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SPREADING THE CLASSICAL LIBERAL GOSPEL OF
RICHARD COBDEN
AND THE ANTI-CORN LAW LEAGUE

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Abstract.

One of the central concepts of classical liberal economic thought is the superiority of free trade over protectionism. The key historical event leading to the dissemination of this idea was the activity of Richard Cobden and the Anti-Corn Law League in Britain in the 1840s. This paper explores the ways in which Cobden and the Anti-Corn Law League were received on the Continent, and the relative reception of free trade ideas in France, through Frédéric Bastiat and later the Anglo-French Treaty of Commerce in 1861; in Italy, through Francesco Ferrara and Camillo Cavour; and in Germany through John Prince Smith. A preliminary conclusion about the role of general levels of economic knowledge in the receptivity of free trade ideas precedes suggestions for further research.

THE FREE TRADE OF IDEAS: SPREADING THE CLASSICAL LIBERAL GOSPEL OF RICHARD COBDEN AND THE ANTI-CORN LAW LEAGUE

The early nineteenth century was a period of unprecedented disruption in the political and economic assumptions of Europeans. During the Napoleonic Wars, huge armies had crisscrossed Europe, providing grist for the imagination of railroad projectors throughout the continent. Napoleon's Continental System of blockade had made it possible to reformulate the ancient idea of siege into a new strategy of economic warfare and to think of trade as both a diplomatic and a political tool. Population growth was soaring, for the first time in centuries, driving many people off the farms in search of a new way to earn a living. Industrialism had taken off, particularly in England, making it clear that manufacturing was going to compete with agriculture and commerce for the leading role in the economic order. Most importantly, after several decades, the implications of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* were beginning to be understood in more and more places across Europe and around the world, leading to a growing use of economic arguments beside, and sometimes as a substitute for, political arguments in the drive to preserve and extend the classical liberal programs that had formed the policy agenda at the end of the eighteenth century.

There would be many ways of examining the flow of economic ideas across Europe during this period, some of which I will propose for further research at the conclusion of this paper. For a variety of reasons, however, I will focus here on just one thread, the influence and reception of Richard Cobden and the Anti-Corn Law League in continental Europe, looking at some examples in France, Italy, and Germany.

The case of Richard Cobden and the Anti-Corn Law League is particularly pertinent for a study of the transmission of classical liberal ideas for a variety of reasons. First, the issue the League fought for—the complete and immediate repeal of the all protective tariffs on grain in Great Britain—was at once simple and central to the classical liberal worldview. Accepting its premise unconditionally—that free trade is more efficient than government intervention—is perhaps the best litmus test for adherence to classical liberal ideas. Second, the British repeal provided tangible benefits to other countries, by reducing their cost of doing business with Great Britain, while at the same time providing a model for unilateral action which would bring even further benefits if those countries also abolished their own protective tariffs. Thus, it demonstrated the ability of liberals to fight and win an important policy battle within a particular nation, and offered an organizational model for how to go about doing so. Finally,

following the League's success in Parliament, Richard Cobden made an extended trip through Europe, during which he met with and spoke to liberals about the League and its program. The publicity that his visits generated, and the subsequent actions that followed, provide a window through which to examine the state of liberal thinking on free trade in a variety of places and contexts at roughly the same point in time.

In each of the following three sections, Cobden's encounter with the free trade movement of a specific country will be placed in the context of that country's debates about free trade policy. France, Italy, and Germany each provide striking examples of the variety within the liberal movements of the three countries. As should be apparent, however, they were also part of a single thread of discussion, and engaged in what, at least at times, was part of a pan-European movement for reform along classical liberal lines.

A. French Liberalism and Trade

a. French Trade Policy in the 19th Century

The main thesis of Tocqueville's *Ancien regime et la revolution* is that continuity outweighs change when comparing France before and after the French Revolution. Beginning with the collapse of the Physiocrat influence embodied in Turgot's proposals for economic reform, and extending through the Continental System of Napoleon, France has probably had Europe's most consistent mercantilist or neo-mercantilist economic approach to trade, continuing through today.¹ The appearance of nineteenth century free trade ideas in France, therefore, has been rare, with some exceptions, including two which are notable for our purposes: the writings of Frédéric Bastiat from the late 1840s until his death in 1850, and the Anglo-French commercial treaty of 1861, which lasted only 15 years.

b. Cobden and Bastiat

The degree of influence that Cobden held over Bastiat cannot be overemphasized. Bastiat's correspondence with Cobden makes this clear, beginning with his first letter, dated 24 November, 1844, which deserves being quoted at length:

Monsieur,

Nourished in the school of your Adam Smith and our J.B. Say, I began to believe that this simple and clear doctrine had no chance to be popularized, at least for a long time, because, here, it is completely stifled by the specious *fallacies* that you have so well refuted—by the fourierist, communist, etc. sects of which the country is momentarily engorged—and also by the fatal alliance of the party journals with the journals paid by manufacturers' committees.

It was in the state of complete discouragement in which these sad circumstances had placed me that, having subscribed by accident to the *Globe and Traveller*, I learned of both the existence of the *League* and the struggle in England between commercial liberty and monopoly. As a passionate admirer of your so powerful and moral association, and particularly of the man who seems to have given it, in the middle of innumerable difficulties, an impulsion at once energetic and wise, I could not contemplate this spectacle without desiring also to do something for the noble cause of the emancipation of work and commerce. Your honorable secretary, M. Hickin, had the goodness to send to me the *League*, from the date of January 1844, and many documents related to the agitation.

¹ For an extended history of free trade and protectionism in France and Europe, see Paul Dunez, *Histoire du libre échange et du protectionnisme en France* (Paris: Institut Social de France et de l'Union Européenne, 1995).

Armed with these pieces, I tried to bring public attention to your *proceedings*, on which French journals have kept a calculated and systematic silence. I wrote to the journals of Bayonne and Bordeaux, two cities naturally placed to be the cradle of movement. More recently still, I had an article inserted into the *Journal des Economistes* (n° 35, Paris, October 1844), which I recommend for your attention. ...

I tried to organize in Bordeaux an association for the emancipation of trade, but I failed because if one finds a few spirits that instinctively wish for liberty to a certain degree, one does not find any who understand it in principle.

...

