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Trade and the Regeneration of France, 1789–91: Liberalism, Protectionism and the Commercial Policy of the National Constituent Assembly

Since the rise of interpretations of the French Revolution based on 'political culture' and 'discourse', the economic history of the Revolution has been pushed somewhat to the margins. There have even been claims that, contrary to the former mainstream view, the Revolution actually had little impact on France's long-term economic development, other than perhaps ultimately retarding rather than hastening the development of industrial capitalism.[1] Yet, despite such claims, the debate on how one might come to a new synthesis regarding the political and economic dimensions of the Revolution remains very much open. This debate up to now has largely focused on the question of the links between the making of Revolution and the supposed class ideology of a putative, capitalistic bourgeoisie. Revisionists critical of the Marxist-inspired depiction of a 'class struggle' between a forward-looking capitalistic bourgeoisie and a backward-looking feudalistic aristocracy have shown that not only were many Old Regime aristocrats far more enterprising in a capitalist way than previously thought, but that much of the bourgeois merchant class had remained corporatist and not hugely 'liberal' in outlook.[2] In short, the notion of a single, coherent and 'revolutionary' bourgeois class promoting capitalistic values has taken a severe if not lethal battering in recent times, since it is no longer generally considered to be empirically tenable.

Nonetheless, a number of historians — such as Colin Jones, William Scott and Jean-Pierre Hirsch — have continued to insist on the significance of an arguably 'bourgeois' belief in capitalism

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in regard particularly to the work of the National Constituent Assembly.[3] Such historians have argued that the principles espoused, and legislation enacted, by the Constituents in regard to the organization of economic life within France followed, by and large, the individualist and laissez-faire principles of both Physiocracy and Adam Smith. To substantiate this argument, one might indeed point to the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* — which promoted political liberty and the 'natural right of property' — and, among other things, to the two pieces of legislation generally regarded as most expressive of the Constituents' apparent economic liberalism: firstly, the 'Loi d'allarde' of 2 March 1791 abolishing guilds, corporations and private monopolies, and secondly, the 'Loi Chapelier' of 17 June 1791, outlawing worker associations.

Yet, curiously, these and many other historians have had rather less to say about the response of the Constituent Assembly to the question of *external* trade, and commercial relations with other states. The neglect of external French economic policy seems to have been general within Revolutionary historiography; even such well-known and influential studies as Florian Aftalion's *The French Revolution: An Economic Interpretation* barely discussed the issue of foreign trade at all, giving it only the most cursory treatment.[4] This apparent neglect or lack of detailed analysis, I would contend, is a serious one, in that it would seem to leave unanswered a number of questions about French attitudes to commerce which have arguably become more important in the light of recent efforts by historians such as Bailey Stone and Gary Savage to consider the Revolution in a more international geopolitical context.[5] For instance, if the majority of the Constituents clearly favoured a liberalization of France's domestic economy, as the authors above generally attest, what was their understanding of the nature of international trade, and commercial competition *between* states? What role did the deputies expect the Revolution to play in affecting France's own position in this international trade? What role, conversely, would foreign trade play in the regeneration of the French state? Furthermore, what role did they see the state playing in promoting the economic development of France? Finally, what factors — economic, political — were considered important in affecting commercial policy, and commercial relationships with other states? These questions do not appear as yet to have been satisfactorily answered.

This article, through a detailed examination of a number of the Constituents' legislative proposals and principal pieces of legislation (and the debates surrounding them), will attempt to shed some light on the deputies' responses to these issues, and provide a fuller picture of their economic and commercial policy as developed in this early revolutionary period. Here, however, the focus will be on the deputies' own comprehensions of political economy, and their impressions of the international system, rather than on any reductive class-analysis of this or that proponent. The resulting analysis will show that whatever the strength of the liberalism or 'revolutionary' idealism held by many deputies in the Assembly on a variety of issues, on issues of trade and economics specifically this idealism was often tempered by a certain degree of hard-headed realism, and a capacity, at least among those deputies more directly involved, for flexible and pragmatic policy formulation.

The French Economy in 1789 and the Legacy of the Old Regime

In an official report on the overall state of French trade in 1789 presented two years later, Arnould, head of the Royal Government's Bureau de la Balance de Commerce since the 1780s, was to state that the balance of trade with Europe alone (excluding the Ottoman Empire) had been calculated to have risen from a figure of 36 million livres in 1715 to one of around 57 million in 1789.[6] Despite the evident growth and favourable balance represented by these figures, however, officials such as Arnould and reformers such as the former Controller-Général Calonne had come to believe, well before the Revolution, that, if anything, the country had been failing to realize anything close to its real economic potential in international trade. Indeed, Calonne — as his secret advice to Louis XVI in 1786 reveals — was, in particular, convinced that the fiscal and economic structures of the Old Regime had for a very long time impeded, inhibited and seriously undermined the economic progress of France.[7] This was a view that was not merely confined to government officials, but was also popularly believed. As many of the *cahiers des doléances* show, there was in 1789 a widespread dissatisfaction with the performance of French commerce, and a corresponding belief in the imperative need of France to compete more effectively in inter-

national trade so as to guarantee its long-term prosperity.[8] Furthermore, many *cahiers* carried the conviction that any root-and-branch 'regeneration' of France ought to have as a principal objective the unleashing of this potential, on the grounds that France's internal prosperity and world standing depended on it.[9]

That economic competition had become pivotally important in the relationship between states, and should not be subordinated to other exigencies, was also a view emphasized in many *cahiers*. In an oft-quoted passage from the *cahier* of Le Havre, its merchant-authors noted that

> . . . le commerce est maintenant la première base et le premier objet de toute administration publique bien entendue et bien dirigée; il est le lien des nations comme il est le motif de leurs rivalités. Lui seul est souvent l'objet des guerres; il détermine les alliances; il doit diriger les traités. Ce n'est plus l'Europe sauvage qui se teint de sang pour la stérile possession de marais ou de landes. C'est l'Europe commerçante et riche, qui spécule, qui négocie pour le soutien et l'accroissement d'un commerce qu'elle se dispute.
>
> Oui, Sire, l'administration politique de tous les Etats policés n'est plus que la spéculation de tout ce qui peut favoriser ou étendre leur commerce. Révolution heureuse qui prouve si bien que les souverains ne s'occupent plus que du bonheur de leurs peuples.[10]

The problem with the French economy under the Old Regime — according to high officials such as Calonne and Arnould — was, however, that it existed not as one single integrated economy, but rather as merely an aggregate of separate economic regions, with multifarious internal barriers and a multitude of tolls, tariffs and prohibitions that varied from place to place. For Calonne, Arnould, and many other contemporary analysts of France's economic situation, all of this had had a number of serious consequences. Firstly, of course, it discouraged the circulation of internal trade, and the forming of mutually profitable trading relationships within France, with the high costs and vexing delays that attended the internal customs regime and its complex bureaucracy.[11] This meant that in many cases foreign goods whose transport costs were negligible by comparison, such as Britain and Holland (and whose costs were sometimes even offset by their own export subsidies), could often compete more effectively in specific internal French markets than goods produced elsewhere in France. Local industry was thus considerably disadvantaged by the artificial inflation of its prices, which lessened demand for their own products while allowing foreigners to

profit better from the needs of internal consumption in spite of high external tariffs. Foreign trade and industry were thus stimulated at the expense of that of France, in a market where by rights French goods ought to have received preference, and ought to have been more competitive.

Secondly, these same high costs of internal commerce were also thought to hinder the competitiveness of France's exports, by making them more costly.[12] Added to the relative cheapness with which the goods of Britain and Holland were produced and transported, this proved a severe handicap to France's ability to keep pace with its economic rivals, particularly Britain, whose economic power was rapidly expanding during the second half of the eighteenth century. The arrogance and aggressiveness with which the British were perceived to conduct their trade and their growing superiority in that field were the cause of considerable resentment in France, felt at both popular and official levels. This resentment had seemed to peak in the period following the introduction of the 1786 trade treaty with Britain, which had led, according to its critics, to the flooding of French markets by cheap British goods, and to a consequent sharp decline in the French manufacturing industry. The *cahiers* of 1789 repeated many of these bitter criticisms.[13]

