

Reform in Britain and Prussia, 1797–1815: (Confessional) Fiscal-Military State and Military-Agrarian Complex*

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'ONLY THOSE RESULTS', Hans-Ulrich Wehler argues, 'which pass the litmus test of comparison, that unsurpassable substitute for scientific experiment, can give reliable information about the transnational or national character of problems'.¹ At first sight, the period of intensified international competition triggered by the diplomatic revolutions of the 1790s,² and its domestic resonances, or lack of them, in Britain and Prussia, seems to provide a fruitful avenue for the comparative approach. Moreover, although there is no shortage of comparative work on Britain and Germany in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Revolutionary and especially the Napoleonic period has been largely neglected.³

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¹ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "'Deutscher Sonderweg" oder allgemeine Probleme des westlichen Kapitalismus', in idem, *Preußen ist wieder chic. Politik und Polemik in zwanzig Essays* (Frankfurt, 1983), p. 30: 'Nur diejenigen Ergebnisse, welche das scharfe Säurebad des Vergleichs, dieses einzigen, unübertrefflichen Ersatzes für das naturwissenschaftliche Experiment, überstehen, geben verlässliche Auskunft über den transnationalen oder nationalen Charakter von Problemen'.

² For the revolution in international relations in the 1790s see Paul Schroeder, *The transformation of European politics, 1763–1848* (Oxford, 1994); T. C. W. Blanning, *The origins of the French Revolutionary wars* (London, 1986); idem, *The French Revolutionary wars* (London, 1996); and idem, 'The French Revolution in Europe', in Colin Lucas, ed., *Rewriting the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 183–207. For its effects on Germany see Brendan Simms, *The struggle for mastery in Germany, 1780–1850* (Basingstoke, 1998).

³ Eckhart Hellmuth, ed., *The transformation of political culture: England and Germany in the late eighteenth century* (Oxford, 1990); Eckhart Hellmuth, 'Der Staat des 18. Jahrhunderts. England und Preußen im Vergleich', *Aufklärung*, 9/1 (1996), pp. 5–24; John Breuilly, *Labour and liberalism in nineteenth-century Europe: essays in comparative history* (Manchester, 1992). Wolf D. Gruner, 'The British political, social and economic system and the decision for peace and war:

Yet, as Fabio Ruggie has pointed out, it is easier to demand comparative history than to practise it.⁴ For one thing, not only were the two polities politically, socially, and economically fundamentally distinct at the beginning of the conflict with Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, they also experienced radically different pressures throughout the twenty years before 1815. To name only the most obvious differences: Britain was a confessional but parliamentary state in the throes of a socio-economic revolution; Prussia was an absolutist and socio-economically pre-modern polity. Despite periodic invasion scares, and brief French forays into Ireland and Wales in 1797–8, Britain remained largely inviolate throughout the period; Prussia on the other hand suffered a total military collapse and remained under occupation for several years. In no sense, therefore, would a comparison between reform in Britain and Prussia constitute a scientific ‘experiment’ in the Wehlerite sense, carried out under laboratory conditions. Nevertheless, within the framework of these and other caveats, comparison between Britain and Prussia in the Napoleonic period is not merely possible, but useful, for it casts some light on how these two very different polities reacted to the challenge of French power after 1792.

The chief theoretical impulse behind this paper is the primacy of foreign policy, and its domestic consequences. These were first explored in depth by the German historian Otto Hintze, and more recently revived at the macro- and micro-levels by Tom Ertman, Brian Downing, and John Brewer.⁵ For both states were in the first instance vehicles for the conduct of war, or at least the maintenance and projection of external power. If Britain was, in John Brewer’s phrase, a ‘fiscal-military state’ designed to maximize British financial resources for the naval and colonial struggle with France, then Prussia, in Hanna Schissler’s adaptation of Eisenhower’s famous neologism,

reflections on Anglo-German relations, 1800–1939’, *British Journal of International Studies*, 6 (1980), pp. 189–218, concentrates on the period after 1815. With the exception of Linda Colley’s article, the centre of emphasis of Lawrence Stone, ed., *An imperial state at war: Britain from 1689 to 1815* (London and New York, 1994), is on the pre-1790s. The comparative train of thought explored in my thesis on Anglo-Prussian relations in the Napoleonic period: Brendan Simms, ‘Anglo-Prussian relations, 1804–1806: the Napoleonic threat’, unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1992, was largely dropped for its publication in book form: idem, *The impact of Napoleon: Prussian high politics, foreign policy and the crisis of the executive, 1797–1806* (Cambridge, 1997). Some very general and tentative comparative perspectives were offered in idem, ‘Fra Land e Meer. la Gran Bretagna, la Prussia e il problema del decisionismo (1806–1806)’, *Ricerche di Storia Politica*, 6 (1991), pp. 5–34.

⁴ Comments by Fabio Ruggie in a paper given at the Settimane di Perfezionamento at Trani, September 1991.

⁵ See Thomas Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan: building states and regimes in medieval and early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1997); Brian M. Downing, *The military revolution and political change: origins of democracy and autocracy in early modern Europe* (Princeton, 1992); John Brewer, *The sinews of power* (London, 1989), which contains a strong comparative element.

was a 'military-agrarian complex', in which social inequalities were determined by the unique cantonal system of recruitment.⁶ After all, between 1750 and 1815 both powers were at war as often as they were at peace: in 1756–63, in 1776–83, in 1778–79, and more or less permanently after 1792. It is therefore hardly surprising that domestic change in the two polities was not just self-generated by endogenous forces, but a direct result of external pressures.⁷

Of course, a detailed comparison of reforms at every level would be impossible within the confines of a short article. There are whole areas such as the growth of nationalism, tactical military reforms, the development of the financial system (particularly income taxes), opposition to reform, and the semantics of 'reform' and 'revolution', which must be passed over. Instead, this article will look at four areas only: (1) the rhetoric and justification of reform; (2) the reform of the executive; (3) social and military reform; and (4) political reform, or lack of it, under the primacy of foreign policy. Wherever a comparative perspective was explicitly opened up by the protagonists themselves, the sources have been allowed to speak directly.

The rhetoric and justification of reform

The streamlining of society and economy in accordance with external demands had a long tradition in Prussia: this principle had underlain the seventeenth-century governing compromise between prince and estates in Brandenburg-Prussia by which the nobility sacrificed their participatory political powers for greater control over their peasantry. Similarly, the enlightened reform absolutism of Frederick the Great had aimed to maximize Prussia's military and economic strength, largely by increasing the power of the nobility in army and administration. Until the 1790s, this system had underpinned Prussia's rise to great power status and appeared to be a resounding success. It was only after the defeats at the hands of Revolutionary France in 1792–3, that plans for a more thoroughgoing

⁶ Hanna Schissler, 'The social and political power of the Prussian Junkers', in Ralph Gibson and Martin Blinkhorn, eds, *Landownership and power in modern Europe* (London, 1991), p. 103. The literature on reforming activity before 1806 is surveyed in Simms, *The impact of Napoleon*, pp. 115–36. A good recent overview of the period after 1807 is to be found in Bernd Sösemann, ed., *Gemeingeist und Bürgersinn. Die preußischen Reformen*, Forschungen zur brandenburgischen und preussischen Geschichte, Neue Folge, Beiheft 2 (Berlin, 1993). The most recent treatment of Hardenberg is Thomas Stamm-Kuhlmann, '“Man vertraue doch der Administration!” Staatsverständnis und Regierungshandeln des preußischen Staatskanzlers Karl August von Hardenberg', *Historische Zeitschrift (HZ)*, 264 (1997), pp. 613–54.

⁷ For Britain see Clive Emsley, 'The impact of war and military participation on Britain and France, 1792–1815', in Clive Emsley and James Walvin, eds., *Artisans, peasants and proletarians, 1760–1860* (London and Sydney, 1985), pp. 57–80.

reform of state and society began to gain any currency. But before 1806, the Prussian reform debate remained primarily focused on improving the chaotic executive and gradually rationalizing the social system.⁸ Radical demands for total reform, 'renewal' and especially constitutional reform only followed the complete military collapse of the Prussian state at Auerstedt and Jena.