I dreamed of establishing in Paris a daily journal founded on the following two principles: Commercial Liberty and the exclusion of party spirit.—There, too, I ran up against financial and other obstacles that would be useless to explain. I shall regret this all the days of my life, because I have the conviction that such a journal, responding to a need in opinion, would have had some chance of success. (I don't renounce the idea).

Finally, I wanted to know if I could have had some chance of being elected deputy, and I received the certitude that my fellow citizens would have given me their votes. ... But personal considerations hindered my from aspiring to this position, which I would have been able to turn to the advantage of our cause.

Forced to restrict my action, I put myself to translating your meetings at Drury Lane and Covent-Garden.—Next May, I will deliver this translation to the public. I await good effects....

In order to complete this work, I would like to have a few documents on the origin and beginning of the League. ...²

The product of whatever documents Cobden had sent to Bastiat was an extended history of the Anti-Corn Law League, which Bastiat entitled: *Cobden and the League, or the English Agitation for the Freedom of Exchange*, the published version of which Bastiat sent to Cobden on 8 April 1845.³ Following publication of the book, Bastiat wrote to Cobden that “public opinion has been awakened,” and that he expected to be elected to the Chamber of Deputies in the next election.⁴ Overall, the recognition that this book received spurred Bastiat on to five years of intense organizational, journalistic, and literary activity in the name of free trade, ending only with his death in December 1850.

²24 November 1844. Frédéric Bastiat, *Oeuvres Complètes*. 7 vols. Paris: Guillaumin et Cie, 1855. Vol. 1: *Correspondance, mélanges*, pp. 106-108. This, and all other translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

³Ibid., 8 April 1845, p. 109.

⁴Ibid. 2 October 1845, pp. 112-13.

Throughout this time, Bastiat continued to look to Cobden for counsel. He visited Manchester in the fall of 1845, and met with Cobden, the Brights, and others. The remainder of Bastiat's correspondence with Cobden is filled with requests for information, advice, and assistance. On 2 October, he thanked Cobden for his counsel about not trying to start a grass-roots movement in France, but rather to work from the top down, given the state of education of the masses.⁵ Cobden recommended that he go to Paris to work from there, and on 13 January 1846 Bastiat reported that the attempt had failed, and must necessarily have failed. Among the 20 participants at the dinner he instigated, Bastiat reported, one wants half liberty, another a quarter liberty, and another an eighth. Three or four were ready to demand liberty in principle. Those who were ready to agitate for absolute liberty, according to Bastiat, amounted to perhaps one or two. Bastiat concluded by pleading with Cobden to remember that his letters, "are the most effective balm to calm the boredom of my solitude and the torments born of the sense of my uselessness."⁶

Following his election as a corresponding member of the Institut de France, Bastiat wrote to Cobden, "I am not blind enough to attribute this success to myself. I owe it *to you*. . . ."⁷ In February 1846, Bastiat created an association for free trade in Bordeaux, and asked for assistance with editing the speeches of the League members into a more economical volume than his original book.⁸ The association met with limited success, since many of the participants turned out to be more interested in the social aspects of the gathering than in actually promoting free trade. In March, therefore, he went to Paris to attempt Cobden's "from the top" approach again.⁹ On 2 April, he wrote of his intention to create a journal, which he called *Free Trade*, to advocate free trade in France, and asked Cobden if he could arrange for 1000 English subscriptions to underwrite the effort.¹⁰ In May, he reported that his efforts to form a "small League" in Paris had come to naught, due to the difficulty in getting permission to form an association, without which permission the notables he had collected refused to act,¹¹ and in June 1846 he returned to his home in Mugron, close to Bordeaux, having temporarily lost his taste for agitation.¹² Instead, Bastiat decided to work on a second

⁵ Ibid. p. 114.

⁶ Ibid. 13 January 1846, p. 120.

⁷ Ibid. 9 February 1846, p. 122.

⁸ Ibid. pp. 124-125.

⁹ Ibid. 25 March 1846, p. 129.

¹⁰ Ibid. 2 April 1846, pp. 130-131.

¹¹ Ibid. 25 May 1846, p. 133.

¹² Ibid. 25 June 1846, p. 135.

edition of his *Economic Sophisms*, and to begin work on another small book, to be called *Economic Harmonies*.¹³

During this time, Bastiat continued to ask Cobden for help with his projects. On 29 September 1846, on the occasion of an invitation to speak in Havre about shipping, he asked Cobden for advice on public speaking in general, and specifically for counsel on what to say about free trade and the Navigation Act.¹⁴

On 25 November 1846, again while asking for advice about public speaking, Bastiat wrote,

...if, therefore, some new idea comes to you, one of these thoughts which, developed, might serve as the text of a good speech, do not hesitate to point it out to me. ...—You could write these thoughts as they are offered to your spirit, on small pieces of paper and enclose them in your letters.—I will charge myself with the glass of water in which these drops of essence are diluted.

Particularly, I am trying to deepen the question of wages, that is the influence of liberty and of protection on wages. I would not be embarrassed to treat this great question in a scientific manner; and if I had a book to do on it, I would reach a satisfactory demonstration.—But that which is lacking in me is one of these clear and satisfying reasons, appropriate to be presented to the workers themselves, and which, to be understood, does not need all the anterior notions of value, nominal value, capital, competition, etc.¹⁵

Shortly thereafter, Bastiat began to feel the pressure of the reaction to his agitation. In December 1846, he wrote that he was being accused of being a traitor and an agent of the English: “They write from Mugron that one doesn’t dare anymore to talk about me except among the family, so much has the public spirit risen up against our enterprise.”¹⁶ Bastiat’s solution, which he proposed to Cobden in January 1847, was for Cobden and others to speak out publicly against English foreign policy, particularly toward the American colonies in 1773, and against the French Revolution in 1791. Translations of these speeches, Bastiat hoped, would separate in the minds of the public the agitation for free trade from English foreign policy in general.¹⁷ This train of thought culminated, in October 1847, in a long series of demands that Bastiat made to Cobden for a radical change in English foreign policy, bringing it into harmony with the “logic” demanded of it by free trade: commercial freedom for English colonies, abolition of the Navigation Act, retrenchment of the British Navy to a purely defensive role, relief for the people, an end to threats against other peoples, and the

¹³ Ibid. p. 136.

¹⁴ Ibid. 29 September 1846, pp. 140-41.

¹⁵ Ibid. 25 November 1846, pp. 147-48.

¹⁶ Ibid. 20 December 1846, p. 148.