Thirdly, it was believed that this lack of a single customs regime throughout the country had as a long-term effect a dangerous pattern of uneven economic development. Frontier provinces such as those in eastern and south-eastern France which lay outside the area of the General Farm, and which were exempt also from burdensome indirect taxes such as the *gabelle*, could trade far more profitably with foreign markets than those in the interior, on account of their position and the different rights that they enjoyed. Similarly, the 'Atlantic' provinces with their ports that serviced colonial trade, and those on the Mediterranean such as Marseilles, enjoyed on account of their trading privileges, and the volume of trade which they handled, a great prosperity during the eighteenth century. As Arnould pointed out, the overall structure of the economy under the Old Regime was such that these 'peripheral' regions were favoured far above those of the interior in terms of financial return and capital investment: out of a total of 364 million livres earned through foreign trade in 1789, he estimated that 228 million of this valuable capital remained in the maritime sections of France, 77

million at the frontiers, 18 and 29 million went to Paris and Lyons respectively, and as little as 11 million flowed back to the interior.[14] Furthermore, he stated, what investment capital existed there was steadily drained from these interior regions by various means, but mostly through heavy taxation. This was a situation that the existence of internal barriers only worsened, by making it harder for the centre to attract and access capital that might otherwise have been used to improve rural infrastructure.[15]

As Arnould and his colleagues in the National Assembly also well knew, attempts to encourage trade within the constraints of this existing system had only seemed to accentuate the problem and its inherent inequities. That the frontier and maritime sections were accorded specific financial privileges — such as the creation of free ports — only made the royal government all the more dependent on the far less prosperous interior for much-needed tax revenue.[16] From another angle, efforts to protect French trade and industry also proved to be ultimately counter-productive. High tariffs placed on imported goods such as textiles had only encouraged an enormous smuggling industry, which could not be effectively policed at the frontiers because customs resources had to be spread throughout the country, thus weakening the frontier barriers.[17] Not only then did French industry continue to be challenged by cheaper imports, but this illicit trade also deprived the government of further revenue.

The unification of France as an economic entity in 1789–90 was not therefore just a mere concomitant of the political expression of French nationhood, but also, one may conclude, the outcome of recognized economic imperatives. The notion of 'national interest' was assumed from the beginnings of the Constituent Assembly to include the economic interests of France, considered now as one single entity, and the subject thereby of coherently *national* economic objectives. The urgent need for the removal of internal barriers and the creation of a national market was to be unquestioned in the Assembly, not least because it would free the French people as a whole from many of the vexations and economic burdens that had for so long, and so unnecessarily, oppressed them. As a representative of the Committee for Agriculture and Commerce was to declare in the Assembly, 'among a free people, commerce must not be enslaved'.[18] The benefits of this liberation were to be both economic and political; the perceived abuses and regional inequities of the

old system would be swept away, the subsequent generation of internal trade promoting both national union and national prosperity. Foremost, moreover, in this vision of a 'regenerated' French economy, with the unshackling of its true potential and productive capacity, was a France better able to compete *internationally*, and thus better able to assert its national interest in the competitive environment of global commerce.

The Creation of a National Economy and the Debate on a New Tariff

On 29 August 1789, only three days after the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen' had been promulgated by the National Assembly, the deputies took the first steps toward this 'regeneration' of the French economy by reaffirming an earlier royal decree of June 1787 freeing the grain trade in France, while also stipulating that, in view of the current subsistance crisis in France, exports of grain out of the country were to be forbidden.[19] The wider issue of trade, agriculture and the French economy was also considered important in the Assembly, and its reform a reasonably high priority, for only another couple of days later the Committee for Agriculture and Commerce was brought into being.[20] This committee (numbering just over 40 members) was to be dominated by mostly middle-aged *négociants*, lawyers, and some farmer-proprietors, drawn from all around the country, and most of them from the Third Estate. In terms of political affiliation, most of the members have been identified as, at least initially, members of the Left, many being Jacobin but then subsequently mostly Feuillant in sympathy. They were, however, with the exception of Dupont de Nemours, rather minor figures in the political life of the Assembly, and were neither prominent speakers in the Assembly nor in the clubs.[21]

That only a small proportion of these particular deputies served on other committees, or that few seemed to have been prominent in wider revolutionary politics is unsurprising, for the task of this committee, as outlined in the Assembly the following March, was colossal and all-consuming. In communication (and, where necessary, in conjunction) with other relevant committees in the Assembly, the Committee was, throughout its life, to pursue the issue of reform in a variety of areas related to commerce and agriculture. This included continuing to assist in the aboli-

tion of feudal dues and privileges, reviewing various commercial treaties and state-sanctioned monopolies, such as the East India Company's monopoly of Far Eastern trade, and considering matters such as how best to exploit France's iron and coal reserves. It also included work on a comprehensive 'Rural Code' governing the organization of French agriculture, as well as the introduction not only of a nationally uniform system of weights and measures, but also of a new system of state administration in the area of trade and manufacturing.[22]

Of all the objectives subsequently pursued by the Constituents' Committee for Agriculture and Commerce, none was considered more important than the issue of customs and tariffs. Early on, the Committee and the Assembly at large had signalled its determination to unify the French economy and create, for the first time, a genuinely national market by removing internal barriers to trade. At this point, the pivotal question before the Assembly, and the Committee, was this: having resolved to remove such internal barriers, how then would it be best to maximize France's advantages in *external* trade, and establish a basis for durable prosperity? Ought they to re-establish a protective regime in the tradition of Colbert, or give way to the invocations of the Physiocrats and commit France to a regime of free trade?

The Committee reported back to the Assembly with a legislative project on this issue on 27 August 1790. Presented by the deputy Goudard, and the work of Goudard himself, Roussillou and Fontenay (all merchants and members of the Left), and with the contribution of a number of experts long experienced in this issue, this report outlined their policy proposals in some detail. First of all, their position on the unification of the French economy was clear. There was an imperative need, Goudard affirmed, to suppress internal customs barriers on account of their pernicious effects on French trade, industry and agriculture, and their crippling of French competitiveness. After all, Holland, Britain, Russia and the majority of other European states did not have to suffer such constrictions on their internal trade, so why should France, particularly when its consequences were so serious?[23]

On the question of foreign trade, however, the Committee's position was rather more ambivalent, an ambivalence reflective of the differing pressures with which the deputies were faced. On the one hand, as already noted, there had been widespread and

popular condemnation of the 1786 commercial treaty, particularly from manufacturing interests in France and their associated officialdom, most of which wished to see the treaty either repealed or substantially modified, and who were generally antagonistic to the idea of free trade.

On the other hand, political expediency increasingly demanded that this commercial treaty be left in place more or less unchanged (at least until it expired in 1797). In the early months of 1790, a deputation of the Committee for Agriculture and Commerce had conferred with the Foreign Minister Montmorin, the Naval Minister La Luzerne, and the Controleur-Général Lambert with regard to the numerous complaints about the treaty and its supposedly disastrous effects for French manufacturing. Montmorin, in particular, warned the deputation that since Britain attached a great importance to the commercial treaty, any moves in the Assembly to abrogate it might provoke an untimely 'rupture' with that country, which would likely result in war.[24] Now, at the end of August, with the Anglo-Spanish 'Nootka Sound' crisis still in the balance, and with the influential patriot deputy Mirabeau inveighing against any move towards a premature isolationism, the Committee for Agriculture and Commerce, together with the Ministers, would have been even more careful to avoid any undue provocation of the British government, lest this increase the prospects for a devastating foreign war.[25]

The resultant policy position of the Committee can be seen as an attempt to straddle or even reconcile these contradictory internal and external pressures. While stating that a new general tariff should in theory allow no exceptions, Goudard nonetheless made it clear that all existing commercial treaties between France and other states, such as with Switzerland, Great Britain, Russia, and the Hanseatic towns, would continue to be upheld (at least in so far as they remained extant).[26] However, Goudard also made it clear that by no means should the economic liberalism of the 1786 commercial treaty with Britain serve as any guide to the formation of a new general tariff. The terms of the 1786 treaty would thus indeed be truly exceptional for, in a passage which signalled a determined retreat from its economic liberalism, Goudard announced that it was imperative that French industry be otherwise protected from cheap foreign imports.[27] Free internal trade in France was therefore to be complemented by a

policy of external protectionism, whose watchwords would henceforth be 'liberty, protection and security'.[28]

This protectionism, Goudard argued, was indispensable to France's economic development. As he explained, it only reflected the realities of European commerce, following in the footsteps of major powers such as Britain, Russia, Prussia and Spain. Indeed, for Britain, a rigorously enforced protectionist policy had been, he claimed, the secret of its economic success.[29] Furthermore, what development French industry had attained over the century was, in the first place, largely attributable to the introduction by Colbert of protective tariffs, a policy which Goudard praised and to which he rendered homage.[30] Colbert's frustrated vision of a nationally integrated and protected economy would now finally be fulfilled. Patriotism and the general interest, Goudard declared, demanded such a policy.[31] To do the opposite, and unilaterally remove France's external barriers, as some were suggesting, would only advantage her rivals,[32] and thus leave France utterly vulnerable in a ruthlessly competitive world.