The Prussian reform movement has sometimes been referred to as a 'defensive modernization'.⁹ This characterization is correct, in so far as it describes the need to defend the state against absorption by Napoleonic France. But it is misleading in so far as it implies an attempt to preserve the existing order of society against revolutionary threats from below.¹⁰ In fact, the reformers saw domestic change firmly within the context of the primacy of foreign policy, as the internal imperative deriving from Prussia's exposed geopolitical position. Reform, therefore, was 'offensive modernization' designed to underpin the Hohenzollerns' attempt to reclaim their rightful position in the European pentarchy.¹¹ As the leading reformer and later chancellor, Karl August von Hardenberg observed in his famous Riga memorandum of 1807:

There can be no independence without power; therefore Prussia must strive to regain power. Now more than ever she cannot remain immobile. She must enlarge herself, not just to make up for her losses, but in order to achieve territorial increases, otherwise she will sink, she will perish completely. The geographical situation of Prussia alone would be enough to ensure that. If she does not recover her strength, she will become the prey of her powerful neighbours.¹²

⁸ Simms, *Impact of Napoleon*, pp. 328–9.

⁹ See Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte. vol. I. Vom Feudalismus des Alten Reiches bis zur defensiven Modernisierung der Reformära, 1700–1815* (Munich, 1987); Barbara Vogel, *Allgemeine Gewerbefreiheit. Die Reformpolitik des preußischen Staatskanzlers Hardenberg (1810–20)* (Göttingen, 1983).

¹⁰ Simms, *Impact of Napoleon*, pp. 115–27. Eike Wolgast, 'Reform, Reformation', in Otto Brunner, Werner Conze and Reinhart Koselleck, eds, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (9 vols, Stuttgart, 1984), v, sees the concept of reform during the Prussian reform era, pp. 345–6, purely in domestic terms.

¹¹ See Simms, *The struggle for mastery in Germany*, pp. 75–90.

¹² Des Ministers Freiherr von Hardenberg Denkschrift 'Über die Reorganisation des Preußischen Staats, Sept. 1807, Riga, in Georg Winter, ed., *Die Reorganisation des Preussischen Staates unter Stein und Hardenberg. vol. I. Vom Beginn des Kampfes gegen die Kabinettsregierung bis zum Wiedereintritt des Ministers vom Stein* (Leipzig, 1931), pp. 306–7: 'Ohne Macht ist keine Selbstständigkeit und Interdependenz, also muß Preußen streben, diese wieder zu erlangen. Still stehen kann es jetzt weniger als je. Es muß sich wieder vergrößern, nicht nur seinen Verlust decken, sondern noch mehr erwerben, oder es sinkt, es geht ganz unter. Die geographische Lage Preußens macht dieses gewiß. Es wird, erhebt es sich nicht, ein Raub seiner mächtigen Nachbarn werden. . . Vor allen Dingen muß es Kraft sammeln, das Innere in allen Zweigen wohl ordnen und planmäßig in Übereinstimmung bringen, auch sich ohne Zeitverlust wieder zum Kampf rüsten, soweit es die Mittel gestatten, besonders zu dem der Verteidigung.'

Hence, Hardenberg continued, 'Above all, Prussia must concentrate her strength, and organise and systematically co-ordinate all aspects of her internal affairs. Moreover, she must prepare herself for battle without delay, as far as means allow, preparing herself especially for defence'. This principle was echoed by Karl vom Stein zu Altenstein, another prominent reformer, and close associate of Hardenberg: 'The internal constitution [of the state] is largely determined by the role which the state may wish to play in foreign affairs, and this in turn is linked to the military potential permitted by the [internal] constitution'.¹³ This is the context in which the reforming blueprint in Prussia is to be seen. The determination to tackle domestic inequalities — of which more presently — was driven by geopolitically based foreign-political priorities and not, primarily, by any abstract plan for societal modernization, or fear of internal revolution.

There was no corresponding reform blueprint in Britain. Here the fear of revolution from below was certainly greater, at least before 1800: the various Corresponding Societies in England and, of course, the emergence of the United Irishmen caused the authorities considerable concern.¹⁴ But fear of domestic unrest was as likely to lead to repression as to pre-emptive reform. As in Prussia, the main impetus for reform came from the need to mobilize national resources in the struggle against France. As John Ehrman has recently pointed out, Pitt's domestic policies (especially his fiscal reforms, which will not be addressed here) were primarily intended to strengthen the 'home base'.¹⁵ However, there seem to have been no fundamental governmental reform plans from Pitt, Dundas, or other prominent British politicians on the Prussian model. The closest one comes to a programmatic British blueprint for reform are the writings of the radical military reformer, the Earl of Selkirk, whose pamphlet of 1808 on national defence was widely publicized, and whose remarks bear a remarkable resemblance to the reforming programme in Prussia:

Though Great Britain has not been immediately involved in the catastrophe of the continent, yet her policy cannot remain uninfluenced by so vast a change in

¹³ 'Des Geheimen Oberfinanzrats von Altenstein Denkschrift 'Über die Leitung des Preussischen Staats an S. des Herrn Staatsministers Freiherrn von Hardenberg', 11 Sept. 1807, Riga, in Winter, ed., *Die Reorganisation des Preussischen Staates*, p. 412: 'Die innere Verfassung wird größtenteils durch den Standpunkt bestimmt, auf welcher sich der Staat in den äußeren Verhältnissen setzen kann, und dieses hängt wiederum von der militärischen Kraftäußerung ab, welche die Verfassung erlaubt'.

¹⁴ Paradigmatic: E. P. Thompson, *The making of the English working class* (Harmondsworth, 1963); Marianne Elliott, *Partners in revolution: the United Irishmen and France* (New Haven, 1989); Jim Smyth, *Men of no property: Irish radicals and popular politics in the late eighteenth century*, (London and Dublin, 1992).

¹⁵ See John Ehrman, *The younger Pitt: the consuming struggle* (London, 1996), pp. 98–129 and *passim*.

all that surrounds her. To us, as well as to the nations of the continent, this must be a new aera: our arrangements, internal as well as external, must be adapted to our new circumstances. Britain has long maintained a rivalry against a country containing more than double her population, and, in point of natural advantages still more her superior. If, against so great a disproportion of physical strength, we have been enabled hitherto to maintain an equal contest, it is not to be entirely ascribed to the advantage of our insular situation. Our inferiority in regular military force has not yet occasioned very imminent danger to our national independence, because the great military powers of the continent kept our adversary in awe, and prevented the full extention of her strength against us. That check is now no more. We are deprived of all extraneous support, while the force against which we have to contend, has been increased beyond all bounds. If, therefore, we are to remain on the list of nations, it must be by exertions unprecedented in the improvement of our internal resources.¹⁶

The reference to the preponderance of France, the geopolitical nod towards Britain's island status, and the need to maximize internal resources to external ends: all this is reminiscent of reforming rhetoric in Prussia.

Reform of the executive

If one turns to specific areas of reform, however, the preoccupations were rather different. In Prussia, reform of the supreme executive was a central concern before 1806, and remained important after 1807. During the early years of the French threat, Prussian foreign policy-making had been complicated by the retention of multiple, usually two but sometimes three, foreign ministers, the *Kabinettsministerium*, each vying to displace the other in the confidence of the king, Frederick William III.¹⁷ The picture was further complicated by the *Kabinett*, a body of ostensible secretaries who doubled as intimate councillors of the king, and constituted something of a shadow government, undermining the authority of the official ministry. Moreover, the organization of the General Directory, the supreme domestic administration of the kingdom, into regional and topical ministries, resulted in much confusion and duplication of effort. It was never quite clear, for example, whether a certain issue fell most properly within the purview of, say, the East Prussian Department, or of the Justice Department; matters were not helped by the existence of the Silesian ministry, which lay outside the General Directory altogether.

