in the spread of liberal institutions across Germany. However, Austen Layard systematically rebutted the criticism that Britain failed to energetically pursue equivalence with France from the Zollverein. Layard presented a comprehensive narrative of the political obstacles that had so far prevented both the French Treaty to be signed and Britain to attain MFN status. He explained since unanimity within the Zollverein was required to ratify a treaty the opposition of the Southern States, based as it was upon political motivations, had impeded Britain’s commercial policy. Yet, paradoxically, Layard did not attribute this to the power-political jealousies of the Austro-Prussian rivalry he had just expounded upon. Instead, Layard concluded: “The principles of free trade had not penetrated sufficiently into Europe to produce such a result.”³⁰⁶

These manifestations of public opinion lay bare the mechanics behind British perceptions towards the Treaty and the Zollverein. The dynamic involved a comprehensive understanding of the Zollverein Crisis as political in nature throughout all elements of public opinion. However, notwithstanding this, the conclusions reached by the British remained paradoxical as perceptions reverted to an ideological commitment to the wider dissemination of the free trade doctrine throughout Germany. It was widely known free trade was a Prussian tool for supremacy, and that Austria rallied the support of those States politically aligned to it against free trade, yet this political reality failed to shape the conclusions of British public opinion which instead believed Germany would eventually embrace the doctrine for the same

³⁰² Lord Russell threatened Russia with intervention during the Polish Uprising if it failed to uphold the six points agreed to within the Treaty of Vienna. The despatch concluded non-compliance meant Russia forfeited its right to Poland which it gained from the Treaty. Prince Gortchakoff, the Russian Foreign Minister, upon receiving this threat stated, “you had better not present this concluding sentence to me,” then returned the despatch to Russell for amendment. Russell subsequently retreated on his demands and rescinded cooperation with France, whom Britain had called on for assistance from the onset. The crisis led Britain to become detested across the Councils of Europe, Robert Gascoyne-Cecil Salisbury, *Essays by the Late Marquess of Salisbury Foreign Politics*, (New York, E.O. Dutton & Co, 1905) 192.

³⁰³ *Times*, 22 January, 1863.

³⁰⁴ *HC Deb 17 February 1863 vol 169 cc415-48*

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

ideological reasons as Britain. Therefore, the British should be understood as almost fanatical: all that mattered were low tariffs and liberal institutions. However, although frequently rooted in dogma, British support for Prussian economic predominance in Germany also stemmed from political reasoning as the ramifications of this position within the German question were fully understood – albeit often considered as subservient to the spread of free trade principles across Europe. These elements of British public opinion did not link the Franco-Prussian Treaty to German unification and instead perceived it purely through a Whiggish free trade lens. Whilst this viewpoint is but one of a multitude of various perceptions – in contrast to the realists who viewed the Treaty in terms of the balance of power and the economic essentialists who remained preoccupied with market access – the degree in which liberal dogma shaped perceptions cannot be underestimated. This can be attributed to the domestic consensus free trade had gained in Britain; following 1846 free trade became a privileged identification bundle that acted as the reference point in how the British understood their position in the world. Furthermore, following the Cobden-Chevalier Treaty in 1860 the Cobdenite doctrine increasingly came to dominant British perceptions of international relations.

The multidimensional, and often contradictory, character of British public opinion can be further demonstrated by an array of articles published in the press during the latter half of 1863. Following the fruitless Fifteenth General Congress of the Zollverein held in Munich between March and June – as neither Prussia nor Austria altered their positions³⁰⁷ – the *Times* and the *Economist* both printed essays explicitly linking the Zollverein to German unification. In an essay titled ‘Austria, Prussia, and the Zollverein’ the *Times*’ Prussia correspondent perceived a dual economic and political function for the Customs Union. The correspondent argued the Zollverein originated from a Prussian desire to deter French aggrandisement in Germany: “She had too seriously suffered under the French not to make her Sovereign desirous to create the elements of popular and independent resistance amid the uncertain eventualities of the time.”³⁰⁸ It was not from ambition, the correspondent continued, to attain political supremacy through that institution; Prussia constituted but a minor Power, or “the smallest among the great,” surrounding the genesis of the Zollverein in 1818 and the German unity movement was almost non-existent. However, as the political and commercial character of Germany became modified, the call for unity became intertwined with the individual economic and political liberty the Zollverein promised. As the correspondent wrote: “With the yearning for power the spread of commerce and general prosperity went hand in hand.”³⁰⁹ Austria, who the correspondent argues became aware of the power the Zollverein encompassed following 1848, understood “the main features of unity would be established in a department perhaps most important of modern politics. And in that unity she would have no share.”³¹⁰

The *Economist* dedicated a series of articles to the question of Austrian entry into the Zollverein. The majority of a 22 August article titled ‘German Attempts at Unity’ was dedicated to the ongoing Fürstentag – a conference convened by Austria with the German Kings and Princes at Frankfurt to settle the question of Germany’s federal institutions.³¹¹ The

³⁰⁷ “In the Zoll conferences lately held at Munich, Prussia showed the position she assumes, by declaring that she will not enter upon negotiations till the Franco-Prussian treaty shall have been accepted by the different states of Germany”, *Manchester Guardian*, 7 July 1863.