With the nationalization of the customs service (from a private profit-making corporate licencee to a direct government agency), the purpose of the tariff system was deliberately transformed. Under the aegis of the Farmers-General, whose responsibility extended little beyond their own profit, tariffs had been primarily a means of raising revenue. Now it was to be seen as primarily a method of economic *control* employed directly by government, allowing them a greater capacity to plan and pursue national economic objectives. The redeployment of customs resources to the frontiers would make the service far more effective in regulating the flow of trade, strengthening the actual barriers and greatly diminishing the possibilities for smuggling. Certain goods could be admitted or prohibited according to whether or not their entry was perceived to be beneficial or harmful to the development of national industry, it being possible to adjust the particular tariff whenever it was thought necessary or when changing circumstances demanded it.

It was a measure of the expectations of this policy's outcomes that the committee was happily prepared to forgo the revenue that would be lost from the abolition of internal barriers, for it was anticipated that this short-term sacrifice would eventually reap enormous rewards. The limiting of imports would retain currency in France, which would be then rechannelled into a

reinvigorated and sizeable internal market, maximizing national self-sufficiency. As Goudard asserted,

> Dans un moment où nos manufactures sont répoussées par presque toutes les nations, il est d'une sage politique de subvenir, autant que les circonstances peuvent nous le permettre, à notre propre consommation.[33]

The expansion in national wealth that would accrue from this, and the development of national industry that it would stimulate, could, it was thus assumed, only augment the economic power of the French nation, strengthening its position vis-à-vis rival trading states.

Such proposals were not, of course, to pass without controversy, especially since their protectionism sharply contradicted the fundamentals of Physiocratic thinking, the dominant economic doctrine of the time in 'enlightened' circles. In response to Goudard's report, a Parisian merchant (and *suppléant* to the National Assembly), Jean-Joseph-Chrysostome Farçot, published a work highly critical of 'prohibitionist' policies in general, and of the Committee for Agriculture and Commerce in particular.[34] Evidently a student of Adam Smith, Farçot sought to contest the presumed fundamentals of economic thinking that had in the past been the basis for 'prohibitionist' (and what Smith would have called 'Mercantilist') policies, and which had seen economic development as more or less a zero-sum affair. France was, he argued in this work, only one component of an *international* economy in which the participant states, with the growing volume of trade, had become increasingly interdependent. To hope to maximize one's profit by maximizing the other's loss was therefore short-sighted and ultimately self-defeating, since each state depended on the other for the money to buy its surplus goods. It would only be through, rather, a *mutual* exchange and profitability that states could prosper and expand their economies, for it was the flow of commerce itself that was crucial to prosperity, not the mere accumulation of capital. Thus, Farçot concluded,

> . . . s'il est démontré que la prospérité des nations s'est toujours proportionnée à l'étendue qu'elles ont donnée à ce commerce, la conséquence nécessaire, évidente & incontestable, doit être qu'il faut donner à ce commerce toute l'étendue possible, & par conséquent adopter franchement, pleinement & absolument les principes de la plus entière liberté.[35]

Farçot hence regarded no form or level of protectionism as either legitimate or beneficial to the economic development of France or its neighbours, who would now share peacefully with France in the benefits of a generally increasing wealth.

The author then moved on in the same work to combat specific arguments used by Goudard to justify the protectionist measures proposed on 27 August. Attacking, firstly, the use of Britain as an example of the supposed benefits of protectionism, he praised Smith's work *The Wealth of Nations* and put forward its argument that the dynamic rise of British commerce and industry had occurred largely in spite of mercantilist policies, rather than because of them. Secondly, he defended the 1786 commercial treaty with Britain, denying that it was in any way responsible, as some had obviously alleged, for economic crises in France that may have precipitated the Revolution. Indeed, the widespread and popular belief that the treaty had quickly opened the gates to a devastating 'flood' of English manufactured goods onto the French domestic market was, he argued, simply misplaced, or even malign. British imports during 1787 were not, he reported, as great as those coming from Austrian Flanders, nor were they any greater than in previous years (taking into account the regular importing of contraband goods). The treaty was in fact, he concluded, merely coincidental to a crisis that had had much more to do with the wider effects of the royal government's 'financial embarrassments' than with the supposed ill-effects of freer trade.[36]

Finally, the author directly criticized the committee, alleging that it had been poorly informed when making pronouncements on some tariffs, and further alleging that in its ignorance it had merely followed 'blindly' its own protectionist inclinations.[37] His greatest opprobrium, however, was reserved for the *députés permanents des manufactures et du commerce de France*, a corporate body with whom the Committee had consulted on the question of the tariff. This body, he claimed, had, in supporting measures of protectionism, no authority to speak for the true interests of the nation, being dominated by private and particular interests. Only the National Assembly could legitimately represent the general interest of the nation. He hoped that the Assembly would now, in fact, act in favour of the national interest by extending the vaunted principles of liberty to the arena of foreign trade.[38]

The committee, however, plainly rejected these criticisms. A follow-up decree and report of 30 November 1790 demonstrated their ongoing commitment to a policy of strict protectionism. Presented again by Goudard, the report reiterated and reaffirmed the principal points made earlier in the decree of 27 August, and in the legislation introduced on 30–31 October. France, he declared, had indeed offered in its new constitution a great example of liberty and the rights of nations to all those peoples elsewhere subsisting under more or less despotic regimes. However, to then extend this 'complete liberty' — alone, and without reciprocity with other nations — to the area of commerce would, he insisted, be

> . . . une fausse mesure pour une nation dont le système politique est aujourd'hui d'être une puissance purement agricole et commerçante, dont la splendeur dépend des progrès de son industrie, qui doit accroître sa population, la force de l'Etat, et assurer la prospérité de l'agriculture, qui en est la véritable richesse.[39]

While lauding the 'sublime doctrine' of unlimited free trade, Goudard nonetheless asserted that this was not at present a realistic option, that it would endanger French prosperity and economic security. If it benefited 'true cosmopolitans' like commercial speculators then this was neither here nor there — only national interest ought to be considered by the National Assembly.[40] Moreover, he reminded the deputies, the newly instituted tariffs were to be considered chiefly as protective devices, rather than as simply serving the interests of the Treasury. To this end Goudard went on to announce a series of prohibitions and prohibitive tariffs that would fulfil this objective, a policy stance that was seconded by the moderate deputy Malouet, who declared that these measures were necessary on account of the 'rivalité du commerce des nations'.[41]

These measures, and the assumptions behind them, were, however, immediately challenged by Boislandry, a merchant, and leftist deputy from Paris, in what was evidently a heated debate in the Assembly.[42] Boislandry's objections were both political and economic, and strongly echoed those expressed by Farçot. While the great Physiocrats of the mid-eighteenth century — Quesnay, Mercier, Mirabeau *père* — had believed that internal free trade should be complemented by a central, authoritarian government, Boislandry, in contrast, appeared convinced, as had Farçot, of

the strong connection between political liberty, economic liberty and increased prosperity.[43] There were, Boislandry argued, two types of trade policy followed in Europe, those of protectionism and free trade, and, he claimed, it was the less *politically* free nations that tended toward protectionism; the ones with greater freedoms tended toward free trade and also, allegedly, were the more prosperous. This protectionism was, in his view, inimical in two ways to the preservation of a French liberty so recently gained. Firstly, the rigorous customs regime proposed by Goudard's sub-committee, with its domiciliary visits, and all its powers of search, seizure and punishment, accustomed a nation to slavery and thus subverted its liberty.[44] Only 'arbitrary' governments or those of nations prepared to sacrifice their liberty, so as to gain some temporary advantage over their neighbours, would follow such a policy.