¹⁷ Ibid. 10 January 1847, p. 153.

freedom of the seas. Implement these changes, Bastiat pleaded, “and then, be sure of it, France will open its eyes.”¹⁸

Several things are clear from these letters. First is that throughout his creative period Bastiat saw himself as working within the shadow of Cobden, and turned to him and the Anti-Corn Law League repeatedly for money, strategic advice—which he tried to implement—and not only general ideas, but even a few pithy phrases which Cobden should put down on scraps of paper and send to France. Indeed, in the introduction to *Cobden and the League*, Bastiat describes himself as a mere translator of the Copernican revolution in the relations among peoples which he saw the English agitation as auguring.¹⁹ Second is that Bastiat was much more radical in his ideas than Cobden. What for Cobden were probably largely rhetorical flourishes, such as the references to the oppression of the English people by the aristocracy, seem to have been taken literally by Bastiat, who wrote in the introduction to *Cobden and the League*, that the objective of the League was, “a total revolution in the domestic and foreign policy of Great Britain.”²⁰ This was necessary to “destroy the most oppressive and most powerfully organized regime after slavery.”²¹ Finally, Bastiat’s emphasis on the idea of Providence in bringing about this revolution and even the prominence he attached to the notion of the harmony that would result from the abolition of tariffs all seem to indicate that he saw this issue in much more utopian terms than did his English counterpart, who, after all, held to the League’s promise to disband following repeal of the Corn Laws.

c. Cobden and the Anglo-French Treaty of Commerce of 1861

Cobden’s pragmatism was evident only a few years later, when he negotiated a commercial treaty with Louis-Napoleon. The coup of December 2, 1851, had taken him by surprise. On 3 January 1852 he wrote, “...What a spectacle France presents! How little did we understand the political character of its people! ... How do I pity Horace Say and the men who resemble him! Why don’t they make themselves Americans or Englishmen?”²² After some years of reflection, however, he returned to the pre-1848 conviction expressed to Bastiat that the only

¹⁸ Ibid. 15 October 1847, p. 163.

¹⁹ Frédéric Bastiat, *Cobden et la Ligue ou l’agitation anglaise pour la liberté du commerce*. Paris: Guillaumin, 1845, p. xxxix.

²⁰ Emphasis added.

²¹ Ibid. p. xli.

²² Richard Cobden, “Letter to Mme Schwabe,” 5 January 1852. *Notes sur ses Voyages, Correspondance et Souvenirs*: Collected by Mme Salis-Schwabe with a preface by M. G. de Molinari (Paris:Guillaumin, 1879), p. 205.

route to trade reform in France was from the top down. Centralization under Napoleon III only made that simpler. In 1859, at the beginning of his negotiations, he wrote to Lord Palmerston that in his preliminary meeting with M. Rouher, he had been told that, “everything depends on the Emperor, and on the Emperor alone...”²³ Napoleon III himself later clarified what this meant, noting that the Legislative Corps and the Senate both contained resolutely protectionist majorities, and that the only way open to reform was by a treaty, upon which he could act by imperial decree.²⁴ The landmark 1861 Anglo-French Commercial Treaty which resulted not only contained nothing of the idea of democratic revolution which had marked Bastiat’s agitation a decade earlier, but also was directly contrary to the League’s—and presumably Bastiat’s—arguments about the unilateral advantages of free trade and the “*fallacy of reciprocity*.”²⁵

From these sketches, it seems apparent that the idea of free trade as a liberal reform fell on deaf ears in France. Perhaps first among the many possible explanations for this, at least as proposed by the actors described above, was the fact that the French public was both unable and unwilling to think in the terms necessary to come to free trade conclusions. One possibility for this is certainly the insufficiencies of Bastiat as a messenger—in terms of his ability to communicate, of course, but perhaps even more so due to the utopian results that he promised would follow on the adoption of free trade policies. In this regard, the Italian reception of Cobden and the Anti-Corn Law League form a stark contrast. Unlike the French free traders, the Italians were neither unfamiliar with the ideas, nor marginalized politically. Moreover, the pragmatic approach they pursued helped assure better results. As a consequence, of the three cases presented, the Italian one provides the cheeriest example of the European fruits of Cobden’s efforts.

B. Italian Liberalism and Trade

a. Italy Trade Policy in the 19th Century

The most important consideration when thinking about Italian liberalism in the nineteenth century is the fact that, politically and economically speaking, there was no Italy. Lombardy and Veneto were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Romagna was governed theocratically from the Vatican, and Naples was in the hands of a Bourbon king appointed by the first

²³Ibid. Letter to Lord Palmerston, 29 October 1859, p. 330.

²⁴Ibid. Letter to Lord Palmerston, 29 October 1859, p. 333.

²⁵ For Bastiat’s use of this phrase, see Bastiat, *Correspondence*, 2 October 1845, p. 114.

Napoleon before his defeat. One of the few truly self-governing parts of the peninsula, Piedmont-Sardinia, had been annexed by France during the Empire, and was ruled by a king from the House of Savoy, a French family. Different states, not surprisingly, had different trade policies, and liberalism also had different standings in different places. This is, in some respects, frustrating, but at the same time it provides a fertile environment for comparative research, because many of the assumptions that apply to other places do not apply here. For instance, whereas in France and Germany most liberals focused on political issues to the neglect—or even detriment—of economic questions, something close to the opposite may be said about Italy. Indeed, in Kenneth Greenfield’s still important study of economics in Lombardy in the 19th century, Greenfield points out that liberal reformers responded to Austrian censorship of political discourse by pursuing their opposition to Viennese rule with economic arguments and proposals for reform, the full consequences of which the censors generally could not follow.²⁶ Likewise, late in his reign, King Charles Albert of Piedmont began to use trade and development policy as a way to generate and sustain anti-Austrian sentiment in neighboring Lombardy. In Italy, nineteenth century liberals refused to draw a distinction between economic and political liberalism. The keystone to this position, not surprisingly, is the view of reformist Italians toward trade.²⁷

Two facts stand out in considering nineteenth century Italian debates about free trade. First, unlike in Germany or France, free trade policies had a much longer continuous history in Italy, going back at least to the decision of Leopold of Tuscany in 1781 to abolish most laws restricting internal and external trade. As a result, Tuscany had the most liberal trade policy in the world for the next 70 years.²⁸ Second, by all accounts, the level of knowledge of economic principles—at least among elites—was higher in Italy than perhaps anywhere else on the Continent.²⁹ As a result, in places where it might have made a difference—Tuscany or Piedmont, for instance—free trade views already had a standing when the Anti-Corn Law League was waging its battles in England. Rather than help change minds, therefore, Cobden

²⁶ Kent Roberts Greenfield, *Economics and Liberalism in the Risorgimento* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1934), p. 301.