³⁰⁸ *Times*, 18 August 1863.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹¹ The Austrian scheme involved “the introduction of a federal executive (*Bundesdirektorium*), an assembly of princes (*Fürstenversammlung*), a federal council (*Bundesrat*), an indirectly elected federal assembly (*Bundesversammlung*) and a federal court (*Bundesgericht*)” Müller, *German Question*, 197.

opinion of the *Economist* towards Austria's attempts at federal reform was dubious. "How can one Emperor, one great King, four minor Monarchs and a countless tribe of Princes," the publication queried, "with different creeds, political institutions, and some discrepant and separate foreign interests and connections, be fused into one efficient Federation, on any plan or by any agency?"³¹² This criticism stemmed from the *Economist*'s fundamental rejection of federations; in the case of Germany, it believed the federal constitution of the Bund "offers all the elements of discord and contention and not one of the elements of real union."³¹³ Instead, the publication continued, the Teutonic race would better realise its deserved influence in Europe through institutions such as the Zollverein. As the *Economist* concluded: "The immense social and industrial benefit that has resulted from the imperfect approach to national unity effected by the Zollverein – a commercial union – has done much to stimulate the popular desire for a limited and consolidated Empire and nation."³¹⁴ Thus the Zollverein was perceived as a precursor, or even a prerequisite, to the unification of Germany.

The position of the *Economist* may be further illustrated by another article published in October titled 'The Progress of Austria in its New Career: The Probabilities of a Revised and Enlarged Zollverein'. After recounting the series of events, beginning with the Italian War 1859, that led to Austria's diminished position in Germany, the *Economist* argued Austria had gradually reoriented itself towards liberal institutions.³¹⁵ Resonating with the position it held in 1851, the *Economist* proposed a comprehensive German Zollverein would both repair Austria's standing and further the cause for German unification. However, in deviating from its position from the First Zollverein Crisis, the *Economist* concluded Austria was not in a position to barter and should apply to join the Customs Union following its renewal in 1866. Therefore, although it prescribed an economic unification of Germany encompassing both Great German Powers, the *Economist* understood Austria as subordinate to Prussia. Yet this perspective also involved a liberal optimism which believed Austria would reform its protectionist and despotic institutions in favour of the English model. Free trade would be the harbinger of this – again demonstrating an idea of convergence, that with increased economic ties Germany would become more liberal and western – and, in turn, free trade would also lead to a political alliance between Britain and Austria. As the article concluded: "Once set this free interchange fairly in motion, and the alliance of England and Austria will no longer be a figure of speech largely used by diplomatists and politicians. It will be a reality, representing the interests of two nations which have become necessary to each other."³¹⁶ In synthesis with the *Times*, it can be surmised the Zollverein shaped how the British press constructed its idea of a unified Germany: a free trade Zollverein would internally unite Germany and integrate it into the European states system by conforming to the liberal 'spirit of the age.'

The death of the King of Denmark on 15 November, surrounding another abortive Conference in Berlin which attempted to solve the renewal of the Customs Union, would come to take precedence over the Second Zollverein Crisis for the British. British public opinion, which was decidedly pro-Dane, became furious at both Austria and Prussia following their

³¹² *Economist*, 22 August 1863.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

³¹⁵ Since it had made progress on the six "gigantic evils" facing Austria, which were: 1) the failure of despotic institutions 2) quarrels with Hungary 3) poor finances and an overbearing deficit 4) feudal regulations of industry such as guilds and monopolies 5) a prohibitory tariff system 6) Prussia's newly acquired leadership of Germany, *Economist*, 3 October 1863.

³¹⁶ *Economist*, 31 October, 1863.

invasion of Schleswig in February, 1864.³¹⁷ However, much of this anger was directed not only at the actions of the German Powers but towards the policy of the British Government. Palmerston and Russell's threats of intervention in the affair were ultimately revealed as bluff.³¹⁸ Consequently, a pivotal series of debates took place within Parliament that created a seismic shift in British foreign policy away from Palmerstonian interventionism towards Cobdenite non-intervention. Richard Cobden presented a piercing critique of Lord Russell's Schleswig-Holstein policy in the Commons. He recognised Britain's defences as an island nation were impenetrable, yet this also rendered intervention in Europe impotent. Cobden perceived war with Prussia as fruitless because it represented the widespread desires of the German national movement. He stated: "our war would be with the whole German people; for, as I said before, the Austrian and Prussian Governments are merely doing the behests of the German population." He then argued Britain had mutual interests and a shared sympathy with the desire of the German people for unification: "if there is any country in the world with which we ought to be able to live at peace, it is with the German population, for on that principle of nationality which has now become the loadstone of peoples we are by race and religion more allied to the Germans than any other people." Cobden concluded his speech upon a denunciation of the balance of power by stating it was something he could never understand as the Vienna Settlement, which supposedly created stability, did the opposite by repressing the principle of nationality. He then asked the House: "can we, in the face of these growing popular interests, any longer base our foreign policy on that Treaty of Vienna? Recollect that we are not bound to do anything by force to maintain that treaty. All we are bound to do is not to violate its undertakings."³¹⁹ Robert Cecil – the future Conservative Foreign Minister and Prime Minister – praised Cobden's speech and argued if Britain had followed his beliefs it would never have lost prestige in the affair. He stated: "this loss of dignity and honour is not a sentiment; it is a loss of actual power. It is a loss of power which will have to be brought back at some future day by the blood and treasure of England."³²⁰