By the early 1800s, a considerable reform debate had developed which stressed the need for greater executive cohesion, generally through the

¹⁶ The Earl of Selkirk, *On the necessity of a more effectual system of national defence and the means of establishing the permanent security of the kingdom* (London, 1808), pp. 2–3.

¹⁷ See Simms, *Impact of Napoleon*, passim.

creation of a monocratic foreign ministry within a council of ministers, which would replace the polycratic chaos — to borrow a term from the historiography of the Third Reich — of the *Generaldirektorium* and the *Kabinettsministerium*.¹⁸ One of the royal military adjutants, Colonel Massenbach, demanded a 'central point from which all instructions radiate as if out of one focus'; Count Alvensleben, himself a longtime co-foreign minister, demanded 'more unity in the administration and simplification and rationalisation of the affairs of state'.¹⁹ This debate culminated in the famous memoranda by Baron Stein, Hardenberg and Altenstein in the summer of 1806, in which they called for the elimination of the Kabinett, and the creation of a ministerial council.

Unsurprisingly, the campaign for a reform of the executive was resumed with a vengeance after the defeats of Auerstedt and Jena. In his memorandum of March 1807, Hardenberg called for 'Unity of principles, strength and consistency of execution', and for a 'council which unites the individual sections [of government] and those individuals who lead the sections... the purpose: unity and speed'.²⁰ That same month, Voß stressed that 'what the Prussian state lacks, and which is indispensable for a great monarchy, is the spirit of unity or a central authority, associated directly with the King, which unites all the administrative branches of the state'.²¹ Similarly, Baron Stein in his famous Nassau memorandum of 1807, demanded 'the creation of a state council or a supreme authority directly responsible to the King, with publically-recognised and not covertly-arrogated authority, which would be the final reference point for the various administrative branches of the state'.²² The thinking behind these demands was subsequently summed up the royal councillor, Johann Peter Ancillon, as follows: 'The less

¹⁸ See Hans Hausherr, *Verwaltungseinheit und Ressorttrennung. Vom Ende des 17. bis zum Beginn des 19. Jh.* (Berlin/East, 1953), pp. 189–204.

¹⁹ Cited in Simms, *Impact of Napoleon*, p. 133.

²⁰ 'Denkschrift Hardenbergs an König Friedrich Wilhelm III', 3. Mar. 1807, Memel, in Leopold von Ranke, ed., *Denkwürdigkeiten des Staatskanzlers Fürsten von Hardenberg* (Leipzig, 1877), v, p. 456: 'Einheit in den Grundsätzen, Kraft und Konsequenz in der Ausführung... Konseil, welches die einzelnen Partien vereinige, darin diejenigen Personen, welche sie führen... Zweck: Einheit und Schnelligkeit'. See also p. 449 and passim for similar wording.

²¹ 'Denkschrift des Ministers von Voß', 10. Mar. 1807, Memel, in Winter, ed., *Die Reorganisation des Preussischen Staats*, p. 140: 'Geist der Einheit oder eine Zentral-vereinigungsbehörde aller einzelner Staatsverwaltungszweige, unmittelbar an die Person des Regenten geknüpft, ist das, was dem Preußischen Staat fehlt, und für eine große Monarchie unentbehrlich ist'.

²² 'Des Ministers Freiherr vom Stein Denkschrift 'ber die zweckmäßige Bildung der obersten und der Provinzial-Finanz- und Polizeibehörden in der Preußischen Monarchie', Nassau [Nassau memorandum], June 1807, in Winter, ed., *Die Reorganisation des Preussischen Staats*, p. 190: 'Bildung eines Staatsrates oder einer unmittelbar unter dem Könige arbeitenden, mit anerkannter und nicht erschlicherer Verantwortlichkeit versehenen obersten Behörde, die der endliche Vereinigungspunkt der verschiedenen Zweige der Staatsverwaltung ist'.

cumbersome the wheels [of the machinery of government], the more reliable and smooth the functioning of the machine'.²³

This programme was implemented in fits and starts after 1807. The General Directory was abolished and replaced by five monocratic subject ministries: foreign affairs, military affairs, finance, justice, and the interior. Hardenberg's plan for a prime ministerial system — headed by himself — was briefly tried but lapsed in 1808–10 during the co-ministry of Dohna and Altenstein. It was only in 1810, with Hardenberg's return as chief minister, which he remained until 1822, that the reform of the executive demanded before 1806 was truly complete.

The contemporaneous British debate on the executive was no less concerned to find the winning formula against France, but it was couched in very different, rather less trenchant terms, and its preoccupations were somewhat different. Partly, this was due to the fact that the old British system of two Foreign Secretaries, one for the Northern Department and one for the Southern Department — in effect a Prussian-style co-ministry — had already been abandoned in favour of a monocratic Foreign Office in 1782;²⁴ the organization of the British executive was thus more efficient to begin with. But mainly the explanation lies in the evolutionary development of the cabinet council as an instrument for co-ordinating the war effort against France.²⁵ Whenever necessary, an inner cabinet was formed to ensure secrecy and speed of execution. In the 1790s this famously included Pitt, Grenville, and Dundas,²⁶ whereas the last few years of the war were dominated by the triumvirate Castlereagh, Bathurst, and Liverpool. The characteristics of this new body: prime-ministerial guidance, joint responsibility, mutual delibera-

²³ Johann Peter Ancillon, *Geheimes Staatsarchiv Dahlem (GStA)*, Rep. 92 Ancillon 22, *Fragmente enthaltend Vorschläge zur Verbesserung der Staatsverwaltung in Preußen o. d. (nach 1815)*, unfoliated. The document contains further references to need for 'Einheit' and to avoid the 'langsamen und sogar schleppenden Gang der Geschäfte': 'Alles was die Regierung vereinfacht bringt sie nicht allein ihren Zweck näher, sondern führt auch immer ein mehr oder minder grosses Ersparnis herbei. Die Bewegung der Maschine wird um so sicherer und leichter, je weniger es in derselben Räder giebt, und je einfacher das Räderwerk, um so weniger kostspielig der ganze Mechanismus'.

²⁴ Charles Middleton, 'The early years of the old Foreign Office, 1782–1810', in *Proceedings of the Consortium on Revolutionary Europe (PCRE)*, pp. 92, 97. See also Charles Middleton, *The administration of British foreign policy, 1782–1846* (Durham, N.C., 1977).

²⁵ See Charles Middleton, 'The impact of the American and French Revolutions on the British constitution: a case study of the British cabinet', *PCRE* (1986), p. 317. See also Richard Willis, 'Cabinet politics and executive policy-making procedures, 1794–1801', *Albion*, 7; and Arthur Aspinall, 'The cabinet council, 1783–1835', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, London, 38 (1952). But see also John Ehrman's words of caution on 'grey areas' of cabinet, *The younger Pitt*, p. 451.

²⁶ See Michael Duffy, 'Pitt, Grenville and the control of British foreign policy in the 1790s', in Jeremy Black, ed., *Knights errant and true Englishmen: British foreign policy, 1660–1800* (Edinburgh, 1989), pp. 151–77.

tion and co-ordination with the king, were not so very different from the Prussian ministerial system which emerged after 1807 under different circumstances but in the face of similar, if more keenly felt pressures.

Social, religious, and military reforms

These reforms of the decision-making apparatus did not *per se* involve fundamental changes in society or politics. Yet in both states the French threat prompted a more radical debate on internal reform. In Prussia, the reformers argued that the international situation demanded, to quote the famous passage from Hardenberg's Riga memorandum [1807], 'a revolution in the good sense of the word... Democratic principles in a monarchical government: this seems to me the form of government most congenial to the spirit of the age'.²⁷ But this modernizing programme was in no sense a departure from the old Prussian primacy of foreign policy. Hardenberg went on to observe that 'Under different, but similar circumstances, yet in the context of a completely different *Zeitgeist*, the Great Elector Frederick William revolutionalized his state, after the unhappy epoch under George William, and thus laid the foundations of his subsequent greatness'.²⁸ This shows the essential continuities between seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Prussian reform absolutism and the reform era of the early nineteenth century.