²⁷ Greenfield writes that, “by 1830 Italian publicists had come to accept the principle of free trade as axiomatic.” Ibid, p. 232.

²⁸ Abele Morena, “Gli accademici Georgofili e la libertà del commercio.” *Estratto dagli scritti di pubblica economia degli Accademici Georgofili concernenti I dazj protettori dell’agricoltura* (Arezzo: Bellotti, 1899), p. 36.

²⁹ On 20 March Bastiat wrote to Cobden, asking for Italian texts on political economy, remarking, with reference to Nicolo Donato, that, “if renown were not sometimes capricious, Turgot and Ad. Smith, while conserving the glory of great men, would lost that of inventor.” (Cobden, *Correspondence*, 20 March 1847, p. 156-157). Cobden responded by sending Bastiat the 50 volumes of Costodi’s *Economisti classici italiani*.

simply provided additional support for already dominant positions. This support was less relevant in the 1840s, however, than at the end of the century, when united Italy adopted protective tariffs of its own.

b. Cobden and Italy

Following repeal of the Corn Laws, Cobden spent fourteen months traveling on a combination vacation and missionary tour, designed at once to recover from the fatigue of the Anti-Corn Law campaign, and to spread the good news of free trade. After visiting Bastiat in France and traveling through Spain and then back along the Mediterranean coast of France, he spent six months in Italy. Along the way, he had an audience with Pope Pius IX, and to whom he appealed to stop the Church's support of bullfighting in Spain.³⁰ In Naples, he was elected a member of the Academy of Pontaniana, and he gave speeches at banquets throughout the country. Of note was his stop in Florence, where he spoke to the Academy of the Georgiofili on April 29, noting that, "without question, it is to Tuscany that remains the glory of having advanced by half a century the rest of the world in the application of the theories of economic science to legislation, and that it was there, for the first time, that the commercial code was inspired by the principles of this science."³¹ After also visiting Turin and meeting with liberals there, he was surprised that the Austrians would let him speak in Milan and Venice. He then went on to Vienna where, rather than being hosted at a banquet of liberals, he dined with Metternich instead.³²

Perhaps most telling among Cobden's impressions of Italy, however, are his comments on the South. In 1851, reflecting on the possibilities of progress in the free trade movement to Mme. Schwabe, he wrote,

...When I visited Italy, in 1846, before the troubles of the continent, I made the acquaintance, in Naples, of several liberals. After having lent an ear to their dreams of a constitutional and representative government, I tried to demonstrate to them the impossibility of such a government, with an ignorant population entirely governed by the priests. ... Upon arriving at Terracine, on the way to Rome, I remember having written to an officer of some genius, named Dagila, a young man of a serious but exalted character, begging him to abandon his radical projects for the love of his young wife and small children.

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...

³⁰ Cobden, p. 53.

³¹ Cobden, p. 70.

³² Mme Cobden to Mme Schwabe, 8 June 1847, in Cobden, pp. 78-79.

³³ Cobden to Mme Schwabe, 6 August 1851, p. 181.

Cobden maintained similar views in 1860. In a letter praising Garibaldi as “a great and honest man,” Cobden nevertheless, “feared strongly that the degraded situation of the Sicilian population would throw Garibaldi into great embarrassment and great difficulties. This is one of the most ignorant and debased peoples in Europe.”³⁴

At least through this one window, therefore, it seems as if Italy was something of a paradox. In its “enlightened” parts, it was ahead of Europe by several decades in implementing free trade reforms, and no further action was necessary; in its “backward” areas, by contrast, there was no hope for progress. The one stop about which, however, Cobden did not comment in his letters to Mme. Schwabe may have been the most important one for the question of free trade liberalization, namely, Piedmont.

c. Italian Reactions to the Anti-Corn-Law League

i. Francesco Ferrara

For most Italian economists in the middle of the century, the principle of free trade was more or less self-evident. Among the most prominent of them was Francesco Ferrara, who between 1850 and 1868 edited two series of *Library of Economists*, an extensive collection of translations of economic treatises into Italian, accompanied by long introductions by Ferrara. When Cobden was in Italy, the Sicilian Ferrara was a professor in Turin. Upon the repeal of the Corn Laws, Ferrara wrote a long article in praise of Robert Peel, in which he noted the effect that the repeal would have in public discussions of economics:

It will be in the face of the partisans of the exclusive or protectionist system who we have, until now, continually heard cite the experience of England and attribute its wealth to its tariffs. This, which was only a diversion from the ineluctable proof of fact, today is fallen. Sir Robert Peel has proposed, and the Parliament has sanctioned, a measure, according to which, of the 813 articles of which is composed the tariff of Great Britain, 430 will be henceforth freely admitted without customs. Thus, the country from which three centuries ago came the scandal of a deadly principle that has so much burdened the human species, today is the first to solemnly condemn it, and with the example of its own penitence, revealed its falseness.³⁵

³⁴ Cobden to Mme Schwabe, 5 July 1860, p. 346.

³⁵ Francesco Ferrara, “Robert Peel e la riforma delle dogane inglesi,” in *Opere Complete*, Federico Caffè and Francesco Sirugo, eds. Vol. VI, *Articoli su giornali e scritti politici parte prima (1844-1850)* (Rome: associazione Bancaria italiana e della banca d’Italia).pp. 99-100.