Another decisive alteration which shaped British perceptions was undertaken via the Select Committee on Trade with Foreign Nations in July, 1864. The committee consisted of some of the key architects of Britain's commercial policy, such as Richard Cobden, and those called upon to submit evidence included: Louis Mallet, Earl Russell, Robert Morier, and representatives of the Chambers of Commerce. The primary purpose of the Committee was to review the relationship between the Foreign Office and the Board of Trade. There existed systematic issues relating to the transmission of information between both institutions, thus it was the brief of the Committee to recommend ways in which a more harmonious relationship might be fostered. The key prescriptions it endorsed were: 1) greater sharing of information between both departments and on matters of both politics and commerce. 2) that a commercial department of the foreign office is established. 3) the Board of Trade be put in direct contact with the Consular and Diplomatic Services on commercial matters. 4) that the Board of Trade

³¹⁷ "There is hardly a German of them all who is not an accomplice in the work of spoliation of which the two great Powers have made themselves guilty; not one who is not ready to goad them on, hound them on, till Denmark is made to give up the very last drop of her life's blood", *Times*, 17 September 1864.

³¹⁸ Bismarck is reported to have said "if Lord Palmerston sends the British army to Germany, I shall have the police arrest them", "Otto Eduard Leopold von Bismarck," in *Gale Encyclopaedia of Biography*, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/otto-eduard-leopold-von-bismarck>.

³¹⁹ *HC Deb 05 July 1864 vol 176 cc826-930*.

³²⁰ *Ibid*.

is put on a more even footing with the Foreign Office.³²¹ The result of the Committee led to the formation of the Commercial Department of the Foreign Office in 1865. Yet this change perpetuated divisions between the Board of Trade and the Foreign Office and thus weakened rather than strengthened the comparative position of the Board.

The Committee's report also reviewed the state of the second Zollverein Crisis. A contentious issue was the matter of who should have served as Britain's negotiator. Initially, Russell had approached Cobden to accept the role which he declined. This idea was proposed by the representatives of British manufacturers, namely Ripley of the Bradford Chamber of Commerce, who believed Cobden would have conducted negotiations more satisfactorily than Ward. It was Ripley's impression that Ward was unfamiliar with the interests of British manufacturers, nevertheless, this emotive critique was not based upon any evidence as Ripley remained unfamiliar with the negotiations himself. Morier, on the other hand, thought Ward a suitable choice as he was "esteemed in Germany," and "looked upon as a high authority on commercial matters."³²² Ward was indeed capable in commercial negotiations due to his familiarity with the intricacies of the Zollverein tariff, although it must be acknowledged after a long career of service in the German Confederation he had accumulated a sympathy for the cause of unification. Writing retroactively in his autobiography in 1872, Ward stated that despite "the violence with which the Prussian government has extinguished the independence of so many German states," he was "not blind to the benefits which may eventually accrue to the nation from the establishment of the new Germanic empire under the Prussian lead." He continued: "Bismarck may be regarded as the instrument of a higher power, whose work, even against his own wishes, must tend to the ultimate realization of national unity, and constitutional liberty, by the German people."³²³ Ward's preference for Prussian leadership in Germany is representative of the wider sentiments of his colleagues such as Lord Napier and Morier. As will be shown, by the conclusion of the Zollverein Crisis Austria was perceived as unsuited to participate in the Union, let alone take a leading part within it.

The opposition of the Southern States towards the Franco-Prussian Treaty had largely diminished by the fall of 1864. Hanover, Bavaria, Wurttemberg, and Hesse Darmstadt came to realise the economic loss they would incur in departing from the Zollverein would be ruinous. Thus it became increasingly apparent Prussia would succeed in its bid to exclude Austria from the Customs Union and renew the Zollverein upon the basis of the French Treaty. The *Times* correspondent for the Minor German States in Dresden dedicated a series of essays to the issue. A 15 September article – in contradiction of the views expressed in August, 1863 by the *Times* correspondent for Prussia – established the purpose of the Zollverein had been since its outset to impose Prussian supremacy upon Germany. As the correspondent wrote, Prussia "strove to ground her supremacy on the influence of an enlightened, progressive, and truly beneficial rule."³²⁴ It was argued by the correspondent the Zollverein constituted Prussia's means of resisting the Vienna Settlement of 1815 which divided its domains following Prussia's acquisition of the Rhenish territories. The writer demonstrates a unique comprehension of the Zollverein Crisis, explicitly acknowledging the commercial question was intrinsically linked to the political question of unification and presents a robust analysis of how the Zollverein altered the balance of power between Austria and Prussia. "There is also little doubt," the

³²¹ United Kingdom, Parliamentary Papers, *Report on the Select Committee on Trade with Foreign Nations*, VII. (1864) IV.

³²² *Ibid.* 214.

³²³ Ward, *Diplomatist*, VI.