The resulting catalogue of domestic reforms was intended to 'set free' the hidden strengths of Prussian society. The noble monopoly of the officer corps and the senior ranks of the administration must be broken: bourgeois talent should be encouraged. Restrictions on the purchase of estates should be lifted: this would create a free market in land. The hereditary bondage of the peasantry should be abolished: this would both encourage agricultural improvement and create a flexible labour force. Local government was restored to Prussian cities: this would provide cheap administration and help to bind town-dwellers closer to the state than hitherto. Naturally, the changes provoked furious opposition, largely from the threatened junker elites. As one ardent reformer, Theodor von Schön, noted bitterly in his diary, 'the old aristocrats love only themselves... In their view the state may perish but seignorial power would survive'.²⁹

²⁷ Hardenberg's Riga memorandum, in Winter, ed., *Die Reorganisation des Preussischen Staats*, p. 306: 'eine Revolution im guten Sinn... Demokratische Grundsätze in einer monarchischen Regierung: dieses scheint mir die angemessene Form für den gegenwärtigen *Zeitgeist*'.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 306: 'Unter anderen, aber ähnlichen Umständen, jedoch bei einem ganz verschiedenen *Zeitgeist* revolutionierte Kurfürst Friedrich Wilhelm der Große nach der unglücklichen Epoche unter Georg Wilhelm gleichfalls seinen Staat und legte den Grund zu seiner nachherigen Größe'.

²⁹ Cited in Gerrit Walther, *Niebuhr's Forschung* (Stuttgart, 1993), p. 237: 'die alten Aristocraten, diese lieben nur sich... Der Staat gehen, ihrer Ansicht unter, aber die Gutsherrschaft bliebe'.

Much of the reforming programme — such as the creation of monocratic ministries and the abolition of feudal leftovers — was in more or less self-conscious imitation of Revolutionary France.³⁰ But many reformers looked to Britain for inspiration instead. Indeed, there was a long eighteenth-century tradition of Anglophilia in Germany, which for all the increasing criticism was still strong around 1800.³¹ For example, Barthold Georg Niebuhr and Ludwig Vincke were impressed by what they took to be the freedom-loving spirit of English local self-government.³² Vincke's *Darstellung der inneren Verwaltung Großbritanniens* (account of the domestic administration of Great Britain) was only published in 1815, but penned in 1807, immediately after Jena; the foreword was written by Niebuhr.³³ They proposed, as Vincke put it in a memorandum of 1808, to 'transfer British internal administration to Prussian soil, customs and constitution, as far as it can be made applicable', in particular the highly successful system of justice of the peace.³⁴ But there were also cautious voices, such as that of Regierungsrat Merckel, who warned against simply grafting British institutions onto the Prussian body politic: 'Before one can learn to run, one must learn to walk properly; and the internal constitution of England, which is the result of a representative constitution which has been firmly in place for hundreds of years, and is the product of a long-cherished sense of freedom, cannot simply be transplanted to a soil where hereditary bondage still prevailed only a year

³⁰ See Max Lehmann, 'Die preußische Reform von 1808 und die Französische Revolution', *Preußische Jahrbücher*, 132 (1908), pp. 211–29, but also Ernst von Meier, *Französische Einflüsse auf die Staats- und Rechtsentwicklung Preußens im 19. Jahrhundert*, (2 vols, Leipzig, 1907–8).

³¹ See Michael Maurer, *Aufklärung und Anglophilie in Deutschland* (Göttingen and Zurich, 1987).

³² Walther, *Niebuhr's Forschung*, pp. 114, 475; see also B. G. Niebuhr, *Nachgelassene Schriften nichtphilologischen Inhalts*, ed. Marcus Niebuhr (Hamburg, 1842). Such views have also been attributed to Stein, but this is contested by Walther Hubatsch, *Der Freiherr vom Stein und England* (Cologne, 1977), p. 39. See also Werner Gembruch, 'Zum England-Bild des Freiherrn vom Stein', in Johanne Kunisch, ed., *Staat und Heer. Ausgewählte historische Studien zum ancien regime, zur Französischen Revolution und zu den Befreiungskriegen*, *Historische Forschungen*, 40 (Berlin, 1990), especially p. 538.

³³ Ludwig von Vincke, *Darstellungen der inneren Verwaltung Großbritanniens*, ed. B. G. Niebuhr (2nd edn, Berlin, 1848). On Vincke see now Hans-Joachim Behr and Jürgen Kloosterhuis, eds, *Ludwig Freiherr von Vincke. Ein historisches Profil zwischen Reform und Revolution in Preußen* (Münster, 1994).

³⁴ Vincke memorandum, 'Über die Organisation der Unterbehörden zunächst für die Polizeiverwaltung', 4 Jun. 1808, Berlin, in Heinrich Scheel and Doris Schmidt, eds, *Das Reformministerium Stein. Akten zur Verfassungs- und Verwaltungsgeschichte aus den Jahren 1807–8* (Berlin, 1966–8), II, pp. 588–9: 'die britische Verwaltung des Innern... auf preußischen Boden, Sitten und Verfassung zu übertragen soweit solche anwendbar gemacht werden kann'.

ago, without obviously endangering internal order and peace';³⁵ similar reservations were expressed by Altenstein.³⁶

Social and administrative reforms were not an end in themselves, they were part of a process of national mobilization directed against Napoleonic France. As one military reformer, Colonel von Borstell, put it: 'Surrounded as she is by powerful states, Prussia's exposed military-geographical position, which is secure only towards the Silesian border with Austria, confers on it the rank of a subordinate ally. Therefore, at the moment, the reassertion of great-power status can only be achieved through the most sustained mobilisation of all the resources of the state'; similar views were expressed by other prominent military reformers, such as Gneisenau.³⁷ Crucial to the release of latent societal strengths in Prussia was the development of a new model of military organization, the logical consequence not merely of Prussia's precarious external situation, but also of the dismantling of the traditional military-agrarian complex. Hitherto, the Prussian army had been based on a corporate division of functions between a privileged nobility, which dominated the officer corps, and the peasantry, which provided the rank and file; townspeople were largely exempted from recruitment.

The reformers now assaulted this system from two angles. First, they argued that the closure of the officer corps to non-noble candidates deprived the nation of a range of talents. 'Birth confers no monopoly on merit', Gneisenau observed in 1808, 'if one grants it too many rights, a multitude of resources [will] lie sleeping, undeveloped and unexploited in the bosom of the nation'.³⁸ Moreover, the powerful corporate ethos of the old system had led

³⁵ Bemerkungen des Regierungsrats Merckel 'Zu dem von des Herrn Staatsministers von Schroetter Exzellenz unterm 13. Oktober 1808 eingereichten Plane zur Einrichtung der Kreisverwaltungsbehörden mit Rücksicht auf die dazugehörenden Beilagen', 9 May 1809, Breslau, in Heinrich Scheel and Doris Schmidt, eds, *Von Stein zu Hardenberg. Dokumente aus dem Interimsministerium Altenstein/Dohna* (Berlin, 1986), p. 282: 'Um fertig zu laufen, muß man erst sicher gehen lernen; und die innere Verwaltung Englands als das Resultat einer Jahrhunderte sicher bestehenden Repräsentativ-Verfassung, das Produkt eines lang genährten Freiheitssinnes, kann ohne offenbare Gefahr für innere Ordnung und Ruhe unmöglich plötzlich auf einen Boden verpflanzt werden, an welchem noch vor einem Jahre Eigenbehörigkeit klebte'.

³⁶ Marginalia to 'Bemerkungen des Geheimen Oberfinanzrats von Staegemann zum Organisationsplan', after Nov. 1807, in Scheel and Schmidt, eds, *Stein*, I, p. 188.