In a subsequent entry of the *Library of the Economists*, “Modern Tariffs,” Ferrara wrote, “Fallen is forever—we can only hope—the principle of protection.” He went on to treat the question of protective tariffs as a matter of historical interest only.³⁶

ii. Camillo di Cavour

The latter part of the nineteenth century is thought of as the period of the triumph of liberalism. Probably nowhere is this truer than in the principles of government of Camillo Benso di Cavour, the dominant minister of Piedmont from 1850 until his premature death at the dawn of unification.³⁷ Prior to taking up politics, Cavour devoted a long period to the study of economic theory. His career has been described, in part, as trying:

to anchor his economic ideas in the emerging needs of everyday life, and from there to render them popular. He turned them around, revitalized them, and added out of his lucid soul to the arguments in favor of free commerce, which blossomed in England from the era of Huskisson to the heroic laissez-faire of Cobden. And for Cobden and the Anti-Corn Law League he had a missionary passion. Due to a different political temperament, he was unable to develop them in grand meetings, but he developed them in Parliament, in journals, and in clubs.³⁸

In January and February 1845, Cavour published a long article in the *Bibliothèque universelle de Genève*, entitled “On the Question Relative to English Legislation on the Grain Trade,” in which he praised the way in which the English had put the sound science of economic principles into practice. He translated and rewrote this article and published it in the *Antologia italiana*, in March 1847, condensing the praise of the principles, and adding an extensive section on the specific advantages that the repeal would have, particularly for Piedmont’s silk industry. In the Italian version, he singled out the usefulness of the repeal for popularizing economic principles, and praised the English for implementing the economic doctrine “promulgated in Italy in the previous century.”³⁹

We can therefore assert that the example of England will prove not a little useful in rendering popular and accessible economic doctrine in all civilized countries and especially in our Italy, the first fount of the holy doctrines,

³⁶ Ibid. “Le Dogane Moderne” (p. 568).

³⁷ For two opposing biographies of Cavour see Denis Mack Smith, *Cavour* (New York: Knopf, 1985) and Harry Header, *Cavour* (New York: Longman, 1994).

³⁸ C. Benso di Cavour, *Discorsi Parlamentari*, Vol 1, 1848-1850. Adolfo Omodeo, ed. (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1932), p. lxiii.

³⁹ Camillo di Cavour, “Dell’influenze che la nuova politica commerciale inglese deve esercitare sul mondo economico e sull’Italia in particolare.” *Antologia italiana*, March 1847, p. 1.

whose favorable lot was limited, until now, to a few illustrious writings and the valiant professors of public economy.⁴⁰

In the earlier article, several things stand out. First, like Ferrara, Cavour characterizes the battle over free trade as a question of the triumph of science over passion.⁴¹ Of particular interest for the question of liberalism is his notice of the problem of democracy with regard to the question of free trade:

It would be as interesting as useful to establish the influence of theoretic truths on the real world, and the weight which reactionary attempts of the prejudiced can have against the principles of science. This work is beyond our powers; without wanting to undertake [this study], we can remark that things of this kind happen differently in countries where public opinion has a direct influence on the creation of laws. In the first, one often sees the principles of science adopted with the favor of an enlightened prince, or a distinguished man of state, such as has happened in Tuscany and in Prussia; then they triumph completely, for a time at least, over the spirit of routine and popular prejudice. In the others, on the contrary, one constantly perceives economic doctrine welcomed first with favor as a progressive innovation; but then it doesn't take long and a formidable coalition rises up against them, formed from erroneous opinions and ruffled interests, against which it is impossible to struggle with advantage.

In effect, the superiority of the liberal system in the matter of commerce is one of the truths that strikes at the first hit. To establish it, it is necessary to take into consideration not only its immediate effects, but the indirect consequences that result for it for the general economy of the nation, which supposes a certain intellectual development that is rare to find in the masses, or even in that which makes up the people who have received the first elements of instruction. By contrast, the partial advantages of a protective system are easy to grasp, they translate into obvious deeds, and can be carried to everyone. ...⁴²

As noted above, in May of 1847 Cobden spent over a week in Turin, with Cavour as his host for much of the time.⁴³ Cobden came away much impressed with the aspiring Piedmontese politician, and later referred to him as the “ablest man he had ever met.”⁴⁴ Cavour was also favorably impressed by Cobden, and afterwards corresponded with him several times. During the visit, Cavour wrote to Emile de la Rue, “Cobden has been here for

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 5.

⁴¹ M. de Cavour, “De la question relative à la législation anglaise sur le commerce des cereals,” *Bibliothèque de Genève*, January and February 1845, p. 8.

⁴² Ibid. pp. 9-10.

⁴³ Cavour seems not to have entered into this role with much enthusiasm. He wrote, “Petitti being sick, Cobden is in my charge. This leaves me little time to think about business.” (*Epistolario*, vol. 4 1844-1846, Carlo Pischchedda, ed. (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1962), p. 164.

⁴⁴ Frank J. Coppa, *Camillo di Cavour* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1973), p. 59.

five days; I've seen a lot of him and I'm extremely satisfied. He's a man of perfectly good sense and a clever spirit. He has, moreover, a charming character, simple, modest, and of good faith."⁴⁵ Cobden's visit was also perhaps not without results. He had an audience with King Charles Albert, after which Cavour reported that the king had "announced himself in favor of gradually reducing tariffs."⁴⁶

Following this minor triumph, Cavour continued to press the issue of free trade from within the government. In June of 1851 he was able to report in a letter to Cobden⁴⁷ that

the Sardinian government is ready to let triumph in Parliament the doctrines of free trade. We are in the process of bringing about a complete reform of our tariff... Your name has been often cited, and your authority often invoked in the discussions that have taken place, to the extent that one could say that you have powerfully contributed to our economic regeneration.⁴⁸

d. Cobden and the fight against protectionism at the end of the century

Nevertheless, by the 1880s, free trade was under attack, even in Italy, and in 1887 the parliament approved a protective tariff. Pantaleone called this the "deflowering of the Cavourian tradition of our Chamber,"⁴⁹ and de Viti de Marco referred to the decision as having "been the means of the liquidation of the Cavourian program, and the principles of the Italian revolution."⁵⁰

This is not the place to go into details about the fight against protectionism in Italy at the turn of the century, but it is worth noting that, whereas Cavour, thoroughly permeated by Cobden's influence, only invoked him a few times in his parliamentary speeches, economists at the time of the protective tariff invoked the memory of the League repeatedly in their attempts to return to free trade policy. De Viti de Marco argued that the campaign should focus on a single, but crucial objective, following the example of the Corn Laws,⁵¹ Pareto argued that economists had misunderstood the meaning of the repeal as a triumph of reason in human action,⁵² and that, "If Cobden's companions had had the prudence of de Viti, it is

⁴⁵ Cavour, *Epistolario*, v. 4, p. 165.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. 170.

⁴⁷ Admittedly the purpose of which was to enlist Cobden's help in introducing a young engineer sent to England to learn about solutions to the problem of workers' housing.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* vol. 8, p. 180.