³²⁴ *Times*, 15 September 1864.

correspondent wrote, “that the Zollverein in a very great measure contributed to secure in behalf of Prussia that political ascendancy over Germany for which she bid so high, and, on the other hand, it had a tendency gradually, but virtually, to shut out and estrange Austria from the Confederacy.” [...] “Austria can no more force Germany back into her ideas of Protectionism than she can stay the sun in the heavens. She must either enter the Zollverein on its own terms, thereby acknowledging how wrong she had been for so many years in keeping aloof from it, and taking her place at the tail of it as the latest convert to liberal views, or she will have to continue in her impertinence and isolation; she will be socially as well as commercially, therefore, and to a great extent politically, shut out of Germany.”³²⁵

The important conclusion of this author, which was also presented by a contributor for the *Daily News*,³²⁶ was that unification would not be accomplished through federal institutions such as the Confederation. Instead, extra-federal institutions such as the Zollverein constituted the real battleground in which the balance of power in Germany was modified. As the correspondent further explained in a subsequent article, the Vienna Settlement had created an inherently unstable order in Germany because it did not consider the impotence of the Lesser States. This had led, as in the case of the Zollverein, for the Lesser States to gravitate towards either Prussia or Austria which in turn undermined the Federal structure of Germany.³²⁷ Moreover, the correspondent – again, akin to the concern expressed before by the *Times*’ correspondent for Prussia in June, 1862 – remained unsure to what degree their views represented the wider British public. They wrote: “I do not know whether many English readers attach as much importance as I do to the negotiations now pending with respect to the renewal of the German Custom-house Union. To me the subject seems to carry so much weight on all the political questions of this country that I think I need hardly apologize for my frequent reference to the matter.”³²⁸ As we have seen, although aware of the political dimension of the Franco-Zollverein Treaty, British politicians and manufacturers, in particular, did not perceive the Zollverein in terms of German unification. It may be concluded this viewpoint was only held by Britain’s most knowledgeable actors towards the German question who were able to put into perspective the wider role of the Zollverein within the problem, such as diplomats, consuls, and foreign correspondents for the press.

If the *Times* may be considered a “state within a state,” as one scholar has asserted, then it is significant to note all of its branches by now appreciated the Zollverein and the quest for German unification operated in unison.³²⁹ An editorial dated 25 October can clarify upon the perspectives demonstrated by numerous British actors thus far. For example, the decisive shift towards Cobdenism following the July debate regarding Schleswig-Holstein in the Commons and the Select Committee on Trade with Foreign Nations may be traced. The editorial began by celebrating “the new era of diplomacy has fairly begun” [...] “the policy of the future is peace and the development of trade, and the duties of the Foreign-office are daily becoming more and more commercial.”³³⁰ It then applied the free trade doctrine to Anglo-German

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ “The Federal restraints which ostensibly bound them, proved powerless to check or even to modify their career. After such a painful exhibition of administrative incapacity, the claims of the Federal system as a means of supplying a vigorous central executive can hardly be seriously maintained”, *Daily News*, ‘Commercial Reform in Germany’ in *Manchester Guardian*, 16 September 1864.

³²⁷ *Times*, 27 September 1864.

³²⁸ *Times*, 29 September 1864.

³²⁹ Kurt von Stutterheim, *Die Englische Presse von Ihren Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, (Berlin, Carl Duncker, 1933) 31.

³³⁰ *Times*, 25 October 1864.

relations by arguing: “it is undoubtedly a powerful agent in removing ignorant jealousies and mutual suspicion; and there is much to be said in favour of making an attempt at Free Trade with Germany just at present” – since the Schleswig-Holstein Crisis had brought both countries to the brink of war.³³¹ Furthermore, the editorial overtly linked the Zollverein to the balance of power in Germany, it continued: “The Austrian Government had discovered how much their influence in Germany was weakened by their commercial isolation, and though still stout Protectionists they were willing to suffer what they thought would be a grievous material sacrifice for the sake of recovering their waning power.”³³² Finally, the editorial reported that John Ward would visit the manufacturing districts of England to discuss what tariff changes they wanted from the Zollverein, and the *Times* described this as “the best service an English agent can render his country.”³³³ Overall, it can be seen the *Times* exhibited the full spectrum of British perceptions towards the Zollverein this thesis has been able to identify, namely: the liberal idealists who were committed to the dissemination of free trade, the balance of power realists who analysed the Austro-Prussian rivalry, and the economic essentialists who prioritised market access. This highlights the notion all three identification bundles had attained privileged status and that, although some British actors such as the Chambers of Commerce only perceived the Zollverein in terms of their economic interests, they were often synthesised and thus not mutually exclusive.

In December de Clercq was summoned to a conference with the German plenipotentiaries to finalise the Franco-Zollverein Treaty. Lord Napier, the new Ambassador to Prussia, interviewed with de Clercq on 15 December following the conclusion of negotiations. Napier reported that Prussia sought to maintain Austria’s preferential access to the Zollverein established in the Treaties of 1853, this included two proposals: 1) the concession of a preferential tariff to Austria. 2) The modification of article XXXI³³⁴ of the Franco-German Treaty to allow for the future right of the Austrian Empire to join the Zollverein. However, de Clercq reemphasised the French position, that no preferential rights would be given to Austria out of political sympathy, and stated: “the whole Treaty had been founded in the great principle of equality of commercial rights, and the least deviation would vitiate and annul a rule to which the French Government attached the highest importance, which was in their eyes the basis of the new commercial code of Europe. Austria therefore remains absolutely excluded from every privilege.”³³⁵ Therefore, liberalising the tariffs of Europe superseded Austria’s attempts to retain its position as a German power with the Zollverein. Free trade thus compelled Germany’s neighbours to intervene within the question of economic supremacy between Austria and Prussia, the ultimate result being Austria’s permanent exclusion from the Zollverein.