³⁷ Memorandum attributed to Lieutenant Colonel von Borstell, 20 Sept. 1807, Treptow a. d. Rega, in Rudolf Vaupel, ed., *Die Reorganisation des Preussischen Staates unter Stein und Hardenberg. Teil II. Das Preussische Heer vom Tilsiter Frieden bis zur Befreiung 1807–1814* (Leipzig, 1938), p. 87: 'Umgeben von mächtigen Staaten scheint Preußens ausgedehnte geographisch-militärische Lage, welche nur von der schlesisch-österreichischen Grenze Sicherheit gewährt, ihm den Rang eines untergeordneten Bundesstaates anzuweisen. Die jetzige Repräsentation einer selbständigen oder starken Macht dürfte folglich nur mit der äußersten Anspannung aller Landeskkräfte zu realisieren sein'; Gneisenau memorandum, pre-1807, *ibid.*, p. 187.

³⁸ Gneisenau's article in the *Volksfreund*, 2 Jul. 1808, in Vaupel, ed., *Preussische Heer*, p. 490: 'Die Geburt gibt kein Monopol für Verdienste, räumt man dieser zu viele Rechte ein, so schlafen im Schoße einer Nation eine Menge Kräfte unentwickelt und unbenutzt'.

to widespread indifference towards the fate of army and dynasty. Just after the catastrophe, one military commentator spoke of 'the indifference of civilians towards the relations of the state with other states . . . it appeared all the same to them whether they were ruled by friend or foe'.³⁹ For this reason the reformers supported measures such as the abolition of corporal punishment. As Scharnhorst put it in 1808, 'One must make the army more attractive to the nation and remove its hateful elements'.⁴⁰ Secondly, agrarian reform, with its associated freedom of movement, rendered the old cantonal system, based on bonded peasant recruits, obsolete. Even the Jews were permitted, *de facto*, rather than officially, to join the struggle against Napoleon; due to the relatively small numbers involved this was of more symbolic than practical significance.⁴¹ From now on, however, the principle was clear: 'All inhabitants of the state should be born defenders of same'.⁴²

There were, however, considerable differences as to how the military mobilization of Prussia should best be achieved. Some advocated the direct adoption of the French system of general conscription, perhaps with some form of substitution; others feared the impact of conscription on Prussian society and economy. Vincke famously warned that conscription would be 'the grave of all culture, of academic pursuits and trade, of civil freedom and all human happiness'; similar concerns were expressed by Theodor von Schön.⁴³ There was also the problem of finance: the costs of the lost war and Napoleonic exactions meant that, in the short term at least, the Prussian regular army after 1807 had to be reduced rather than increased. This explains why Prussian military reformers took such a keen interest in British military organization, particularly the militia system. Thus the initial reports of the military investigative commission in 1807 envisaged the creation of a 'Reserve Army' comprising those who could not arm, clothe and train themselves at their own expense; like the British militia, it would not normally be deployed outside its home area.⁴⁴ As with the English Militia

³⁹ Major von Lossau, 'Gedanken über die militärische Organisation der preußischen Monarchie', 21 Mar. 1808, Treptow a. d. Rega, in Vaupel, ed., *Preussische Heer*, p. 333: 'eine Kälte der Zivileinwohner gegen die Verhältnisse des Staats zu andern Staaten . . . so schien es völlig gleich, ob Feind oder Freund im Land war'.

⁴⁰ Scharnhorst to Stein, 3 Jul. 1808, Königsberg, in Vaupel, ed., *Preussische Heer*, p. 500: 'Man muß der Nation den Soldatenstand angenehm machen, und das Verhaßte aus ihn entfernen'.

⁴¹ See Horst Fischer, *Judentum, Staat und Heer in Preußen im frühen 19. Jahrhundert. Zur Geschichte der staatlichen Judenpolitik* (Tübingen, 1968), pp. 32–53.

⁴² Immediatbericht der Militär-Reorganisationskommission, 31 Aug. 1807, Memel, in Vaupel, ed., *Preussische Heer*, p. 82 and passim.

⁴³ Vincke to Stein, 30 Sept. 1808, n.p., in Vaupel, ed., *Preussische Heer*, p. 599: 'das Grab aller Kultur, der Wissenschaften und Gewerbe, der bürgerlichen Freiheit und aller menschlichen Glückseligkeit'; Schön's notes, 4 Dec. 1807, Memel, *ibid.*, pp. 201–202.

⁴⁴ Report of Militär Immediat-Kommission, 31 Aug. 1807, Memel, in Vaupel, ed., *Preussische Heer*, pp. 82–3.

and Volunteers, the Prussian Reserve Army was also allotted a domestic role: one report of the investigative commission remarked that ‘When England armed her property-owners and householders, thoughts of revolt and internal revolution disappeared’.⁴⁵ And in 1814, around the time of the introduction of universal military service in Prussia, attention turned once again to British models, with Hardenberg even going so far as to request details from the Prussian representative in London: ‘Our government needs exact information on the organisation and numbers of the English militia. I therefore ask you, monsieur, to send me all the ordonances which relate to this topic’.⁴⁶

The link between the emancipation of hidden societal strengths and military mobilization, which so characterized the Prussian reform movement after 1807, had already been accepted by the British government in the 1790s. Once Holland had fallen, Britain was effectively encircled: she now had to muster all her resources to man the extended perimeter line against the threat of French invasion.⁴⁷ This was done in two ways. First of all, the traditional county militia formations were re-embodied at the outbreak of war, the levy was increased under the Quota Act of 1796, and in 1797 the system was extended to Scotland. Militia service involved a proportional ballot of able-bodied men — excluding those who had already joined the Volunteers — for three years’ service. They could pay a fine or provide a substitute, if they were unable or unwilling to serve. Secondly and more spectacularly, the government attempted to tap the reserves of patriotism in civil society through the Volunteer Act of 1794: this created a largely self-funded home defence force of about 300,000 men by 1803. As J. E. Cookson has recently pointed out, the Volunteering phenomenon was not just about ‘loyalism’,⁴⁸ but also — and

⁴⁵ Report of Militär Immediat-Kommission, 15 Mar. 1808, in Vaupel, ed., *Preussische Heer*, p. 323: ‘Als England seine Grundeigentümer und Hausbesitzer bewaffnete, verschwand der Gedanke an Revolte und innere Revolution’.

⁴⁶ Hardenberg to Greuhm, 2 Jun. 1814, Paris, GStA, Rep. 11:82, London 272, *Acta der Gesandtschaft zu London betreffend der Organisation und Einrichtung der englischen Miliz*, unfoliated: ‘Il importe à notre government d’avoir une connaissance exacte de l’organisation et l’état de la milice anglaise. Je vous charge en conséquence Monsieur, de me transmettre toutes les ordonances qui ont rapport à cet objet’; Boyen (Prussian minister of war) to Greuhm, 15 Aug. 1813, *ibid.* See also the printed document ‘Return of the effective strength of the British Army in rank and file, at the under-mentioned periods, distinguishing cavalry, artillery, infantry and militia, and British from foreign and colonial troops’, with handwritten comments on it by Jacobi (Prussian ambassador to London): ‘Ce qu’on appelle ici *local militia*, la milice qui ne quitte pas la comté ou le district ou elle est levée monte à 250 000 h[ommes]’, in: GStA, 2.4.1 Abt. I 5219, unfoliated.

⁴⁷ Re ‘encirclement’ see J. E. Cookson, *The British armed nation, 1793–1815* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 38–41.

⁴⁸ J. R. Western, ‘The Volunteer movement as an anti-revolutionary force’, *English Historical Review*, 71 (1956), pp. 603–14; H. T. Dickinson, ‘Popular loyalism in Britain in the 1790s’, in Hellmuth, ed., *The transformation of political culture*, pp. 503–33.

perhaps primarily — about ‘national defence patriotism’.⁴⁹ After all, the biggest initial surge in volunteering came in coastal counties, where the threat of French invasion was greatest.⁵⁰ External defence, not domestic repression was the key to Pitt’s policy in the 1790s.