This led on to Boislandry's second point. Given that aggressive economic rivalry was the source of so many international conflicts, a policy of high protectionism was, he believed, inconsistent with (or even directly contradictory to) France's recent renunciation of offensive warfare and commitment to peaceful relations, a declaration (on 22 May 1790) which had been applauded all over Europe. The deputy thus concluded by repeating Farçot's charge that not only was a system of prohibitive tariffs 'un attentat au droit des gens' ('un crime de lèze-société' [sic], as Farçot had also asserted), but it was also tantamount to a declaration of war.[45]

For Boislandry, as for Farçot, that such a policy was imprudent was also a question of plain economics. Such a high degree of protectionism would only provoke the other major economic powers of Europe to respond in kind. The consequences of this would be disastrous: French industry would be excluded from the export markets essential to its prosperity and future growth. The whole policy of 'beggar thy neighbour' and of hoarding precious metals was thus, paradoxically, harmful to the French economy. As he commented,

> L'accroisement du numéraire n'est désirable en France que parce qu'il procure les moyens d'étendre plusieurs branches d'industrie; mais il faut qu'il soit proportionné à l'accroisement du numéraire chez les autres nations, afin de ne point altérer les rapports que nous avons avec elles. Sans cette condition, l'augmentation des métaux précieux serait plus nuisible qu'utile.[46]

This was not to say that France, as one part of a system of interdependent national economies, could not, however, actually increase its *relative* economic power if protectionism was removed. Indeed, France, blessed with so many natural advantages and with its geographic position in Europe, would be, Boislandry believed, the nation best able to profit from international free trade. It would have nothing to fear from the industry of other nations, for

> Aujourd'hui que la nation française jouit de la Constitution le plus libre et le plus juste de l'univers, son industrie ne tardera pas à surpasser celle de tous les peuples du monde; mais ce serait ralentir ses progrès que d'établir des lois prohibitives qui, en excitant la jalousie et le mécontentment de nos voisins, les avertiraient de porter les mêmes lois contre nous. Vous éviterez ces dangers en laissant une libre concurrence à toutes les nations étrangères; par cette concurrence vous stimulerez le génie national, et vous donnerez aux talents une nouvelle émulation et une plus grande énergie.[47]

Boislandry was hence no less interested than Goudard in seeing a relative and substantial increase in France's economic power. Though they understood the dynamics of the international economy somewhat differently, both saw it as essentially competitive, and saw that the Revolution had a positive role in greatly improving French competitiveness. The belief in free trade here thus by no means excluded a degree of economic nationalism. Boislandry was even more explicit than Goudard in identifying who their arch-rival in this affair would be, namely Britain. This country, he claimed, had been the initial source of this policy of aggressive protectionism, and had as a partial result of this enjoyed a prosperity far in excess of what its natural resources would have otherwise allowed.[48] Hence, while Farçot had suggested that free trade would make the French and British nations together 'les premières de l'univers', cementing their union and friendship, Boislandry's outlook was rather more combative. It was now time to cut Britain down to size, by taking back from it the share of trade that it had, he suggested, illegitimately acquired. A general policy of free trade would achieve this end, for, as he argued, 'ce système noble et généreux, en augmentant la prospérité de la France, frapperait d'un coup mortel le commerce et la puissance de l'Angleterre'.[49] France would hence regain the economic supremacy destiny had owed to her and which the British had stolen long ago. As *the* predomi-

nant economic superpower, she would become once again the arbiter of nations:

> . . . les succès de nos rivaux depuis un siècle leur ont procuré, avec la prépondérance qu'ils avaient acquise en Europe, le sceptre des modes et des usages; ils ont usé de leur supériorité avec hauteur et en despotes. Votre Constitution et la fraternité à laquelle vous avez appelé toutes les nations vous rendra ce sceptre, et vous vous en servirez en amis et en frères.[50]

To do otherwise, and thereby only imitate the British, would simply turn potential friends on the continent into enemies, enemies which France could ill afford economically. Britain's own alienation of Europe during the War of American Independence here served, in this respect, as an instructive example of what to avoid.[51]

Boislandry's connection of protectionism with arbitrary and aggressive government here was certainly controversial, and an allegation that would have been fiercely contested by many deputies. (Roussillou, in his report on the Levant trade, was even to suggest that French protectionism actually *followed on* from the principles of liberty and equality.[52]) The campaign led by this deputy against the general introduction of prohibitive measures was, however, at least partially successful. On 1 December 1790, and more fully on 22 January 1791, Goudard announced a significant lowering of the tariff level on a wide range of imported goods.[53]

Clearly, however, this was a victory less for the advocates of free trade than for those of a moderate protectionism. Although on 1 December and 22 January Goudard declined to specify particular reasons for the revision of the committee's earlier recommendations for higher tariffs on many goods, one may surmise that the committee, when joined in its deliberations on this question by the Taxation Committee, had found itself finally persuaded by arguments that prohibitively high tariffs on a wide range of goods would prove both self-defeating in their consequences, and dangerously provocative to foreign powers. This did not mean, however, that the deputies of the Committee for Agriculture and Commerce were less staunch in their opposition to a policy of 'unlimited' free trade being introduced in France. They determined, in fact, that while most locally produced goods would be protected only so far as to give them an edge in domestic and foreign markets, some foreign imports, par-

ticularly coal and silks, would continue to be subject to prohibitions as the Committee had initially proposed. France's developing industries would thus be given as much, but only so much, protection as they individually required in order to make them genuinely competitive, and hence promote their continuing and long-term development.[54]

As earlier noted, economic imperatives were not always the only factors taken into account in the Assembly's discussions on external tariffs. Some sensitivity to the political and diplomatic consequences of tariff legislation was shown by the deputies, for example, in the debate on the admission of fish oil from the United States. On 24 January 1791, Dupont de Nemours defended the proposal (in a follow-up decree to that of Goudard's on 22 January) that American fish oil be exempt from a blanket prohibition on the importation of this commodity, asserting that this was important to French strategic interests. Not only would the exemption be helpful in preserving good Franco–US relations, but it should also prevent, he argued, experienced American seamen from being lured to Halifax (in present-day Canada), where they could be conscripted, in time of war, into the ranks of the British navy.[55] Despite the reservations of Begouen and Malouet, the Assembly clearly agreed with this argument, voting to allow imports of fish oil from the United States.[56] The deputies thus recognized that there were occasions when diplomatic or strategic imperatives clashed with national economic objectives, and when concessions had to be made in the name of overall national interest.[57]

Enhancing Competitiveness: Subsidies and Exports

If the exponents both of protectionism and of free trade in the Assembly desired an expansion of French economic power, both, similarly, and regardless of their different views on imports, recognized that this required an expansion of France's exports. Just how this export growth was to be achieved was a subject on which the Constituent Assembly received many suggestions. It was first of all assumed that the abolition of internal barriers would make French goods generally more price-competitive in foreign markets, but what further measures could be introduced to bolster France's export trade? One way, generally accepted, in

which France could strengthen its commercial competitiveness was to procure and encourage industrial mechanization, particularly in industries, such as textiles, that had hitherto demonstrated some resistance to the introduction and development of new labour-saving technology. A concomitant of this was that France foster — through subsidies — the development of its own hitherto underdeveloped coal-mining industry, to provide a reliable and cheap source of fuel for domestic and industrial consumption, rather than contribute to the development of their rivals' industrial resources.[58]

Another measure on which there seemed to be general agreement was that of subsidies and encouragements to other French industries, such as that of the fisheries. Goudard, Roussillou and Delattre joined others in urging subsidies for such industries as cod fishing off Newfoundland, or for French whaling, recognizing the need of the French economy, and national security, that these fleets both financially, and quite literally, remain afloat.[59] For Roussillou, it was partly through such encouragements to agriculture, industry and navigation that Britain,

> . . . dont la population est si inférieure à la nôtre, est parvenue à porter son commerce à un si haut et si étonnant degré de prospérité, et a réussi non seulement à nous écarter de tous les marchés étrangers où notre concurrence pouvait lui être nuisible, mais même à introduire en France les objets de son industrie.[60]

Even Boislandry, in his speech of 30 November, had declared his support for such subsidies (in his case, as a way of offsetting the removal of tariff protection), stating that, for France, 'il assurerait à son industrie et à son agriculture les moyens de marcher toujours d'un pas égal avec les autres nations, et même de les devancer'.[61]

Another way of further improving France's balance of trade would be to develop a whole new range of industries for export. For example, a combined report of the Committees of Finance, Agriculture and Commerce urged in 1791 that the French tanning industry, which had up to then been exporting very little, should be developed to the point where it could compete effectively in foreign markets with British leathergoods, lessening the latter's market share.[62] Yet another method of increasing exports would be to explore more vigorously the opportunities for expanding French commerce into areas where previously it had been weak, such as in the Baltic, where the British and Dutch

dominated.[63] Where French traders already maintained a strong presence, such as in the Levant, it was asserted that efforts should be made there to shore up their position, and to remove any impediments to trade that might have remained as a legacy of the Old Regime. Otherwise, argued Roussillou in a report in July 1791, the protectionist measures of the previous government ought to be continued. The policies of the new regime should even allow France to trounce its trading rivals in the Mediterranean, diminishing considerably their share of a Levant trade which Marseilles was by far the best situated to exploit, but in which it had been hampered by the 'vices' of the Old Regime. 'Heureusement,' declared Roussillou,

> . . . la nouvelle Constitution de l'Empire réparera les torts de l'ancien régime. La protection que vous voulez accorder au commerce, la liberté des opinions religieuses et des cultes, la sûreté des personnes et des propriétés garanties par vos lois, sont autant d'attraits qui vous assurent un accroisement considérable dans la part que vous avez dans le commerce que l'Europe fait avec le Levant; la nouvelle Constitution vous présente la plus douce, la plus belle perspective dans l'avenir; la France libre deviendra l'entrepôt des richesses étrangères, l'asile des commerçants éclairés, le rendez-vous de tous les artistes, le point central de tous les commerces.[64]

A number of other writers and deputies also promoted the prospects for *entrepôt* trade in France, from which, they asserted, the country would greatly benefit. For Boislandry, this had been the principal means by which he had suggested that France destroy the commercial power of Britain;[65] while for another writer, a concerted movement of French merchants into the Baltic and northern trade could eventually see France prosper as the principal *entrepôt* between the great markets of the north and those south of Europe, a position that up to then Holland had held to some degree.[66]

Delattre and the Future of French Navigation

In the final days of the Constituent Assembly, the deputy Delattre presented a report on behalf of the Committees of the Navy and Agriculture and Commerce, on the subject of a French 'Navigation Act'. This report contained an elaborate summary of many of the themes found in the committee's earlier reports and

decrees, and espoused in the Assembly at large: a staunch commitment to the protection of French agriculture and industry, a trenchant critique of 'free-trading' doctrines (in the context of external trade), and an expectation of the future expansion and greater competitiveness of the French commercial economy.