Throughout the course of Napier’s role as Ambassador at Berlin, he held a more sophisticated understanding of the political ramifications of commerce than Loftus; the latter held a tendency to omit political analysis within his reports and was slow to realise politics and

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Ibid. Between October and November, Ward would visit the Newcastle and Gateshead Chamber of Commerce, the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, and the Manchester Chamber of Commerce to discuss the Zollverein.

³³⁴ Article XXXII of the Franco-German Treaty reserved the right for German Powers to join the Zollverein. This provision would not allow for the whole Austrian Empire to join, only the German portion. The German plenipotentiaries urged for the omission of the word ‘German’ to leave it open to other Powers to join the Zollverein without French permission.

³³⁵ Napier to Russell, 15 December, 1864. FO 881/1312.

commerce were one and the same within Germany. On 12 January, 1865, Napier sent Russell a perceptive report regarding the dynamics of Austro-Prussian rivalry within the Zollverein. He stated: “The Austrian statesmen need in this scheme [entry into the Zollverein] a means for destroying the supremacy of Prussia in the commercial council of Germany which gives her so great a political ascendancy” [...] “the English economist on the other hand merely sees in the union of Austria with the Zollverein the development in a vast inner circle of the salutary doctrines of free trade, cares little for the political aspect of the question and hopes that the tariff of the whole enlarged Customs’ Union would eventually become as moderate as” the liberal commercial policy followed by the Prussian Cabinet.³³⁶ Therefore, it can be seen British support for Prussia did not stem from political preference in the German question, rather, an ideological commitment to free trade shaped the perceptions of public opinion. It was understood the Zollverein functioned as the instrument of Prussian predominance, although as long as Austria threatened to impede the progress of free trade Britain would support Prussia in its designs for German supremacy.

As British identity was largely constructed by free trade ideology this led public opinion to relish the dissemination of free trade – seeing it as analogues to the spread of liberal institutions. As the moment of truth had arrived, since the German preference of the Zollverein was comprehended as the embodiment of protectionism in Europe, Britain would not allow Austria to disrupt its perceived world mission of championing liberalism abroad. As Napier stated, Austria would enter the Zollverein “in a spirit of aggression and would find among the smaller States ready associates in assailing the ascendancy of Prussia. Nothing would be gained towards the unity of Germany but on the contrary antagonism and duality would be more conspicuous and intense.” However, as a counterpoint, Napier also understood Austrian entry into the Zollverein could “give consolidation, unity and energy to the political constitution and foreign policy of Germany,” which supported Britain’s foreign policy of, as Napier continued, counterbalancing “the aggrandizement of France on one side as of Russia hereafter, on the other.”³³⁷ However, the reality of the German question was as such “the jealousies and controversies” which divided Austria and Prussia within the Frankfurt Diet would likely “be transferred to the economic congress with fresh materials for animosity.”³³⁸ Thus by 1865, Britain was fully aware that a commercial treaty with the Zollverein promoted Prussian dominance in Germany. The question remains whether this was acceptable because Britain supported Prussian rather than Austrian supremacy, or whether Britain’s fanatical commitment to free trade was apolitical and supported whichever State liberalised tariffs. The evidence shows both propositions are plausible. The conclusions drawn depend upon what element of British public opinion is being discussed. As Napier mentioned, the manufacturing class of England, as well as numerous politicians, did not link free trade to the German question; however, the press, diplomats, and consuls perceived the Zollverein as the precursor to a Germany founded upon liberal principles which would also deter French and Russian bids for territorial aggrandisement.

Conclusion: The Anglo-Zollverein Treaty of Commerce, 1865

As the Lesser States had yielded to the Prussian demands all that remained was for Britain to secure a treaty of its own with the Zollverein, and in January, 1865 Britain formally requested the initiation of commercial negotiations. Why a Treaty was sought so intensely – considering

³³⁶ Napier to Russell, 12 January, 1865. FO 64/580.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Ibid.

the Zollverein would universally liberalise its tariff upon the basis Tariff B within the French Treaty – was because, as Napier stated, it would “place the relations of England and the Zollverein on a basis of right, which is a securer one than a basis of benevolence.”³³⁹ This quotation highlights a significant tenet within British foreign policy: international law functioned as a valuable tool for consolidating Britain’s national interest by institutionalising a beneficial status quo and codifying rules that favoured British interests.³⁴⁰ In this sense, the commercial treaty was an inexpensive way to maintain peace in Europe – just as it had deescalated the Anglo-French war scare of 1859. This was a priority within British foreign policy for two reasons: 1) Britain constituted a ‘satisfied power’, as opposed to the ‘hungry powers’ of France and Russia, therefore any change in the balance of power could only be detrimental to her interests.³⁴¹ 2) European conflict would be a distraction and potentially threaten Britain’s extra European interests.³⁴² Therefore, and as Napier alluded to, the most favoured nation treaty network can be seen as an inexpensive way in which Britain bolstered a preferential status quo in Europe.