⁴⁹ Antonio Cardini. *Stato liberale e protezionismo in Italia (1890-1900)*, (Bologna, il Mulino, 1981), p. 86.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p. 534.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* (words of Cardini), p. 240.

⁵² *Ibid.* pp. 243-244, quoting Pareto, *I sistemi socialisti*, pp. 224-5, 775.

certain that England would still have duty on grains.”⁵³ In Parliament, Gregorio Agnini argued that England owed its prosperity to free trade and Cobden’s movement,⁵⁴ and Papafava hoped perhaps for an Anti-Corn-Law League to create an “enthusiastic, abolitionist movement in the country,” so that Italy would “warm to the abolition of the duty as it has warmed to the defense of liberty.”⁵⁵

If the story of the overturning of the Italian free trade paradigm is one of the early tragedies of the collapse of the liberal paradigm in economics and politics in nineteenth century Europe, it is also part of the story of the transmission of free trade ideas. The change was enacted, in large part, in imitation of and to counteract the changes in the status of Germany in the 1860s and 1870s, particularly following unification. The intellectual leaders of this movement were Italians educated in the tradition of the German historical school of economics, itself a response to the rise of free trade ideas in Germany in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. The different role of free trade ideas in Germany, therefore, is important to the overall problem of European free trade.

C. German Liberalism and Trade

As in Italy, German liberals considered trade policy a weapon in their attempts to unify the German speaking peoples in central Europe. Unlike in Italy, however, the problem of unification was not how to subvert one or several foreign occupying powers so as to allow the various Italian states to unite, but rather how to convince a panoply of more or less independent German political entities to unite voluntarily. As a result, trade policy was used as a weapon, almost independent of its economic effects.

There are surely many reasons to explain this difference, but at least the following two are relevant to a comparative perspective. First, as Keith Tribe has demonstrated in his wonderfully documented book on the development of German political economy, from the mid-eighteenth century until at least the 1840s Germans thought of economics as an integral part of the emerging science of statecraft.⁵⁶ Thus, unlike in Italy, there was no tradition of thinking about economic questions outside of the context of state economic management. This leads to a second, and most damning, reason for the difference, which is that the general

⁵³ Ibid. p. 265, quoting Pareto, *Lettere a M. Pantaleoni*, v. 2, p. 161.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 258.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 317.

⁵⁶ Keith Tribe, *Governing Economy: The Reformation of German Economic Discourse, 1750-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

level of knowledge of economic principles was very low in Germany.⁵⁷ In this regard, Volker Hentschel comments that even the German Economic Congress spent most of its time engaged in debates over basic economic principles.⁵⁸

Finally, within Germany there was a strong contingent of liberals who were willing to argue, following Friedrich List, that free trade was actually antithetical to progressive (and liberal) notions of progress, not on mercantilist grounds, but rather on the belief that rapid industrial development required the protection of strategic and infant industries from foreign competition. The willingness of German liberals in general to subsume economic and political categories into the problem of nationalism meant that German free-trade liberals were constantly on the defensive against the charge that they were essentially unpatriotic.

a. German Strategic Trade Policy in the 19th Century

The key element in understanding German trade policy is the fact that Prussia was basically a proponent of free trade, whereas Austria was staunchly protectionist. Thus, the same logic by which Piedmont opposed the Austrian occupation of Veneto-Lombardy through free trade arguments also worked for Prussia in its battle with Austria for hegemony over southwestern Germany. According to the tariff law of 1818, at least, Prussia was internally a free trade area,⁵⁹ and the fact that it was largely agricultural and highly competitive on the world grain market meant that it had a vested interest in open markets for its produce. It extended the logic of a free trade area through the Zollverein, but in the process, and as a means of cementing internal unity, sacrificed the principle of external free trade in favor of unity.⁶⁰ During his time in office, Bismarck used this as a wedge. Following the signing of the Anglo-French Treaty of Commerce in 1860, it became known that Prussia was also engaged in negotiations with France for a commercial treaty. This treaty was signed in 1862, and

⁵⁷ Perhaps the most damning judgment on this issue came from the Germans themselves. In 1874 Francesco Ferrara wrote an article on "Economic Germanism in Italy," condemning the importation of the ideas of the German Historical School into Italy, which was a preliminary to the introduction of Italian protective tariffs. He recalled that in 1852 he had written to a professor Mittermaier, which had consulted with Rau and Mohl on the question of suitable German texts on economics which he should have translated into Italian for his *Biblioteca dell'economista*. According to Ferrara, they were all of the opinion that there was not a single book written in German since 1820 that merited inclusion in the *Biblioteca*. "Il Germanismo economico in Italia" *Opere Complete*, Federico Caffè, ed. vol. 10: *Saggi, Rassegne, memorie economiche e finanziarie* (Rome: associazione Bancaria italiana e della banca d'Italia, 1972), p. 556.

⁵⁸ Volker Hentschel, *Die deutschen Freihändler und der volkswirtschaftliche Kongreß 1858-1885* (Stuttgart, Ernst Klett Verlag, 1975), pp. 50-51.

⁵⁹ Julius Becker, *Das Deutsche Manchestertum: Eine Studie zur Geschichte des wirtschaftspolitischen Individualismus* (Karlsruhe: G. Braunschen Hofbuchdruckerei, 1907), p. 24.

⁶⁰ Julius Faucher, "A New Commercial Treaty between Great Britain and Germany," *Cobden Club Essays: Second Series* (London: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, 1872, pp. 265-344), p. 273.

provided for the equivalent of most-favored-nation status between the two countries.⁶¹ The net effect of this was to prevent the Zollverein in general, and the southern German states of Bayern, Württemberg, and Hessen in particular, from giving preferential treatment to Austria. In 1863 Bismarck nullified the existing Zollverein treaty, and promulgated a new treaty that explicitly excluded Austria. This was signed by the “renegade” states in October 1864, and prevented any members from engaging in preferential trade agreements with Austria. For the catholic and historically Austria-leaning southern German states, this forced them to choose between trade with Austria and trade with Prussia. Fifteen years later, however, the conjunctures had switched. With the unity of Germany, the problem was no longer how to bring together the German states, but rather competition with England. In 1879, Bismarck abruptly reversed the general course of German trade policy and instituted an across the board protective tariff.⁶² The rest of Europe quickly followed suite, and even England started down the road to protective tariffs in the form of colonial preferences. What is essential here, however, is the fact that, particularly in Germany, trade policy was driven less by economic analysis, than by geopolitics.