Delattre began his report with an affirmation of the as yet unrealized potential of the French economy, asserting, among all the 'precious' branches of this economy worthy of protection, the particular importance and complexity of France's maritime commerce. Exhorting the Assembly to forswear any unbecoming 'arrogance', he nonetheless insisted that neither should France continue to accept a subordinate position when it came to this trade. Britain, with its enormous navy and enterprising merchant fleet, had, he said, grown accustomed to believing that it held a kind of sovereignty over the world's oceans, a situation that could not and ought not to go unchallenged. France was, after all, larger in population than Britain, richer in terms of landed resources, and surely its equal in audacity and ingenuity: 'Pourquoi,' he thus asked, 'ne marcherions-nous pas sur la même ligne dans la carrière ouverte à l'ambition de tous les peuples?'[67]

The way was now open to learn from the success of British trade and navigation. In this, however, Delattre was quick to warn against the distractions provided by the 'dangerous' and theoretical doctrine of unlimited free trade, which, he said, had become something of a religion among certain elements of the Assembly, particularly among its Taxation Committee. While not eschewing 'theory' as such, he besought the Assembly to follow nonetheless the wiser counsels of 'experience and practice', remarking on the necessity of the new and rigorous customs regime to the development and future prosperity of French industry.[68] In language suggestive of the competitive or even combative nature of international commerce, he described the agents of France's new 'douanes nationales', this 'rempart' of French trade, as no longer 'les satellites du fisc qui dévorait tout, mais . . . les soldats du commerce, la sentinelle de l'industrie, les gardiens enfin de nos manufactures'.[69] In the first case, he said, while unlimited free trade might be an ultimate and worthy goal to which one might aspire, French industry was as yet in certain respects insufficiently strong to withstand such a regime.

In the second case, he implored the Assembly to follow carefully the example of France's neighbours and rivals. Among

these, he asserted, one should not properly count the small trading states whose prosperity did indeed derive from a large degree of free trade, but rather, those more extensive states with substantial agricultural and industrial concerns. 'Jetez les yeux sur toutes les grandes nations qui vous environnent, sur ces nations agricoles, industrieuses, qui produisent et qui créent; là,' he declared, 'vous trouverez le régime prohibitif'. Foremost among these states, he furthermore declared, was Britain, 'cette île de liberté', which he said, 'a peut-étre porté la science du commerce au plus haut degré d'élévation qu'on puisse atteindre'. This most flourishing of states, he argued, in vigorously protecting its colonies, fisheries and especially ports from unwanted foreign incursions, was nearly 'cuirassée de prohibitions'. How then could the 'économistes' thus declaim that such protectionism was 'fatal', when its outcomes were so obviously and demonstrably impressive?[70]

Central to the success, and rapid expansion over the century, of British trade and navigation, Delattre then argued, was the British 'Navigation Act' first enacted in 1651. To provide France with a similar Act would be, he thus proposed, 'un de beaux présents que l'Assemblée nationale puisse faire à l'Empire'.[71] In short, such an act would entail the exclusion of foreign or at least third-party shipping from French overseas commerce, and an exclusion moreover of all ships of foreign construction from the French navy and merchant marine.[72] This, he asserted, in encouraging the growth of French maritime resources, would remedy the current situation wherein France, providing only a portion of its own freight-carrying needs, was effectively subsidizing rival maritime establishments, and thus nourishing the very same seamen that would most likely be used against France in time of war. Following the dictum already espoused by numerous other speakers in the Assembly, Delattre put it in simple terms:

> Pour posséder une marine, il faut avoir des vaisseaux et il faut les construire: il faut avoir des matelots; et, pour s'en donner, il faut se livrer à la pêche: la pêche est le berceau de toute marine; elle force à la construction, elle forme les meilleurs et les plus intrépides marins.[73]

In proposing this 'Navigation Act' Delattre did, however, acknowledge the reservations of certain port-towns, specifically Bordeaux, Marseilles and La Rochelle; they feared that French merchant fleets would not suffice to carry all French trade. He

insisted that any shortfall in French shipping could in the interim be provided by the trading partner with whom France was directly dealing.[74] Similarly, on the question of the sufficiency of materials for naval construction, Delattre noted that both Britain and Holland had long been dependent for the bulk of their own naval materials on overseas sources (such as the Baltic region), and that France, again, would simply have to imitate them in this regard.[75]

The second part of this report concerned how this proposal for a Navigation Act would apply to the various different aspects of French navigation and maritime trade. First of all, with regard to the French coastal trade (*cabotage*) and Atlantic fisheries, Delattre argued for the total exclusion of foreign vessels or foreign imports. Both these exclusions, in supposedly stimulating the growth of French shipping, were intended to foster an expansion in France's active seafaring population, thus finally exploiting hitherto underutilized or mismanaged manpower reserves.[76] The fisheries particularly (for which Delattre called for a threefold increase in French shipping) were to be greatly encouraged by a combination of subsidies and the new demands of a unified national market, in which free ports should henceforth be eliminated. 'Nous pouvons et nous devons beaucoup augmenter nôtre pêche,' the deputy preached, 'nous le pouvons pour la pêche en elle-même; nous le devons pour accroître le nombre de nos matelots, et pour ranimer et vivifier notre marine.'[77] The encouragement of an active seafaring population was hence regarded as vitally important to the maintenance and expansion of French maritime power.

In regard to Northern Europe, Africa and the Levant, the report was similarly optimistic in its outlining of the potential for a considerable expansion in French trade and navigation. It was also noteworthy for two further reasons: firstly, although rhetorical references to liberty, equality and revolutionary zeal had found their way into earlier reports of the Committee for Agriculture and Commerce on this subject, the absence in this particular report of such prevailing ideological references among the revolutionaries gives some indication that, in terms of foreign trade, French national interest was conceived by the committee largely in 'traditional' terms (the difference being that France was now economically unified, whereas formerly it had been more or less parcelized). That is, the primary goals of foreign trade were

understood to include the attaining of the most advantageous and viable balance of trade with her various trading partners (and the extraction of maximum profit for French merchants), the greatest development possible of French agriculture and industry, and, finally, the denial, where appropriate, of commercial opportunities to perceived rivals. Delattre, who had begun his report with a statement that it was better to correct the faults of the previous regime, rather than indulge in the 'sad pleasure' of reproaching it, even seemed to be generally praising of the recent diplomacy of the royal government in this regard, particularly the commercial treaties recently effected and re-confirmed respectively with Russia and Sweden.[78]

Secondly, this report displays a curious selectivity in its discussion of the relationship between perceived economic and geo-strategic exigencies in French foreign relations. Particularly with regard to the Ottoman Empire and Spain, there was some recognition of how strategic *means* could both protect France's economic assets and enhance her commercial opportunities. In relation to the Ottoman Empire, Delattre argued that the maintenance, with that country, of France's valuable and particularly advantageous trade required not merely a degree of positive diplomatic pressure (including, he implied, bribery). 'Nous devons,' he said also, 'montrer aux yeux des Ottomans un grand appareil de puissance,' by sending French warships to cruise Ottoman waters. Similarly, the report was adamant in its support for the continuation of the Franco–Spanish alliance, reflecting that their mutual interests 'sont mêlés, confondus et communs dans l'une comme dans l'autre hémisphère', particularly as the two Empires were geographically contiguous both in Europe and in France's most valuable colony, Saint-Domingue. Finally, in the report, the connection of commercial maritime activity with overall naval power, and the need to unite French naval resources with those of Spain (against those of Britain), shows some understanding of the nature and dynamics at least of the maritime balance of power, and its crucial impact overall upon French economic prosperity.