Austro-Prussian commercial negotiations had proceeded simultaneously to those with Britain. Upon the conclusion of the Second Zollverein Crisis Austria was in a weak position and on the cusp of losing its status as a semi-German power with the Zollverein. The demands of Hock, the Austria plenipotentiary, were systematically rejected by the Prussian Cabinet. Austria’s core objective was to secure its preferential status established by the Austrian Intermediate Treaty 1853, yet France was unrelenting and found Austria’s political motivations repugnant. Napier also held the Austrian demands in contempt, and he stated: “while Austria aspired to a preferential position in the Zollverein England was interested in her defeat, for exclusive privileges are repugnant to the theories of commerce which we have adopted and which our experience has approved.”³⁴³ Ultimately, Austria abandoned its position of preferential treatment, a move which signified its decisive defeat in the second Zollverein crisis, and on 29 March the delegates of the Zollverein States met in Berlin to consolidate the multiple treaties of commerce (British, French, and Belgian) into a unified Zollverein Tariff. Following this, the Anglo-Zollverein Treaty was approved unanimously by both houses of the Prussian legislature, and the ratifications were exchanged on 30 May at the Prussian Foreign Department in Berlin. The final Treaty incorporated 9 articles and included the most favoured nation clause sought by Britain via article V.³⁴⁴

In discerning whether British public opinion perceived the Franco-Prussian Treaty as either an economic or a political question it can be seen both suppositions are largely correct. It is consistently demonstrated all elements of public opinion came to appreciate the conflict surrounding the ratification of the Treaty was political in nature following the announced opposition of the Southern States in 1862 – as Austria and Prussia understood the Zollverein as an institution of power which bound the Lesser States to Prussian supremacy. However, to what extent this information shaped the conclusions of British public opinion varies. The manufacturing interest, and those politicians and organisations which represented them, took a

³³⁹ Napier to Russell, 13 January, 1865. FO 64/580.

³⁴⁰ Scott Andrew Keefer, “‘An Obstacle, though not a Barrier’: The Role of International Law in Security Planning during the Pax Britannica”, *International History Review* 35:5 (2013) 1.

³⁴¹ Holbraad, *The Concert of Europe*, 117.

³⁴² Paul W. Schroeder, “The 19th-Century International System: Changes in the Structure,” *World Politics* 39:1, (1986) 11.

³⁴³ Napier to Russell, 4 March, 1865. FO 64/580.

³⁴⁴ Treaty of Commerce between Great Britain and the Zollverein, signed at Berlin, 30 May, 1865 in Clive Parry, *The Consolidated Treaty Series*, vol 131 (New York, Oceana, 1969) 200.

narrow one-dimensional view and perceived the Treaty exclusively in terms of securing markets for British exports. Yet the press, diplomats, and consuls – a group which mostly consisted of experts of international relations – perceived the Treaty on at least three levels: ideological, economical, and political. It promised the spread of free trade and thus the furtherance of liberal institutions in Germany, improved market access, and the consolidation of a united German state. Thus what divided the perceptions of British public opinion was those who perceived the Treaty in terms of the internal organisation and external role of Germany in Europe and those which did not.

However, the argument of this thesis, that the balance of power was the chief factor that shaped how Britain perceived the Zollverein, is not fully corroborated. Although it has been established British actors linked the Zollverein to the balance of power in Germany this view was not fully representative. Complexity is the best explanation of British public opinion because its structure was disparate and frequently contradictory. Furthermore, some elements of public opinion, such as the press, exhibited a wide range of perceptions and ultimately synthesised competing state identities – namely the economic essentialists, the liberal idealists, and the balance of power realists – into a multifaceted outlook. In comparison to the First Zollverein Crisis, it is seen Whiggish sentiments intensified, as free trade was understood as a force of moral good which had ingrained itself within British mentalities, and often overruled any political realisation of the Zollverein as another manifestation of the Austro-Prussian competition over German leadership. This can be explained by the expansion of the MFN network following the Cobden-Chevalier Treaty which led British liberals to conclude free institutions would follow and disseminate across Europe. However, Britain's free trade dogma incorporated an idea of liberal convergence and was thus political because it envisioned a specific kind of outcome for German unification: a free trade and Prussian led German nation-state. It should therefore be understood at least three competing state identities simultaneously shaped how British public opinion perceived the Franco-Prussian Treaty and this outlook was both economic and political in essence.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

In expanding upon the approach of Davis, which remained preoccupied with commercial policy, it has been found Britain supported the Zollverein generally, and Prussia particularly, to bolster the independence and integrity of Germany and thus the balance of power of Europe. This has illustrated the necessity of incorporating a more holistic range of actors in the form of public opinion as the conclusion reached by Davis has been turned on its head. It has been found the Zollverein represented the nexus of interests Britain shared with Prussia, in terms of a shared identity based upon free trade, Protestantism, constitutionalism, and independence from French and Russian influence. This led to the conclusion that Britain and Prussia were 'natural allies' as the Zollverein had a significant impact in evidencing Prussia's liberal credentials which subsequently translated into moral support for Prussian predominance in Germany.