b. Reactions to Cobden in Germany

After leaving Vienna, Cobden went north to Dresden, and then on through Potsdam and Berlin to Stettin, from where he departed for Russia before returning to England. In his journal he recalled several conversations with people who had been involved in the creation of the Zollverein. In Berlin, Dr. Eichhorn, who had been in the department of trade during the Zollverein’s formation argued that the originators of the Zollverein had explicitly capped external tariffs at no more than ten percent. In a meeting with M. Kuhne, another originator of the Zollverein, Kuhne expressed his opposition to the tariffs on imported goods, but feared that they would go still higher. Professor Tellkamp, in another meeting, expressed the opinion that the objective of the Prussian Government was currently to force Holland to join the Zollverein.⁶³ This pessimism about the future of the Zollverein was in stark contrast to a later report of his trip by Julius Faucher:

Particularly his reception at Berlin and at Stettin—at which latter he arrived while the popular movement of Free Trade was in full swing, and where he was made the object of a great ovation—made him feel almost

⁶¹ Hentschel, p. 71.

⁶² Dunez, p. 183.

⁶³ John Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1906), pp. 446f.

certain that Germany, at least, would very soon be found in the wake of England.⁶⁴

Faucher was one of a handful of leaders of the free trade movement in Germany in the 1840s, and after the Revolution of 1848 spent a decade in exile in England acting, in part, as Cobden's secretary, including in the negotiations for the Anglo-French Treaty of Commerce.⁶⁵ Their hopes for a free trade revolution were dashed by the collapse of the German liberal movement in the wake of 1848. By tying the two together, they may have harmed the cause of both. Although these sentiments can be found in the activities of Faucher, more important for German free trade agitation was John Prince-Smith.

c. John Prince-Smith and the German Free Trade Movement

John Prince-Smith was a transplanted Englishman who settled in Prussia at age 22 and then proceeded to integrate himself more or less fully into German cultural and political life.⁶⁶ For scholars of German economic liberalism, he is universally conceived of as the prime mover of the German free trade movement, not only for his journalistic activities, but also as the instigator of German free trade agitation in the 1840s and one of the founders of the German Economic Congress, which he saw at least as much as a vehicle for organizing and coordinating free trade advocacy as a scholarly gathering, and finally as one of the leading figures of the Free Trade Party in the parliament of the North German Confederation, and later the parliament of united Germany. This is not the place for a full evaluation of Prince-Smith as an example of German "Manchester School" thought—this had been done elsewhere by both friends and critics of various sorts⁶⁷—but a closer analysis of two essays by Prince-Smith on the specific subject of Prussian trade policy will shed some light on the way in which the German arguments were shaped, and differed from those in either France or Italy.

i. Dialogue of a Cosmopolitan and a Nationalist

In 1843, Prince-Smith published an essay called "On Hostility to Trade," which takes the form of a dialog between a Cosmopolitan and a Nationalist, in which the Nationalist—seemingly Friedrich List—and a Cosmopolitan—presumably Smith

⁶⁴ Faucher, pp. 275-76.

⁶⁵ Hentschel, p. 68.

⁶⁶ For an biography of Prince-Smith with extensive excerpts from his writings, see Otto Wolff, "John Prince-Smith: Eine Lebensskizze, in John Prince-Smith, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Karl Braun-Wiesbaden, ed. vol. 3 (Berlin: F.A. Herbig, 1880).

⁶⁷ See *Ibid.* Raico, Hentzschel, Becher, et al.

himself—argue about the merits of the protective tariff policy of the Zollverein. The dialog is an occasion for the Cosmopolitan to argue, along purely Smithian lines, that free trade is nothing more than an extension of the division of labor to the international level, and that the same advantages that it brings at the local level will be reaped when extended to the arena of international trade. As far as this goes, there is nothing extraordinary or unorthodox in his arguments.

The differences from the positions examined elsewhere, however, begin to show up when one steps back and examines the dynamic that is introduced by having to defend himself against a nationalist, and where, therefore, the Cosmopolitan is forced to create arguments about why free trade will further the interests of the nation, as opposed to simply its members. The Cosmopolitan seems to be on shakier classical liberal grounds here, and in several places implies that it would be tolerable—or even desirable—for nations to use economic policy in the form of subsidies or compensation as a tool in nation-building. The problem for the Cosmopolitan, therefore, is not subsidies per se, but particularly tariffs, and Prince-Smith seems to concede the infant industry argument for protection—which is the key to List’s argument—while only disputing the means of tariffs as a way of providing them, “then the government could compare the cost of the initial sacrifice with the future value of the business and, when it finds the sacrifice in an acceptable relation to the goals, be helpful through subsidies or certain compensation.”⁶⁸

The second point on which Prince-Smith seems to concede a national point of view is in his accounting of their costs. Although he mostly argues from the point of view of the costs and benefits to consumers, he then tallies these results into costs to the nation, rather than looking at them from the point of view of the justice of redistribution among its members. Thus he argues, using the example of the protection of the sugar beet industry, about its effect on “national well-being” and the reduction in per capita consumption, compared to that of sugar cane producing countries:

A hundredweight of colonial sugar costs about 7 Thaler; the import duty is 5 Thaler; the importation must therefore be limited to that quantity that one can sell for a price of 12 Thaler. How much the enjoyment of sugar is limited by the protective tariff follows from the fact that one can calculate on 4 pounds

⁶⁸ Prince-Smith, “Ueber Handelfeindseligkeit,” in John Prince-Smith, *Gessammelte Schriften*, Karl Braun-Wiesbaden, ed. vol. 2 (Berlin: F.A. Herbig, 1879), p. 138.

of sugar yearly for a Prussian, compared to 100 pounds for a person from New South Wales.⁶⁹

These examples demonstrate the problem of arguments about free trade in Germany. Because the reform was understood to include national unity, advocates of free trade had to argue that reducing trade barriers would be good for Germany, not just for Germans. This slight difference opened up even German advocates of free trade to arguments about the competition among nations, and inevitably to a nationalist point of view, in which economics becomes subsidiary to political and social considerations. This subtle difference is apparent even within Smith's own writing.