It was this same primacy of foreign policy which prompted the government to address the question of those excluded from the civil society of *ancien régime* Britain. For the traditional restrictions on the full deployment of the nation’s resources were not socio-legal — as in Prussia before 1806 — but *confessional*. If Britain was a parliamentary fiscal-military state resting on a large degree of consensus, then it was also indisputably a state based on institutionalized religious inequality: Roman Catholics, especially, were excluded from political and military participation. By the end of the eighteenth century, reform-minded British statesmen recognized that some form of emancipation would be needed to mobilize Catholics, particularly Irish Catholics, in the struggle against France. Irish Catholics were, to quote one British statesman, ‘a weapon of war as yet untried’.⁵¹ Indeed, as Tom Bartlett has shown, the military demands of the international situation were crucial to British government support for Catholic emancipation.⁵² The first Roman Catholic Relief Acts of 1778 and 1782 were passed during the American War; and it was the outbreak of war with Revolutionary France in 1793 that prompted the government to couple its Militia Bill with a Relief Act for Irish Catholics enabling them to serve in it. At first, the idea was to deploy Catholic militia forces in defence of Ireland against French invasion,⁵³ but this narrow conception soon gave way to the desire to use them overseas as well. As Pitt and Dundas argued, ‘the present state of the world’ (i.e. the war) and ‘the present circumstances of this country and Europe’ necessitated ‘conciliating the Catholics as much as possible . . . and making of them an effectual body of support’.⁵⁴ Indeed, the Union of Ireland and Great Britain in 1800 was conceived as part of a broader programme to integrate Ireland and Irish Catholics into the war effort. Due to the opposition of the crown, however, Pitt was unable to deliver on Catholic emancipation.

⁴⁹ Cookson, *Armed nation*, p. 211. But see also Linda Colley, *Britons: forging the nation, 1707–1837* (London, 1994, 1st edn, New Haven, 1992), pp. 283–319.

⁵⁰ Cookson, *Armed nation*, p. 26.

⁵¹ Thomas Bartlett, ‘“A weapon of war as yet untried”: Irish Catholics and the armed forces of the crown, 1760–1830’, in T. G. Fraser and Keith Jeffery, eds, *Men, women, and war* (Dublin, 1993), pp. 66–85. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the differing nature of the problem and the resulting disabilities, there does not seem to have been a military dimension to the problem of (Protestant) dissent: see Ursula Henriques, *Religious toleration in England, 1787–1833* (London, 1961).

⁵² Thomas Bartlett, *The fall and rise of the Irish nation: the Catholic question, 1690–1830* (Dublin, 1992), p. 309.

⁵³ Ehrman, *The younger Pitt*, p. 159.

But by 1806–7, the triumph of French arms across the continent, and the perceived pressing need for more Irish Catholic recruitment, spurred the Ministry of All the Talents to make one supreme effort for emancipation. In December 1806, not long after the Prussian defeat at Jena, Lord Grenville — whose commitment to Roman Catholic emancipation admittedly long predated the need to mobilize the nation against France — spoke of the need of ‘removing *all* restrictions on the employment of the King’s catholic subjects indiscriminately . . . because the present times are felt to call for as much military exertion as the empire is capable of making’,⁵⁵ a clear sign that — in this case — external considerations were being used to drive domestic policy. Four months later, the Earl of Moira argued that a further 100,000 men could be raised if Irish Catholics were recruited in the same proportion as the rest of Britain.⁵⁶ Once again, however, royal and parliamentary opposition proved fatal, and the issue of Catholic emancipation was not raised for the duration of the war.

In their different ways Catholic emancipation, volunteering and even the old militia system proved blind alleys for the war effort. Both forms of home defence organization, the Volunteers even more so than the militia, were hedged about with all kinds of restrictions. The Volunteers could not be deployed outside of their own county, let alone sent abroad, without their consent; and the same was largely true of the old militia. During the invasion scares of the 1790s and the early 1800s, this was less of a problem. But when it came to foreign expeditions, and especially with the revival of full-scale land warfare in the Peninsula after 1808, the need for a larger and more flexible regular army became inescapable. Indeed, there already existed a strong constituency for military reform within the British army and among certain politicians. For example, the Duke of York, the commander in chief, was an ardent ‘Prussianist’, who believed in the virtues of discipline and a large standing army.⁵⁷ On the political side, there was no greater critic of the voluntary system than William Windham, secretary of state for war in 1794–1801 and again in 1806–7. Britain, Windham observed to the House of Commons in 1806, was obsessed with ‘substitutes for an army’.⁵⁸ ‘If anything requires immediate use and is unfit to keep’, he also remarked, ‘it is an offer

⁵⁴ Cited in Bartlett, ‘A weapon of war as yet untried’, p. 43.

⁵⁵ Cited in Bartlett, *The fall and rise of the Irish nation*, p. 287.

⁵⁶ See Selkirk, *On the necessity of a more effectual system of national defence*, p. 113. See also the extracts from the *Morning Chronicle*, 8 Aug. 1808, cited in Peter Spence, *The birth of romantic radicalism: war, popular politics and English radical reformism, 1800–1815* (Aldershot, 1996), p. 65.

⁵⁷ See the discussion by Piers Mackesy, *British victory in Egypt, 1801: The end of Napoleon’s conquest* (London, 1995), pp. 29–30.

⁵⁸ See William Windham, ‘Motion relative to the military establishments of the country’, *Hansard’s parliamentary debates*, v, p. 655.

of voluntary service. It is more liable to spoil than mackerel itself'.⁵⁹ Or, as he put it in another analogy from the realm of nature, the Volunteers were merely 'painted cherries which none but simple birds would take for real fruit'.⁶⁰

By contrast the Prussian army was widely admired — in the 1790s William Grenville described it as 'numerous, disciplined, ready and efficient' — and it was often seen as a model for Britain.⁶¹ But there were considerable barriers to the creation of a large continental-style regular army in Britain: fear of standing armies had, after all, been a staple of opposition rhetoric since the early modern period. Many opposed the creation of an officer academy in 1801, as it was seen as a first step towards a standing army, and thus a 'danger to the constitution'; another critic objected to 'every thing that tended to Germanize the English army'.⁶² Whereas British society grudgingly submitted to the arbitrary naval press gangs, straightforward conscription for army service overseas was unacceptable. Indeed, Windham candidly accepted the limitations this placed upon military organization. As he observed to the House of Commons in June 1804:

If the danger to be guarded against were imminent, and... a levy were necessary immediately, unquestionably a compulsory proceeding to obtain that levy might be the most effectual. Measures of that sort are undoubtedly in their own nature the speediest and most certain in their operation. Nothing seems to be so sure and direct in a case where men are wanted, as to pass a law, by which men shall be forcibly taken. But here care is necessary, to consider the nature and condition of the country in which such powers are to be exercised. What is good for Russia or Prussia may not be good for Great Britain.⁶³

In the end, Britain settled for a revised militia system. Castlereagh's Local Militia Act of 1808 maintained the principle of compulsory local county service, with substantial fines for non-attendance. This created a pool of trained men, from which the regular army could draw replacements, a measure which locally minded militia colonels had previously resisted. The Militia Interchange Act of 1811 enabled the rotation of regiments within the United Kingdom, and in particular released Catholic Irish regiments for service overseas. The Volunteers were allowed to run down. In principle, the act amounted to Napoleonic-style conscription, for local purposes, at least,

⁵⁹ Cited in Erin McCauley Renn, 'England faces invasion: the land forces, 1803–1805', *PCRE* (1974), p. 138.

⁶⁰ Cited in Clive Emsley, 'The Volunteer movement', in Alan Guy, ed., *The road to Waterloo: The British army and the struggle against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, 1793–1815* (London, 1990), p. 47.

⁶¹ Cited in Hartmut Gembries, 'Das Thema Preußen in der politischen Diskussion Englands zwischen 1792 und 1807', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Freiburg, 1988, pp. 99, 168.

⁶² Cited in Gembries, 'Das Thema Preußen', p. 101.