The First Zollverein Crisis has demonstrated British public opinion perceived the Customs Union as a political question. British politicians, diplomats, consuls, the press, and essayists all perceived the Zollverein in terms of the internal organisation and external role of Germany in Europe. The Prussia-Hanover Treaty of 1851 constituted a significant turning point that formed this realisation. Until this point, most British actors hoped for a dualistic solution to the Crisis involving the entry of Austria into the Customs Union. However, although in the ideal hypothetical British observers wished for Austro-Prussian cooperation between 1850-53, their arguments and analysis supported Prussia and condemned Austria for its perceived illiberal character. Public opinion appreciated Prussia constituted the rising power of Germany intent on revising the *status quo*, and that the Zollverein was the vehicle of Prussian supremacy, yet Britain wilfully accepted a united Germany under Prussian leadership because of a perceived sense of shared identity.

However, the Second Zollverein Crisis reveals British perceptions as more multidimensional and complex. No trend of differentiation has been found between state and non-state actors generally, rather, we must compare the individual categories of actors instead. Subsequently, it is found most politicians, the Board of Trade, and the various Chambers of Commerce – or those organisations influenced by the manufacturing class of Britain – did not perceive the Zollverein in terms of the politics of the German question. Instead, a fixation to open German markets for British exports dominated the perspective of these actors towards the Franco-Prussian Treaty of Commerce. This often involved an apolitical free trade dogma – which has been found within all aspects of British public opinion – that believed the spread of liberal progress in Europe, following the path of Britain's own history, was inevitable and that free trade simultaneously constituted the harbinger of free institutions. Furthermore, whilst diplomats, consuls, and the press adopted a similar Whiggish outlook, as the proliferation of the MFN network further ingrained a mentality of liberal optimism within Britain, they instead embedded the Zollverein within the larger German question by linking the economic unification of Germany to the formation of a nation-state. Within this perspective, the Zollverein was understood as the continuation of the Austro-Prussian power rivalry through other means. Therefore, this grouping of actors perceived the Zollverein predominantly as a political issue. Overall British state identity remained contested between 1860-65 as neither the economic essentialists, the liberal idealists, nor the balance of power realists fully represented British perceptions towards the Franco-Prussian Treaty.

In conclusion, British public opinion perceived the Zollverein predominantly as an institution of power – as the belief it constituted the precursor to German unification was

commonly held – which encapsulated the wider dynamics of the German question. Prussia's economic organisation of Germany was seen to parallel its political ascendancy, as British observers made frequent mention to the economic dependency the Custom Union imposed upon the Lesser States, because it forced Austria into a subservient position which British observers thought translated into a loss of political influence. Furthermore, the effects of the Zollverein upon the further integration of the German States were perceived to bolster Germany's role in Europe. British public opinion viewed Germany as the keystone of European security and frequently emphasised the European significance of the German question. The Zollverein fits into this dynamic as Britain perceived German economic unification through its security interests, with one eye on France and Russia, via the balance of power of Europe.

The perceptions held by British public opinion towards the Zollverein are seen to have adapted over time. Whereas Palmerstonian realism constituted the most prevalent expression of state identity within the documentary record throughout the 1850s, following the Cobden-Chevalier Treaty of 1860 Cobdenite idealism came to replace it as the privileged bundle of state identity. This can be demonstrated by the shift between the two Zollverein Crises in how the British imagined a united Germany. Initially, a functionalist perspective was held by both state and non-state actors between 1850-53 that looked at German unification in terms of Britain's role in maintaining the Vienna Settlement. Retaining the balance of power dominated British perceptions of the Zollverein in this period as the 1848 Revolution had called into question the integrity of the international order. However, between 1860-65 the question of Germany's internal organisation gained precedence over what role it would play in the European states system. Whiggish idealism intensified throughout all of public opinion after 1860 and the question whether Germany would have a liberal character congruent with Britain's own identity – as well as open markets to take British exports – characterised the majority of public opinion manifestations. Thus the core development was the gradual diminishment of the Treaty of Vienna within British perceptions that became overshadowed by a widespread exuberance towards the growing MFN network. This dynamic becomes most clear in analysis of the views of state actors who, although acknowledged the power political dynamics of the Zollverein within the Austro-Prussian rivalry, instead accentuated the wider liberalising effect of free trade in Germany. However, it should be acknowledged the influence of both schools remained constant throughout the whole period under investigation, yet the scales of representativeness gradually adjusted between these strands of public opinion.

The choice to apply a theoretical focus upon identity and perceptions, coupled with a public opinion methodology, has allowed this thesis to satisfactorily answer both the subsidiary and primary research questions. Bucher, Jasper, and Hucker have all emphasised intertextual linkages, cross-references, and continuity between the perceptions held by actors reveal dominant trends in state identity and public opinion. It has been possible here to substantiate this as the press, parliament, and diplomats frequently referred to each other's viewpoints about the Zollverein and the German question. For example, the diplomatic reports of Julian Fane were reflected upon in Parliament, and the *Economist* criticised the dogmatic liberal idealism which defined the views of some Parliamentarians. However, it can be seen there existed divergent understandings of British identity within public opinion which actors such as the press held simultaneously. This led to often contradictory manifestations of perceptions as both realist and idealist tendencies were synthesised within the outlook of public opinion. Because of this, it is difficult to say whether one identification bundle was truly dominant; yet it has still been possible to ascertain at what point in time, and from what element of public opinion, these ideas held sway.