At the same time, however, the report seemed to neglect the wider demands of the balance of power, particularly as it pertained to continental Europe. That is, while the committee obviously assumed that European states would continue to compete on an economic level, there seemed to be little if any recognition

of the traditional and ongoing connection in European diplomacy between economic and strategic agendas, in which the balance of power and the balance of trade were considered to be interrelated issues. Would Britain stand by and watch while the prime source of her prosperity, her command of the seas, was compromised and threatened by a resurgence of French maritime power? Or would this power, as the French ambassador to London had earlier feared, take some political, diplomatic or military action (covert or otherwise) against France and its Revolution, to forestall such a possibility? Aside from stating that France should continue to monitor the competitive actions of its commercial rivals, the report was entirely silent on this question.

There remained, moreover, the question of political and ideological reactions of the European powers to the Revolution in France. A number of speakers during the war and peace debate of May 1790 had already warned of the great dangers of France effectively isolating herself, for ideological or any other reasons, from the alliance system of Europe. By the middle of 1790 fears had already been raised in the Assembly about a possible coalition of European powers against the Revolution, a fear that can only have gained strength with the rapprochement around that time of Austria and Prussia (engineered by Britain), and the joint Austro–Prussian Pillnitz declaration in August the following year. What of the rest of Europe? Would otherwise profitable trading relationships with countries such as Russia and Sweden continue to be unaffected by the events in France? Would their monarchs, who had early on shown their marked distaste, if not outright hostility, to the Revolution, co-operate in providing France with the vital naval supplies upon which her projected naval resurgence would doubtless depend? On this question the report was similarly unforthcoming.

There are a number of possible explanations for such a neglect. It is possible, first of all, that the committee's silence on the potential diplomatic and strategic consequences of such a measure as a Navigation Act was at least partly deliberate. Given the concerns already raised in the Assembly about the possible reactions to the Revolution of various continental powers, the committee may possibly have not wished to speculate openly on any further developments or consequences of so alarming a nature. The political situation among the powers of Europe was, after all, more rightly the concern of the Diplomatic Committee.

However, if their concerns about this were of any import, then it is hard to believe that the Committees on the Marine and Agriculture and Commerce would not have also wished to join formally with the Diplomatic Committee for the purposes of deliberating on the issue of a Navigation Act, and investigating its potential consequences. As it was, being virtually at the end of their term — with France's new constitution now more or less complete — the Constituents elected to leave the full consideration of a Navigation Act to the following legislature.[79]

The Commercial Policy of the Constituent Assembly

Throughout its life, from the summer of 1789 to the autumn of 1791, the National Constituent Assembly was beset with innumerable crises and disturbances arising out of the tumult of revolutionary politics — including army and navy mutinies, and fears of foreign and domestic conspiracies — challenges which seemed to demand an urgent legislative response. As histories of the Revolution generally detail, these destabilizing events were also arranged against the background of an intensifying and escalating war of words between opponents and supporters of revolutionary change, and between the various factions aspiring for leadership of the revolutionary movement.

Yet, one should not forget that however much the attention of the Assembly was distracted, and even sometimes consumed, by the daily alarms of revolutionary politics, the attention of many of the deputies remained focused on the more 'prosaic' work of reform and regeneration of the French body politic being undertaken by the Assembly's specialized committees. The fact that the deputies on those committees ploughed on diligently with their appointed tasks — despite the paroxysms of public feeling and agitation that often surrounded the Assembly — gives strong evidence that they considered this difficult, often technical and complex work of national regeneration to be of the utmost importance.

Indeed, from the evidence adduced in this article one can conclude that the work of the Committee for Agriculture and Commerce, and its task — the regeneration of a now unified French economy — was, in particular, of capital importance to the deputies of the Constituent Assembly, in that they believed it

would underwrite the nation's future prosperity and give substance to its enjoyment of liberty. They clearly assumed that once France had been provided with a constitution, the situation would stabilize and the country would be able to enjoy the fruits of their 'regenerative' labours.

Turning to the substance of this policy, one may also conclude that central to this economic regeneration, for the deputies, was a policy that was twofold, involving a combination of free internal trade and measured external protectionism. This policy was itself hardly 'revolutionary', in the sense of being innovative. It may in fact be said to have derived in large part from an analysis of the dynamic commercial success over the century of France's long-time rival, Britain. On the question of foreign trade, the deputies thus consistently eschewed fixed ideas or 'grand speculative theories', of the type promoted by the French *économistes*, in favour of a pragmatic view of the then current realities and an understanding informed by past experience. What they believed the British example had shown them was that it was indeed such a determined and focused policy of internal free trade and external protectionism, combined with an enterprising commercial instinct, that had been basically responsible for the rapid expansion of both British commercial and strategic power in the eighteenth century. The evidence for this had seemed, for many deputies, to be irrefutable.

The further, and indeed most salient, lesson to be drawn from the British experience was one that had also been promoted by such writers as Adam Smith (and, in France, by the Physiocrats) — that the goal of economic policy ought to be the enhancement of productivity rather than the mere accumulation of capital. When considering the situation in their own country, this led the deputies to place great emphasis on the rapid expansion and development of national industry, for it was the common view that hitherto the French economy had been severely 'handicapped' by the multiple strictures of the Old Regime state. Although some sectors such as maritime trade had managed to prosper under this regime, other large sectors of the French economy such as agriculture, mining and some manufacturing had remained chronically underdeveloped.

This was the understanding which underlay the Constituents' transformation of France's customs barriers from more or less a fiscal resource into an instrument of economic control. The Con-

stituents believed that French trade and industry needed to be protected in some measure by the state, at least until such time as the various sectors of the French economy attained their 'natural' level of development, and could compete effectively on their own. Though they had wished to remove most of the governmental restraints that had previously constricted internal trade, the Constituents hence still saw a vital and active role for the national government in the overseeing and 'nurturing' of French industry, and the promotion of economic growth. In this way the government would work to safeguard the national interest.

It should again be noted, furthermore, that both sides in the Assembly's debate over tariff levels — liberal and protectionist — displayed a degree of 'economic nationalism'. Far from evincing a wholly 'cosmopolitan' view of international commerce, the chief proponent of a liberal (free-trade) tariff regime — Boislandry — assumed, together with protectionists such as Goudard and Roussillou, that France had the capacity to develop into the world's dominant economic superpower, and that this would give France an imposing influence on international affairs, most specifically in Europe, but also around the world. There was also some recognition in the Assembly of the political consequences of economic policy, and of the relationship between strategic means and economic goals, particularly in the area of seapower.

It should also be noted, however, that the commercial policy of the Constituent Assembly, as a whole, was one that quite clearly rejected the kind of autarchic, or 'zero-sum', approach so reminiscent of the previous century. The goal now of French commercial policy was not to 'ruin' or crush the economies of other states, but rather, to gain, within an increasingly interdependent and expanding international economy, an eventual share of international trade that was considered only commensurate with France's intrinsic economic potential, given its geography, population and immense physical resources. If this led to an eclipse, or even collapse, of British commercial and strategic power then this was only what many deputies would have considered to be a natural and overdue readjustment of geostrategic realities. Previously 'blighted' by the corporate strictures of the Old Regime, France's homegrown industries hence would, with the help of measured protection, now be able to attain a degree of real vigour

sufficient to assert France's natural superiority not only in trade, but also in the political geography of Europe. France could then not help but become once again the arbiter of the European balance of power.

On the basis of the foregoing discussion, one may hence conclude by asserting that any view of French economic policy during this period must consider that this policy was driven not just by perceived or supposed class interests, but also by the perceived exigencies of international competition and by the no less powerful demands of aspirant nationalism. Furthermore, one may tentatively suggest that it is through such an analysis — in other words, through a consideration of both the internal and external aspects of this policy, and their complex interactions — that the lineaments of a new interpretative synthesis incorporating both the political and economic dimensions of the Revolution may potentially be found. The French Revolution occurred within an international economic and geopolitical context from which it cannot, and should not, be extracted.

Notes

1. See, for example, William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford 1990), 405.

2. Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret, *The French Nobility in the Eighteenth Century* (English trans., Cambridge 1985), ch. 5, passim; Gail Bossenga, *The Politics of Privilege: Old Regime and Revolution in Lille* (Cambridge 1991) ch. 7, passim.

3. See Colin Jones, 'Bourgeois Revolution Revivified: 1789 and Social Change', in Peter Jones, ed., *The French Revolution in Social and Political Perspective* (London 1996), 71–100. William Scott, 'Commerce, Capitalism and French Political Culture of the French Revolution', *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 11 (1989), 89–105; see also, Jean-Pierre Hirsch, 'Revolutionary France, Cradle of Free Enterprise', *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 94 (1989), 1281–9.

4. Florian Aftalion, *The French Revolution: An Economic Interpretation* (English trans., Cambridge 1990), 43, 91; see Scott, op. cit., and Hirsch, op. cit., passim.