⁶³ *Hansard*, v, p. 495.

but as there were always enough (mostly Scottish and Irish) Volunteers, the system was never used to its full potential.⁶⁴

Political reform

Another method of harnessing popular energies against Napoleon was political reform. In the Riga memorandum of 1807, Hardenberg had called for a Prussian national assembly in order to 'bring the nation into a closer relationship with the state administration to make people familiar with it and to interest them in it'.⁶⁵ A year later, Frederick William's decree of November 1808 called for a national representation; and in 1810, Hardenberg's Finance Edict was accompanied by a royal proclamation promising 'the nation an appropriately arranged representation, both in the provinces and for the whole'.⁶⁶ An assembly of (summoned) notables met in 1811, followed by the corporately elected provisional national representation of nobles, peasants and townspeople in 1812–13, and in 1814 by the short-lived 'interim representation'. The purpose of these assemblies was twofold. Their specific task was to advise on and support government plans for fiscal reform. More generally, they were supposed to generate patriotic fervour for the final reckoning with Napoleon. In no sense was the national representation conceived by liberal reformers as a check on royal authority. As Mathew Levinger has persuasively argued, political reform was intended to 'enhance' royal power, not limit it. The Riga memorandum had explicitly stated that the national representation should be 'without compromising the monarchical constitution';⁶⁷ the Royal Edict of 1810 spoke only of 'counsel', not of control. This point was underlined by government-sponsored newspapers, such as the *Vaterlandsfreund*. The representation of the people, it argued in May 1809, 'should in no respect limit the power of the King, but merely advise, enlighten and guide'; 'his power should not be limited in any way by the representative body'.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ This is the argument of Cookson, *Armed nation*, p. 87.

⁶⁵ Hardenberg's Riga memorandum, in Vaupel, ed., *Preussische Heer*, p. 318: 'Die Nation mit der Staatsverwaltung in nähere Verhältnisse zu bringen, sie mehr damit bekannt zu machen und dafür zu interessieren'.

⁶⁶ Cited in Mathew Levinger, 'Imagining a nation: the constitutional question in Prussia, 1806–1815', unpublished D.Phil. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1992, p. 134. See also Mathew Levinger, 'Hardenberg, Wittgenstein and the constitutional question in Prussia, 1815–1822', *German History*, 8 (1990), pp. 257–77.

⁶⁷ Hardenberg's Riga memorandum, in Vaupel, ed., *Preussische Heer*, p. 318: 'ohne Abbruch der monarchischen Verfassung'.

⁶⁸ *Der Vaterlandsfreund*: 'Über den Geist der neueren Staatsreformen', 10 May 1809, in Scheel and Schmidt, eds., *Von Stein zu Hardenberg*, p. 299: 'soll in keiner Hinsicht die Gewalt des Monarchen beschränkend, sondern bloß für seine *Kenntnis ratgebend, aufklärend und leitend sein*' (italics in original); *ibid.*, 31 May 1809, p. 312: 'Seine Macht darf also durch die Repräsentation in nichts beschränkt werden'.

In particular, there was near-unanimity that the British model of parliamentary government was not applicable to Prussia.⁶⁹ Already, in 1796, one Prussian memorialist had observed that 'If the example of England sometimes demonstrates the benefit of a popular representation, which is only deliberative, it demonstrates still more the necessity that executive power be united in one hand, especially as far as a great power is concerned'.⁷⁰ In 1809 the *Vaterlandsfreund* criticized the British parliamentary system on the grounds not only that the franchise was too limited, but that 'the power of the King is too constrained by the representation of the people. The government is therefore obliged to use various, often immoral, means to secure a majority in Parliament'.⁷¹ For this reason, it argued in a subsequent article, the new national representation 'ought not to have both consultative and legislative powers as in England, but should have consultative and advisory powers [only]... It should not have the right to approve or reject [measures]'.⁷² Shortly afterwards the conservative publicist Adam Müller observed that freedom of the press and British-style parliamentary government could not be introduced in Prussia:

The example of England is completely inappropriate for the Prussian states. One cannot create large assemblies to deliberate on general government policy, even if they were merely to be granted a collective right of consultation, without greatly endangering the state... It is obvious that in the current situation of the Prussian state, freedom of the press is quite impossible.⁷³

⁶⁹ An exception would be Quast-Garz's memorandum of 28 Jun. 1812: see Levinger, 'Imagining a nation', p. 184.

⁷⁰ *Reflexions sur les motifs de la conduite des puissances de l'Europe et sur leurs intérêts relativement à la Révolution de France*, 10 Nov. 1796, Berlin, paginated anonymous MSS, GStA, Rep.XI. 81 London 194, p. 36: 'Si l'exemple de l'Angleterre nous prouve quelquefois le bien résultant d'une représentation populaire, mais uniquement délibérante, il nous prouve encore plus souvent la nécessité que le pouvoir exécutif soit réuni dans une seule main le besoin en est surtout démontré pour tout état considérable'.

⁷¹ *Vaterlandsfreund* (anon); 10 May 1809, in Scheel and Schmidt, eds, *Ministerium Dohna-Altenstein*, p. 299: 'die Macht des Königs durch die Repräsentation zu eingeschränkt. Die Regierung ist dadurch genötigt, die Mehrheit im Parlamente durch verschiedene, oft unmoralische Mittel auf ihre Seite zu bringen, damit sie zu den Maßregeln der Regierung ihre Zustimmung gebe'.

⁷² *Der Vaterlandsfreund* (anon), 31 May 1809, in Scheel and Schmidt, eds, *Von Stein zu Hardenberg*, p. 312: 'darf nicht berathschlagend und gesetzgebend zugleich sein wie in England, sondern *berathschlagend* und *ratgebend*. Sie hat nichts zu bewilligen, nichts zu verwerfen'.

⁷³ Adam Müller, memorandum for Frederick William III, 'Redaktion eines Preußischen Regierungsblattes unter dem Titel: Preußische Chronik oder Preußische Hof- und Nationalzeitung', 22 Sept. 1809, in Scheel and Schmidt, eds, *Von Stein zu Hardenberg*, p. 410: 'Das Beispiel von England paßt aber durchaus nicht für die Preußischen Staaten: Große, über die allgemeinen Maßregeln der Regierung delibrierende Körperschaften, wenn ihnen auch nur ein vereintes Votum consultativum einraumt wird, können ohne die äußerste Gefahr des Staats nicht errichtet werden... Preßfreiheit ist der dermaligen Lage des Preußischen Staates, wie von selbst in den Augen springt, durchaus unzulässig'.

Even such a staunch reformer as Gneisenau was put off the British model by his visit to the country in 1809: 'In this country', he wrote to his wife in November 1809, 'the affairs of state are also conducted in such a woeful manner. Ignorant and rash figures are at the helm, and their ineptitude would surely lead to the destruction of this people as well, if it were not protected by its geographic location'.⁷⁴ Once again, this affirms the instinctive link that even Prussian reformers made between geopolitical pressures and the possibility of British-style parliamentary government.

Interestingly, the relative merits of the constitutional absolutist system was a subject often addressed in the Napoleonic period by two people best qualified to judge: the British ambassador to Berlin and the Prussian ambassador to London. They instinctively agreed that the greatest weakness of the British system was the retardative effect of representative structures. Thus Baron Jacobi in London observed that 'the administration of public affairs suffers greatly when ministers find themselves in the position of fearing the loss of their (parliamentary) seats [because] the means of maintaining oneself in parliament absorbs a large part of their attention'.⁷⁵ At around the same time, his counterpart in Berlin, Sir Francis Jackson, lamented Britain's tardiness in coming to Prussia's aid at Jena in the following terms: 'I speak of disadvantages that are I am afraid, inherent in our constitution, or at least form an unavoidable appendage to it'. British diplomats and ministers, he argued, always had to watch their domestic flank, which 'requires more time than if [they] could act upon every emergency [themselves], and independent of every consideration, above alluded to'.⁷⁶

In Britain, political reform — that is franchise reform — during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period on the continent was not sponsored by the government but demanded from below. For the first decade and a half after 1792, calls for broader political participation were coupled with opposition to the war.⁷⁷ But in 1803–6, with the breakdown of the Peace of Amiens and the collapse of the various continental coalitions, and especially after the beginning of the Peninsula War in 1808, this began to change. As Peter Spence has recently pointed out, a direct connection was now often made between political participation and the struggle against

⁷⁴ Gneisenau to his wife, 2 Nov. 1809, from England, in G. H. Pertz, *Das Leben des Feldmarschalls Grafen Neithardt von Gneisenau* (Berlin, 1864), I, p. 575: 'In diesem Lande werden die Regierungsangelegenheiten ebenfalls auf die erbärmlichste Art betrieben. Unwissende und leidenschaftliche Menschen stehen am Ruder, und durch ihre Ungeschicklichkeit müßte auch dieses Volk zu Grunde gehen, wenn solche nicht dessen geographische Lage schützte'.