Most vitally, however, this methodology has made it possible to present an answer as to what meaning Britain gave to an economically unified Germany. An innovation presented here is that the impact of the Zollverein has been framed directly within the German question whereas other scholars have approached it as an isolated problem. There are at least four conclusions which the identity focus of this thesis has elucidated upon. 1) British public opinion evaluated Prussia's position in the German question through a liberal criterion which emphasised: free trade, constitutional liberty, and Protestantism. 2) The Zollverein was understood as the vehicle of Prussian supremacy that dovetailed its ambitions for self-aggrandisement, although this was rationalised by British public opinion through ideas of a shared identity and liberal convergence. 3) British public opinion took such a keen interest in the Zollverein because it resounded with the Corn Law debate of 1846, and this led to the belief Germany was re-enacting Britain's own liberal Sonderweg. 4) Latent Austrophobia within Britain was exacerbated by Austria's perceived illiberal character in comparison to Prussia, or rather by a lack of shared identity, and this impacted to what extent the British envisioned a kleindeutsch solution to the German question.

It is the quality and range of the source material which has made it possible to draw conclusions regarding how Britain perceived the Zollverein as a political issue. In using the terminology of Hucker, we have found both reactive and residual representations that help to explain the free trade idealism and balance of power realism prevalent throughout British public opinion. For example, a residual representation identified is that policymakers often decided to ignore the political ramifications of the Zollverein in favour of a perception based upon liberal free trade dogma. Moreover, we have identified at least three dominant tendencies that were shared by different groups of actors over time (again: the economic essentialists, liberal idealists, and balance of power realists). Diplomatic correspondence, although somewhat constrained by the influence of the manufacturing interest upon policy formulation, nevertheless exhibited clear and subjective understandings of the Zollverein within the German question. Furthermore, the *Times* and the *Economist* demonstrated a sophisticated analysis of both Zollverein Crises and their information gathering ability rivalled that of state actors. However, the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Observer* were ultimately lacklustre resources as almost no subjective assessment of the Zollverein Crises were printed. Notwithstanding this, the accounts of various Chambers of Commerce meetings recounted by the *Guardian* provided a valuable insight into the influence the manufacturing interest held upon perception formulation which also extended into the parliamentary sphere. In addition, parliamentary debates have given greater veracity to the views held by key actors such as Cobden and Palmerston, and have also highlighted discursive tensions between rival conceptualisations of state identity. Lastly, both the *Quarterly Review* and the *Edinburgh Review* linked the Zollverein to the German question between 1848-1853 and thus provided useful evidence to answer the established research questions. Yet, no relevant articles were found from these publications for the period 1860-1865. This highlights the issue that some resources declined in frequency between a specific time period, such as diplomatic correspondence for the year 1863, which, at points, resulted in a somewhat patchy account of the two Zollverein Crises. Expanding the scope of resources would be one way to mitigate this problem, however, finding further sources which discuss the Zollverein remains easier said than done. Other publications such as *Punch* or the *Telegraph* omit any reference to the Zollverein specifically or the German question generally.

The research conducted for this thesis may be taken further by discerning whether free trade constituted the 'spirit of the age,' as was claimed by a wide-ranging group of actors, and

if so how this came to be the case? A transnational history approach may be taken to investigate the political causes of the 1860s MFN network and to trace how the idea of free trade influenced politics and policy. We are already aware of transnational actors, such as Richard Cobden and Michel Chevalier, who proliferated free trade ideas between different states. However, uncovering how these actors directly shaped the political debate between free trade and protectionism across Europe would be the next step to expand upon the scope of this thesis. There existed a plethora of free trade societies across Britain, France, Germany, and wider Europe which can help locate further transnational actors. Identifying transnational links between these organisations and individuals would constitute the focus of this investigation. Similar sources utilised within this thesis would allow for this: the respective press of these nations particularly would prove to be illuminating as it has already been possible to find a handful of potential organisations throughout Germany and France within the research conducted here.

This project would hold significant societal value today as it might be said we live in the twilight of the golden age of the West. There is a widely held fear that liberalism is on its way out as populism and authoritarianism are on the rise globally. Philosophers, journalists, and other academics may also believe this, but we should look to the past to demonstrate whether this is the case. The 1860s can be understood as the proto-global era, the further research suggested here could unravel the dynamics behind this period – e.g. the spread of the MFN network and the rising influence of liberal nationalism – and begin to answer what led to its decline. Through this, we may reflect upon the current and future challenges we collectively face.

The death of both Palmerston and Cobden in 1865 created a political vacuum within Britain which it would grapple with for the remainder of the German question. The legacy of Cobden came to supersede that of Palmerston as British administrations between 1866-1871 would fully embrace his doctrine of non-intervention. This had a momentous impact upon the German question as the threat of British involvement within the Wars of German Unification became nullified. This demonstrates the far-reaching consequences the free trade doctrine had within international relations. Thus it would not be hyperbolic to state the influence of Richard Cobden profoundly shaped the history of nineteenth-century Europe. Yet, perhaps it was for the best that Cobden, whose lifework yearned for peace, prosperity, and goodwill amongst nations, did not live to see the violent means by which Germany was born.

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