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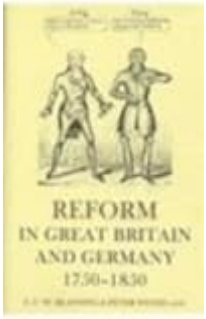

Tim Blanning, Peter Wende, eds. *Reform in Great Britain and Germany 1750-1850.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. viii + 179 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-726201-6.

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"It's got nothing to do with the state of history; it's the result of the Research Assessment Exercise," commented one professor in a recent radio discussion. And the "book of the symposium" –offering a quick method of upping the publication count – seems to have replaced the academic journal, or even the commissioned collection. "A right bugger to edit" in the opinion of one who knows, the latter has been characterized by variable standards, dilatory contributors, wildly divergent types of footnoting, and the fact that it inevitably has been reviewed with great asperity by those who were left out. But "the book of the symposium" has its problems and not just because the exclusion of a contribution may be hurtful to the academic who gave it, while something weak and vague by an accepted name gets in. Views really might be changed by discussions at the symposium. But where are these to figure in the text?

The present volume can't be faulted in terms of academic standards, although only two contributions, Eckhardt Hellmuth on reform movements and Brendon Simms on state structures are truly comparative works. Paul Langford's assessment of foreign observers' books on England brings out the effect of a certain civilizing process on the brutal John Bullism of the mid-eighteenth century –politeness, evangelicalism and anti-slavery had done their work. They still noted an obsession with rank, but conservatives like Friedrich Gentz made more of it than did radicals.

Simms essentially analyses the impact of war on the "confessional" constitutionalism of Britain and the "military-agrarian complex" of Prussia. Here the drive of both states was essentially military: to hold back France in the colonial theatre and get her armies off Prussian soil. The Prussians were the more explicit than the British: Simms has to go to a pamphlet by the Scots Earl of Selkirk (not, one imagines, a household name) to find anything resembling the arguments of Hardenberg or Stein.

Nor was there any British parallel to German obsession with the "machinery of government" analogous to vom Stein's "Nassau Memorandum" of 1807, after Germany's defeat at Jena and Auerspach. This had two prongs: creating an efficient structure of cabinet government, and the democratizing of local administration. The

caesura of a constitutional national assembly was specifically omitted: the goal of mobilization *a la Francais* was to be achieved through using Prussian state power to replicate Britain's celebrated checks and balances, not to speak of such institutions as Britain's militia and Volunteers – a self-funded force of 300,000 by 1800.

This was a radical idea – see the Scots militia debate of the 1760s – made into a conservative resource. But full recruitment of Irish Catholics, "a weapon of war as yet untried," was checked by parliamentary and particularly royal hostility, and the militia was ultimately revived. Prussian representation was closer to the medieval English parliament – a means of allowing royal power to by-pass established ranks; suspicion of a parliamentary system remained, though in Britain radicals like Bundett and Cartwright demanded the franchise on national efficiency grounds.

Another notable non-appearer is the thesis advanced by Prof. Linda Colley in Her *Britons* (1992), that the pressure of war and militant Protestantism "forged" British identity. In fact, Simms's contribution questions it: the motive for integrating Ireland was there, but the program was not undertaken. Equally discouraging was the response even to a Catholicism as flexible as that of O'Connell, shown in Theodore Hoppen's contribution by what looks like blind prejudice on the part of Richard Cobden.

A problem of the international symposium is that, almost inevitably, it will reflect the prevailing political structures of the nations concerned. Contemporary Germany is decentralized; in a Britain newly devolved centralization still leaves a long shadow. This means we hear practically nothing about developments in Scotland, the North of England and Wales, although these provided, pretty consistently, the motors of reform, from the Yorkshire Association and the *Edinburgh Review* to the demotic conservatism of Wordsworth and Scott, the Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League.

Hagen Schulze's "The Prussian Reformers" takes a more sceptical view, not only pointing out the vitriolic hatred between the Liberal Hardenberg and the Conservative Stein, but the absence of any democratic principle in their notion of liberty: not the ideas of Rousseau, but those of Adam Smith, whose doctrines were very popular at the universities of Prussia and Hanover, and who stood as godfather to the reforms. He sees this distrust of the popular will embedding itself in the bureaucratic tendencies of later German society. But it could be traced back to the absence of the "other" Adam Smith of the *Treatise on the Moral Sentiments* (1759), who demanded the cultivation of "sympathy" to establish a trust-based relationship. Germans made much of the law as an instrument in this regard, but Diethelm Klippel, addressing law reform, discounts claims that it embodied a popular element.

Eckhard Hellmuth's study of reform movements brings out the expected result that German reform was state-directed, and that the state tended to hold itself immune from the reforms it prescribed for others; the problem was establishing how effective such reforms were, and the consensus seems to be that accomplishment was pretty limited. Both countries had their "Leviathan," but only Britain's could subsequently be dismantled. In Britain, on the other hand, the state's continuous involvement in imperial wars led to the construction of an effective taxation system without parallel in Europe. This somewhat contradicts the image Hellmuth also wants to convey, of pressure for British reform coming from below. Moreover, the state system itself was of dubious utility in this direction: despite the success of a fair taxation policy, "old corruption" was back. But Britain had, Leslie Mitchell argues, in contrast to Europe its Whig oligarchy, an aristocracy which spread the sense that it acted as trustee for the people. No other country had actors of this sort, whose informality was able to bridge not only a social chasm, but also to remain in power between the zenith of the war-state and the minimal-government ideals of the Victorians.

Peter Wende's piece echoes the state-pathology account. The German constitutional movement in the "Vormaerz" was strengthened by the inflexibility of the state over institutional reform: its unwillingness to concede where this shaded into a constitutional settlement. The upheavals of 1848 only transferred this dilemma into the constitutionalists' arena, where it glued up the proceedings of the Frankfurt assembly. Wende is, I think, wrong to see the facing down of the Chartists and their petition on 14 April as the triumph of British counter-revolution. The 100,000 bourgeois special constables weren't too remote from the sort of people who furnished "National Guards" in continental capitals: protecting bourgeois society from the Jacquerie was one step towards constitutional revolution. This didn't happen in Britain, not just because the proletariat was beginning to enjoy the payoffs of industrialization – notably the employment provided by the expanding railway system – but also because the bourgeoisie could deploy a wide range of reform strategies as defences of the Whig constitution – from Free Trade through institutional reform to the "Reform" that Derek Beales aligns with the tireless Robert

Owen. These had the effect of diffusing the issue, and so defusing it.

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