ii. On English tariff reform

A second piece by Prince-Smith on trade policy is an 1846 essay "On the English Tariff Reform." In it he describes the nature and arguments that have led to the repeal of the Corn Laws, as well as their effects on prices and trade elsewhere in Europe. One interesting aspect of his analysis is the detailed and confident way in which Prince-Smith sees the repeal in England as having an automatic ripple effect. Within England, he argues, the freeing of trade will eliminate economic instability, with all the disastrous economic and social consequences that it brings with it:

Through the freeing of trade, England will namely be freed from business cycles, which brings waste to its prosperity and made its lot, despite its great means, less enviable. ... When England enjoys an even, sure path for enterprise, its lot will overtake that of other countries by comparison.⁷⁰

Prince-Smith pushes this conclusion, which already seems rather simplistic and utopian, in an interesting way. Once the growth and stability of England have established themselves, he argues, popular imagination elsewhere will demand that tariff reform be introduced, not out of an understanding of the reasons why tariff reform is good, but rather out of a desire to emulate England's successes:

Exactly as Germany has called for protective tariffs [which Prince-Smith calls "cost-raising tariffs"], spinning factories, fleets, and colonies, because England had them, it will call for free trade when England has that. The argument *post hoc, propter hoc* is usually the only one which popular

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 118f.

⁷⁰ Prince-Smith, "Ueber die englische Tarifreform," p. 225.

understanding is capable of. And only when the mood has shifted to free trade will anyone want to hear the grounds for it; and then they must be clear.⁷¹

Finally, for the balance of the article and taking up almost half the pages, Prince-Smith enters into a long explanation of the way in which the movement toward free trade policy will bring about not only an economic revolution, but seemingly at least equally importantly, a political and social revolution. Prince-Smith writes,

We also want to discuss the influence of British tariff reform in relation to political development, not only in England, but also in Europe.

The main moment of its tariff reform, the freeing of the grain imports, is itself the consequence of altogether the biggest step in political development that a people can make, namely—the switch from a class to a national principle of government.⁷²

The implication, which becomes clear in the following pages, is that there is an inevitable connection between economic and political reform in Prince-Smith's mind: Europe will be forced, by England, to adopt free trade; that adoption will bring with it an inevitable social and political revolution.

That these views seem reminiscent of those of Bastiat should be no surprise. Sometime in the intervening period, he had become familiar with Bastiat's work, and in 1846 had translated *Economic Harmonies* into German. Bastiat had even asked Cobden to look for Prince-Smith at the 1847 Free Trade Congress in Bruxelles, which Bastiat himself could not attend, and for Cobden to persuade Prince-Smith to come to Paris so that they could meet.

iii. 1848 and abandonment of activity

From the early 1840s, Prince-Smith began actively organizing free-trade associations and promoting free trade agitation in Germany. In 1848, Prince-Smith went as a delegate to the Frankfurt Assembly, where he unsuccessfully tried to introduce free trade issues into the agenda. Following the suppression of the revolution in Germany, his activity went into a quiescent period, and he wrote nothing more on the subject for more than five years. When he rejoined the ranks of active free trade advocates, it was no longer as an agitator, but as the head of the German Economic Congress, where he, however, gave few addresses. At the end of his life, as a member of the German Parliament, he even repudiated his earlier classical liberal utopianism.

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 226.

⁷² Ibid, p. 236.

D. Conclusion

What are we to make of these different approaches to free trade, and what is their relevance to the problem of liberalism? Several things stand out. First, it seems overwhelmingly clear that Bastiat drew largely, if not entirely, from the literature of the Anti-Corn Law League in putting together his ideas and in his failed attempt at starting free trade agitation in France. That influence seems, at least in part, to have passed through him to Germany, where it shaped the activity of German free trade activists as well, although there were certainly also direct channels. What does seem to have passed through Bastiat, however, is the sense of the Anti-Corn Law League as the key to a social and political revolution along utopian lines. The end of protectionism, according to Bastiat and later Prince-Smith, will bring not only “economic harmony,” but social and political harmony as well.

A cursory look at the literature of the Anti-Corn Law League would probably show that these notions themselves were also partially imported from England. Nevertheless, the fact of the dissolution of the League following repeal of the Corn Laws, together with Cobden’s much more realistic—one might even say pessimistic with regard to Garibaldi’s chances in Sicily—attitude to political reform in Italy, show that the program of repeal as actually practiced by Cobden was much more pragmatic and realistic. The fact that Bastiat lambastes the idea of reciprocity, and that this very principle later formed the key contribution of the Anglo-French Treaty of Commerce negotiated by Cobden, seems at least provisional proof that Cobden had no trouble isolating free trade and its benefits from other social and political reforms.

If Cobden was willing to tolerate—or even encourage—a compromise between political reform and radical economic policy, then even more could be said about Cavour. Indeed, as the above shows, even his more radical phase, in the late 1840s, he saw an internal tension between economic and political reform, and placed a higher priority, for whatever reasons, on economics. The problem of anti-trade coalitions forming in democracies more easily than under an enlightened monarch seems prescient, given the fact that it took united Italy only a few years to reverse much of the program of economic liberalization that Cavour had instigated.

When comparing all four countries, several things stand out. First, there seems to be a direct connection between the general level of economic knowledge in a country and its support for free trade. Although the long-term outcome in all four was the repudiation of free

trade, an important element of the difference in the openness toward free trade arguments in the 1840s was in the level of economic knowledge. This points to one of several different areas in which this topic could be further analyzed. Cavour suggests, and Cobden seems to agree, that there is a correlation in democratic polities between general levels of economic knowledge and free trade policies. Some attempt at measuring this would be useful. On the other hand, Cavour also seems to point to a public choice problem with free trade, in that the short-term interests of a few outweigh the long-term interests of the populous in general, when democratic parliaments are left with the decision-making about trade. Again, some attempt to compare the public choice effect with the knowledge effect might be productive.

Second, this paper has focused on one moment in the nineteenth century debate about free trade, namely, the 1840s. The second chapter of this story, the repeal of free trade policies toward the end of the nineteenth century, tied to the spread of the German Historical School and the reaction to it in the form of the early Austrian School of Economics, would provide a useful narrative counterpart to this story, and to the social scientific questions about the level of economic knowledge and the role of interest groups raised by it. The roots of the German Historical School, moreover, extend into the development of American trade policy in the 1820s and 1830s. Here, too, one might find useful material for understanding the ebb and flow of the free trade idea and the spread of liberal ideas.