5. See Bailey Stone, *The Genesis of the French Revolution: A Global–Historical Interpretation* (Cambridge 1994); Gary Savage, 'Favier's Heirs: The French Revolution and the *Secret du Roi*', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 41 (1998), 225–58.

6. A. Arnould, *La balance du commerce et des relations commerciales extérieures de la France, dans toutes les parties du globe, particulièrement à la fin du règne de Louis XIV, et au moment de la Révolution* (Paris 1791), 264. This figure would have been even larger if France had not needed to import sizeable amounts of grain during 1788–9 on account of the temporary subsistance crisis.

7. See Alan Goodwin, 'Calonne, the Assembly of Notables of 1787 and the

Origins of the "Révolte Nobiliaire"', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 61 (May–September 1946), 209–10.

8. B. Hyslop, *French Nationalism in 1789* (New York 1968), 168–9.

9. Such a view was typified in this later comment by a certain Lansel, an Inspector of Manufactures: 'La prospérité du Commerce & de l'industrie doit être une suite nécessaire de la régénération de l'empire; c'est de cette prospérité qu'émane la puissance d'un peuple: ne perdons jamais de vue cette grande vérité, on règne par le commerce, on est détruit par le commerce.' J.A. Lansel, *Necessité d'un régime pour conserver et faire fleuir le commerce et les manufactures* (1791), 1.

10. See Edna Lemay, 'Une minorité au sein d'une minorité. Un banquier et quelques négociants à l'Assemblée constituante 1789–91', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, Vol. 217 (Oxford 1983), 56–7.

11. As stated by the deputy Goudard in a report to the National Assembly on 27 August 1790, in J. Madival and E. Laurent, eds, *Archives Parlementaires de 1787 à 1860. Recueil complet des debates legislatifs et politiques des chambres françaises* (Paris 1862) (hereafter cited as AP), Vol. 18, 307.

12. J.F. Bosher, *The Single Duty Project: A Study of the Movement for a French Customs Union in the Eighteenth Century* (London 1964), 32.

13. W.O. Henderson, 'The Anglo-French Commercial Treaty of 1786', *Economic History Review*, Vol. 10 (August 1957), 109–12; Henri Sée, 'The Normandy Chamber of Commerce and the Commercial Treaty of 1786', *Economic History Review*, Vol. 2 (1929–30), 308–13.

14. Arnould, *La balance du commerce*, 69.

15. Ibid., 81.

16. Ibid., 78. See also, 77–89: 'le sort des peuples de ces sections maritimes ou frontières est donc infiniment moins désadvantageux, toutes considérations pésées, que celui des habitans des sections intérieures du royaume, continuellement tourmentés *par le besoin de faire de l'or*, soit pour satisfaire à leur cotisation de l'impôt, soit pour suffire aux subsidies extraordinaires d'une guerre dont l'objet est souvent le maintien d'une branche du commerce extérieur auquel, pour ainsi dire, ils ne participent point . . . Toutes ces circonstances contribuaient donc à les appauvir de plus en plus, et à les dépouiller de leurs foibles capitaux indispensables à l'explorations de leur commerce intérieur.'

17. Bosher, *The Single Duty Project*, 164.

18. AP, Vol. 18, 27 August 1790, 307. First coming into operation on 2 September 1789, the Agriculture and Commerce Committee was to number just over forty members, predominantly from the Left, of whom the greatest proportion became Feuillants. For a description of the broad agenda of the Committee, see the *Plan de travaux du comité d'agriculture et de commerce*, AP, Vol. 12, 8 May 1790, 435–7. See also, J.J. Guiffrey, 'Les Comités des assemblées révolutionnaires, 1789–1795: Le comité d'agriculture et de commerce', *Revue Historique*, Vol. 1 (1876), 438–83. See also F. Gerbaux and C. Schmidt, eds. *Procès-verbaux des Comités d'Agriculture et de Commerce de la Constituante, de la Législative et de la Convention*, 5 Vols (Paris 1906–37).

19. AP, Vol. 8, 29 August 1789, 511.

20. Ibid., 2 September 1789, 548.

21. The membership of the Committee also remained more or less unchanged for the entirety of the Constituent Assembly. See Edna Lemay, *Dictionnaire des Constituents, 1789–91* (Paris 1991), passim.

22. These tasks formed some of the myriad of often urgent tasks, beyond the simple framing of the constitution, that had been forced on the Constituent Assembly by the effective collapse of the Royal Government's administrative capacities during 1789, and which had necessitated the formation of a series of specialized policy committees. See T. Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture (1789–1790)* (Princeton 1996), 211–39.

23. AP, Vol. 18, 27 August 1790, 306.

24. Untitled note, 25 February 1790, *Archives du Département des Affaires Etrangères-Correspondance Politique* (hereafter cited as AAE-CP) *Angleterre* – 572, fols 176–7.

25. There was much fear on both sides of the Channel during 1790 that the Nootka Sound crisis might embroil not only Spain but also France in a potentially devastating war with Britain. See Harold Evans, 'The Nootka Sound Controversy in Anglo-French Diplomacy — 1790', *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 46 (December 1974), 609–40.

26. AP, Vol. 18, 27 August 1790, 309.

27. Both the Agriculture and Commerce Committee and the Interior Ministry were to receive numerous submissions from various parts of France testifying, among many other complaints and exhortations, to the allegedly damaging effects on French manufacturing of the 1786 Eden Treaty. See, for example, 'A nos seigneurs de l'Assemblée Nationale', from the town of Beauvais, 9 December 1789, *Archives Nationales*-F. 12–652, No. 164. See also Gerbaux and Schmidt, *Procès-verbaux*, Vol. 1, 300, 464, 738, Vol. 2, 136.

28. AP, Vol. 18, 27 August 1790, 308.

29. Ibid., 314.

30. Ibid., 305.

31. Ibid., 304.

32. Ibid., 308.

33. Ibid., 314.

34. Joseph-Jean-Chrysostome Farçot, *Questions Constitutionelles sur le commerce et l'industrie, et projet d'un impôt direct, sur les commerçans & gens à l'industrie, en remplacement des impôts quelconques sur le commerce & l'industrie, proposés à l'Assemblée Nationale par des Négocians François* (Paris 1790).

35. Ibid., 138.

36. Ibid., 154.

37. Ibid., 163–164.

38. Ibid., 163, 200–2. Here Farçot was no doubt referring to the Comité des Députés Extraordinaires des Manufactures et du Commerce de France, an ad hoc body representative of French commercial interests. The Comité had initially sought admission to the Assembly as deputies, but this was refused. Instead, the deputies were granted admission to the Assembly's debates, and were allowed to attend the otherwise closed sessions of the Assembly's Committees, where they came to play an influential role. See J. Letaconnoux, 'Le Comité des Députés Extraordinaires des Manufactures et du Commerce de France et l'œuvre économique de l'Assemblée Constituante (1789–1791)', *Annales Révolutionnaires*, Vol. 6 (1913), 149–208.

39. AP, Vol. 21, 30 November 1790, 135.

40. 'Le Comité d'agriculture et de commerce,' said Goudard, with some

condescension, 'a admiré cette théorie, qui repose sur le liberté indéfinie; elle honore ceux qui s'en sont déclarés comme les apôtres, et qui prêchent cette sublime doctrine au monde commerçant; mais il ne lui a paru sage de s'en faire les disciplines uniques, et de donner un exemple qui ne serait point imité, parce que ce serait prononcer la destruction de notre industrie.' Ibid., 135.

41. Ibid., 137.

42. Lemay, ed., *Dictionnaire des Constituants*, 108. Boislandry, a textile merchant by background, is described as being on the list of very active members of the Left. Like many members of the Jacobin Club, he became a Feuillant in July 1791.

43. In this sense, Boislandry may have been more influenced by the ideas of Adam Smith than those of the Physiocrats.

44. AP, Vol. 21, 30 November 1790, 138.

45. Ibid., 141, 143; Farçot, *Questions Constitutionelles*, 129. For Farçot, the positive effects on international relations of a general system of free trade was obvious: 'Il ne point surprenant qu'avec des principes plus généraux, le commerce libre rende les rapports politiques, entre les nations, infiniment plus faciles, diminue les causes de guerre entre elles.' Ibid., 130.

46. Ibid., 143. In attempting to counter Goudard's assertion that it was the preponderance of protectionism in Europe that necessitated a similar policy in France, Boislandry grossly overestimated the existing prospects for free trade in Europe. Europe was not quite yet the 'one vast republic' that he claimed it to be, in spite of its growing economic interdependencies.