⁷⁵ Jacobi dispatch, 12 April 1805, GStA, Rep.XI.73.179A, fo. 110.

⁷⁶ Cited in Lady Jackson, ed., *The diaries and letters of Sir G.J. Jackson, from the peace of Amiens to the battle of Talavera*, I, pp. 129–30.

⁷⁷ J. E. Cookson, *The friends of peace: anti-war liberalism in England, 1793–1815* (Cambridge, 1982).

France.⁷⁸ In 1806 the radical whig MP, Sir Francis Burdett, observed 'I begin to think that we have no choice but submission or revolution, & I believe our luxurious sheep-breeding gents would much prefer the former';⁷⁹ one is reminded of Schön's almost contemporaneous comment, cited earlier, that 'the old aristocrats love only themselves . . . In their view the state may perish but seigniorial power would survive'. Two years later, Burdett made the link between domestic change and external strength even clearer when he addressed a meeting in the following terms: 'Gentlemen, I say therefore, that in order to face this land from foreign subjugation, we must get rid of domestic oppression; we must have arms and reform'.⁸⁰ The veteran campaigner for franchise reform, John Cartwright, argued similarly in January 1809: 'naught remained to us but this alternative — either parliamentary reformation under George the Third, or national subjugation under Napoleon the first'.⁸¹ Shortly afterwards he exclaimed in his tract 'Reasons for reformation' (1809): 'Hath warning upon warning been wanting to us? Have we not witnessed the catastrophes of Marengo, at Austerlitz, at Jena and at Fridland [sic], and found that no nation under an unreformed government, not even the strongest and least accessible [a clear reference to Britain's island location], can stand before the scourge that is abroad'.⁸² Once again, the connection between geopolitics and representative government is made, but this time in Britain, and with radically different conclusions.

The link between external threat and political participation was made particularly forcefully in a reforming petition of the freeholders of Middlesex in January 1806, preserved in the Holland House papers:

Gentlemen, Contemplating the experienced insufficiency of the two great Empires of *Russia* and *Austria*, even when combined, to contend with the energetic despot of *France*, seeing *Austria* broken and dismembered, that she may no more oppose the torrent of *French* ambition . . . ; while turning for defence and the means of defying the tyrant to our native *English* energies, we discover that the *military* branch of our constitution, that POWER of the collective counties in which every man from fifteen to sixty, in the days of our *Edwards* and our *Henries*, was, when necessity required, a soldier — that POWER which thus became the resistless SWORD OF THE STATE, has long been guilefully mislaid and kept out of sight; and that the *civil* branch of our Constitution, our Parliamentary Representation, which ought to be the perfect and impenetrable Buckler of our Defence, has become a mouldering ruin; and thus perceiving that he [Pitt], in whom for for twenty years past our country has placed her trust — he from whose hands death has recently struck

⁷⁸ Spence, *The birth of romantic radicalism*, p. 22.

⁷⁹ Cited in Spence, *The birth of romantic radicalism*, p. 35.

⁸⁰ Cited in Spence, *The birth of romantic radicalism*, pp. 61–2.

⁸¹ Cited in Spence, *The birth of romantic radicalism*, p. 97.

⁸² Spence, *The birth of romantic radicalism*, p. 139.

the reins of government, had not, during his long administration, either respected that SWORD, or repaired that BUCKLER; . . . we earnestly request you to call an early meeting of the freeholders at large for the following purposes; namely, First, To consider whether the administration of the Executive government of our country be or be not committed to men who are supporters of a system, by which the aggrandisement of *France* has uniformly been increased, . . . Secondly, To consider whether our country can be best defended by a Standing Army, assisted by Volunteer Corps, or by the proper military branch of our constitution, the POWER of the collective counties, properly regulated by law and by rules for military discipline. Thirdly, To consider of the propriety of requesting the Hon. Charles Grey, to renew, as soon as he shall find it convenient, his virtuous efforts towards obtaining for the people an efficient Representation in Parliament.⁸³

There was thus a constituency, albeit a much more marginal one than in Prussia, which saw an intimate link between broader political participation and foreign affairs. At the same time, however, one should bear in mind that these radicals couched their military demands in terms of the ancient constitution: 'reform' meant — rhetorically at least — returning to a prior uncorrupted state.

Both Britain and Prussia reacted to the French threat with measures of domestic reform. Unlike Prussia, there was no fundamental governmental blueprint for radical change in Britain. Here reform tended to be more piecemeal, empirical, and disjointed; and in many ways the measures proposed were more explicitly linked to foreign-political exigencies. Nevertheless, there was willingness in both states to address traditional inequalities in the cause of increased national efficiency. In Britain, these inequalities were *confessional*, and so the drive for greater military mobilization was closely linked to the progress of Roman Catholic emancipation; this notwithstanding the fact that national mobilization could often also have a strongly sectarian, anti-Roman Catholic overtone.⁸⁴ In Prussia, the inequalities were *corporate* — that is socio-legal. The abolition of feudal residues, such as hereditary bondage and noble control of the officer corps, was an integral part of the military mobilization against Napoleon. In many ways, therefore, Roman Catholic emancipation was the *pendant* to the emancipation of the peasantry in Prussia. Broader political participation was another common aspect of the struggle with France. In Prussia, this was sponsored by a reforming elite within government; in Britain it was largely the preserve of a radical minority in parliament and a much larger movement outside Westminster. Both countries looked to the other for inspiration: Britain for an

⁸³ 'To John Austey and Thomas Smith, Esquires, Sherriffs of Middlesex', 25 Jan. 1806, in British Library (BL) Add MSS 51568, fos. 91–2.

⁸⁴ For which see Colley, *Britons*, *passim*.

efficient form of mass military organization, and Prussia for models of self-government. At the same time, however, both were clear about the limitations of such models: British politicians recognized the domestic constraints to the introduction of continental-style conscription, while Prussians believed their monarchy to be too geographically exposed to warrant an open parliamentary system.

As a result, in both countries reform met distinctly defined limits. The plans for a Prussian national representation were shelved after 1815, despite the monarchical promise of a constitution, not least because the old elites had used the interim assemblies to attack anti-feudal reforms. For this reason the Prussian reform period has been termed one of 'partial modernization', when political change failed to keep pace with socio-economic progress, thus contributing to the *Sonderweg*, a purportedly unique path of development which set Germany apart from Britain and France throughout the nineteenth century. Yet by the same criterion, British history during the Napoleonic period was equally characterized by partial modernization. Roman Catholic emancipation was not implemented until 1829, and franchise reform had to wait until shortly afterwards. The French threat was never quite powerful enough to persuade the king to agree to Catholic emancipation, or to force the government to widen the franchise.

In short, it may be undeniable that the reasons for the different British and Prussian paths of development were, as indicated at the outset of this paper, deeply embedded in the differing socio-political systems in Britain and Prussia at the start of the period. But they were also — and herein lies the value of the comparative perspective — directly related to the differing degrees of external pressure they experienced throughout the period, and to the differing domestic consequences resulting therefrom. In this respect, J.R. Seeley's famous dictum about the degree of internal freedom in a state being directly proportional to the strength of the pressure on its external borders needs to be revised. For in Britain such a basic traditional restraint on individual freedom as religious discrimination was retained not because of the French threat, but, objectively at least, *in spite* of it. In Prussia, on the other hand, those most concerned with Napoleonic domination were usually the most ardent reformers, determined to increase the amount of internal freedom necessary for, and compatible with, the recovery of great power status.