47. Ibid., 142.

48. Ibid., 138.

49. Ibid., 143. In assuming the intrinsic economic superiority of France over England (particularly in the production of certain goods, such as silks, lace and fine textiles), Boislandry thus believed, as Dupont had earlier professed in mémoires to the Ministry, that the 1786 Commercial Treaty was ultimately to France's benefit. AP, Vol. 21, 30 November 1790, 145–6.

50. Ibid., 146.

51. Ibid., 138.

52. Roussillou, *Rapport du comité d'agriculture et de commerce concernant le commerce de Levant*, AP, Vol. 28, 21 July 1791, 493.

53. AP, Vol. 21, 1 December 1790, 173–5, Vol. 22, 22 January 1791, 425–34.

54. That the Assembly ultimately opted for a more moderate tariff regime has generally, as the historian John Bosher has noted, been credited to Boislandry (who had suggested in his speech that if the deputies feared that 'une trop grande liberté subitement accordée n'occasionnât à notre commerce quelques secousses toujours fâcheuses', then they should at least 'proscrire pour jamais le systême prohibitif et à n'admettre que des droits modéré', ibid., 144. As Bosher has suggested, Boislandry's own role in pegging back the proposed level of tariff protection may have been overstated, at least as it pertains to his free-trade convictions. Boislandry's most significant source of advice and information was in fact Mahy de Corméré, an Old Regime bureaucrat, reformer and believer in moderate protectionism (and who had acted also as an adviser to the tariff sub-committee), who had counselled a return to the moderate tariff proposals produced by a commission of the Royal Government in 1787. Bosher, *The Single Duty Project*, 160.

See Guillaume-François de Mahy, baron de Corméré, *Situation exacte des finances à l'époque de 1er janvier 1792, ou Lettre . . . à M. le président & à MM. les députés composant le comité des contributions publiques, de l'Assemblée nationale* (Nantes 1792), 13–15.

55. If, Dupont stated, 'les Américains de Nantucket s'établissaient à Hallifax, ils fourniraient à l'Angleterre les moyens d'armer au besoin 8 vaisseaux de guerre de plus en excellents matelots . . . si, au contraire, ils trouvaient en France le débouché de leur pêche, conformément aux principes d'après lesquels nous avions traité avec eux jusqu'alors, ils pourraient nous fournir dans la première guerre l'armement de 8 vaisseaux de ligne; . . . cette difference de 8 vaisseaux de guerre en plus pour les Français et en moins pour les Anglois était une considération très importante'. AP, Vol. 22, 24 January 1791, 473.

56. Ibid., 475. This exemption may also have been seen as necessary to offset the greater competitive edge allowed to the British through the lower tariffs on their imports to France of fish oil that had earlier been struck in the Eden Treaty of 1786. See Jefferson's letter of 6 December 1787 to Montmorin on this point, AAE-CP-Angleterre-562, fols 175–6.

57. The relationship between economic and strategic imperatives had also been strongly emphasized by a number of speakers during the debate on war and peace in May 1790. When the issue of the Spanish Alliance flared up once again in the Assembly in August 1790, two of the Constituent's noted specialists on economic affairs, Dupont de Nemours and Le Couteulx de Cantelau, forcefully repeated this emphasis, warning of the economic consequences to France of a failure to support Spain in her current disagreement with Britain. Noting that Spain and her colonies constituted for France a vitally important market, particularly for her textiles, Dupont reiterated the argument that to jeopardize this valuable trade would be to 'ruiner nos manufactures, et réduire à la mendicité plusieurs millions de Français industrieux'. For his part, Couteulx urged that the Diplomatic Committee (which, he noted, contained no merchants among its members), 'limite cependant l'exemple des Anglais qui ne s'occupent essentiellement d'un traité que sous les rapports qui peuvent être utile à leur commerce, à leur industrie et à leur navigation et qui, par cette conduite encore plus que par le succès de leurs armes, se sont élèvés depuis un demi-siècle au plus haut degré de prosperité' . . . This, he argued, was in contrast to the example of France's former government, which, he alleged (in an obvious reference to the much reviled Anglo–French commercial treaty of 1786), had disdained the views and protests of merchants even when negotiating commercial treaties. AP, Vol. 17, 3 August 1790 (annex), 583–602.

58. In opposition to those such as Boislandry who wished France to lower its import duties to negligible levels, the merchant deputy Begouen implored the Assembly to follow the example of Britain, in regard to both its commercial and industrial development: 'Commence par rendre votre industrie supérieure à toutes les industries qui vous avoisinent, avant de vous proposer de faire tomber devant vous des barrières conservatrices de votre main-d'œuvre. Encouragez, multipliez de tous côtés l'usage des machines anglaises; prodiguez les primes à l'exploitation de vos mines de charbon de terre; vous serez toujours, comme vous êtes, une nation peu industrieuse.' AP, Vol. 21, 1 December 1790, 172.

59. Goudard, *Rapport présenté à l'Assemblée Nationale, au nom de Comité d'Agriculture et du Commerce, sur la situation du commerce extérieur de la France pendant la Révolution, en 1789* (Paris 1791), 8–9. See also the *Rapport de Vergniaud*

sur l'état des travaux de l'Assemblée Nationale Constituente au 30 Septembre 1791 (Paris 1791), note xiii, 21.

60. Roussillou, *Rapport du comité d'agriculture et de commerce sur les encouragements pécuniaires à accorder à l'agriculture, aux manufactures, à la navigation et au commerce*, AP, Vol. 23, 7 March 1791, 712.

61. AP, Vol. 21, 30 November 1790, 145.

62. Hell, *Rapport sur l'état de la Tannerie et de la Corroirie en France, et sur les moyens de les régénérer; fait à l'Assemblée Nationale, au nom des comités d'Agriculture et du commerce et des finances* (Paris 1791), 7.

63. Here the assistance of the goverment would be crucial. Forge, *Mémoire tendant à l'extension du Commerce extérieur, à la sûreté du Commerce intérieur, et à l'accroissement de la marine militaire, présenté par M. de Forge, Chevalier, ancien Ecuyer de main du Roi* (n.d.), 5–7. It did not escape this writer that better access to Russian naval stores would also have significant strategic benefits. See 22.

64. AP, Vol. 28, 21 July 1791, 492.

65. Ibid., Vol. 21, 30 November 1790, 143.

66. Forge, *Mémoire tendant à l'extension du Commerce extérieur*, 12.

67. AP, Vol. 31, 22 September 1791, 203.

68. Ibid., 204.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid., 205.

71. That Britain owed its prosperity and formidable navy to its Navigation Acts was, Delattre argued, a fact universally known and recognized, particularly among *commerçants* and especially among the British themselves, including even Adam Smith, who was otherwise famed for his detestation of commercial protectionism. Ibid.

72. The general principle that all ships in the French maritime establishment should actually be built in France had already been accepted by the Assembly, proposed in a decree presented by Roussillou on behalf of the Committee on Agriculture and Commerce on 4 March 1791. AP, Vol. 23, 4 March 1791, 639.

73. 'Un nation commerçante,' he went on, 'une nation qui possède des colonies, une nation qui doit envoyer ses escadres dans toutes les mers, et porter des forces dans toutes les parties du monde, ne doit pas acheter, même à très bon marché, des navires: elle ne le doit pas, parce que la construction forme des chantiers et ses magasins, qui sont indispensables pour la guerre, parce que la construction forme des charpentiers, des forgerons, des calfats, des poulieurs, des voiliers, une infinité d'ouvriers de tout genre qu'on ne peut faire sortir de terre au moment du besoin, qu'on ne peut emprunter de ses voisins pour la guerre, qu'il faut enfin, dans ces temps malheureux, trouver chez soi pour n'être pas à la merci de ses ennemis et même de ses alliés.' AP, Vol. 31, 22 September 1791, 207.

74. Ibid., 206.

75. Ibid., 207–8. The concern of the Assembly to maintain France's own homegrown strategic resources was shown in Barrère's report on National Forests, which was presented to the Assembly on 6 August 1790. In it the future *conventionnel* and member of the Committee of Public Safety argued that the conservation of France's old growth forests was vitally important to French maritime and territorial power. See the *Rapport par Barrère relatif à la conservation des bois et forêts nationales*, ibid., Vol. 17, 6 August 1790, 630.

76. Although France had a considerably greater population than Britain, the

French seafaring population was actually smaller than that of Britain. This had caused chronic manpower shortages for the French navy throughout the eighteenth century. See William Cormack, *Revolution and Political Conflict in the French Navy, 1789–1794* (Cambridge 1995), 25.

77. AP, Vol. 31, 22 September 1791, 208–9.

78. Ibid., 22 September 1791, 203, 213.

79. The French government did eventually adopt a 'Navigation Act' (21 September 1793), but only once France had gone to war with Britain. See John Stewart (Ed), *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution* (New York 1951), 501–2.

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