

H-France Review Vol. 7 (February 2007), No. 18

Response to Charles J. Esdaile's review of **Frederick C. Schneid**, *Napoleon's Conquest of Europe: the War of the Third Coalition*. London and Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2005. Maps, figures, notes, bibliography and index. ISBN 0-275-98096-0.

Response by Frederick C. Schneid, High Point University.

Taking John Bull by the Horns

I would like to thank the editors of H-France for inviting me to respond to Charles Esdaile's review of my book, *Napoleon's Conquest of Europe: The War of the Third Coalition*. I also want to thank Charles Esdaile, a friend and colleague for his generosity and kind words in the review. Several of the issues he raises, however, relate to fundamental disagreements in our perspectives of Napoleonic diplomacy during the Consulate and related to this is the question of whether I am too wedded to the Napoleonic legend.

Professor Esdaile wrote that at times I was unable to "shake off the clutches of a Napoleonic legend," and cited my opening sentence to the book, "Napoleon was Mars...." The intention of this statement was to grab the reader's attention as a literary device, but what followed in the first paragraph and throughout the introductory chapter was a purposeful rejection of the Napoleonic legend as a basis for interpreting Napoleonic policy during the Consulate. My thesis argues that Napoleon was an opportunist who played upon the changing nature of European international relations, and the individual interests and objectives of European states to establish France as the premier power in Europe; that it was his successful diplomatic maneuvering that paved the road for military victory in 1805. This is based upon evidence, not a pre-conceived acceptance of the Napoleonic legend. My arguments have nothing to do with moral judgments about Napoleon or his intentions. His foreign policy between 1800 and 1805 was a success; he achieved his objectives.

Foremost among Professor Esdaile's criticisms was my failure to address the Peace of Amiens to his satisfaction, "This is in many ways the key event in the whole period and has ever since been the very touchstone of discussions of foreign policy of Napoleon." (Esdaile review). This is a perfectly reasonable view from London. Professor Esdaile interprets the Napoleonic Wars from this perspective in his extensive publications on the Peninsular War and in his book, *Amiens to Waterloo*, a history of Britain and the Napoleonic Wars forthcoming from Penguin. I concede in this response, and in fact throughout my book, that Amiens was critical to Britain, France and Spain, but I remain convinced that the rupture of Amiens did not have a similar impact in Vienna and St. Petersburg. It was Napoleon's violation of the Peace of Lunéville, and his subsequent influence in the Holy Roman Empire before and after the *Reischdeputations-hauptschlu* that led those two continental powers to explore their options vis-à-vis France.

The Peace of Amiens came at a time when Britain faced substantial domestic and international crises. Pitt's pursuit of British interests on the continent was one of the causes for the collapse of the Second Coalition. [1] Russia's withdrawal from the coalition followed by the formation of the second League of Armed Neutrality in 1800 led to Prussian occupation of Hanover and the very real potential of a united Baltic alliance designed to exclude British shipping. While Napoleon encouraged the league, the powers that formed it did so in reaction to what they perceived as aggressive British policy toward neutral

shipping.[2] Britain responded by attacking the Danish fleet at anchor in Copenhagen to mitigate the league. It thus reacted to an alliance it perceived as a vital threat to its strategic interests. The consequence of this unilateral action was to further alienate relations with Russia and Prussia.

The views from St. Petersburg, Vienna and Berlin differed significantly from that of London. After the assassination of Tsar Paul I, his son, Tsar Alexander I did not immediately take an adversarial view of Napoleon. Alexander's mother was the sister of the elector of Württemberg, and Russian influence in the Holy Roman Empire had been substantial following the Treaty of Teschen in 1779. Napoleon and Alexander found common ground in their desire to reduce Habsburg influence in the empire, while simultaneously aggrandizing the German princes, who they hoped would move into either a French or Russian orbit respectively. Prussia, for that matter, also considered the restructuring of the *Reich* paramount to challenging Habsburg imperial power, and this goal was consistent with Prussian interests since the days of Frederick the Great. The *dénouement* between Alexander and Napoleon came after 1803 when the Tsar saw himself as the guarantor of German sovereignty and interpreted—correctly—Napoleonic policy. The occupation of Hanover, the violation of the Hanseatic cities, the 1804 kidnapping of the Duc d'Enghien served as fundamental challenges to Russian safeguards. It was Russia that pursued Austria, and persisted in its endeavor until Vienna came around after a major realignment at court. It is abundantly clear from reports by Sir Arthur Paget, British ambassador at Vienna, and Sir J. B. Warren, ambassador at St. Petersburg, that they were purposely kept in the dark about Russo-Austrian negotiations.[3] It is Russia that should more properly be credited with the formation of the Third Coalition, and as the bulwark against ever increasing Napoleonic provocations. Ultimately a Russo-Austrian convention predated any formal agreements with Britain by either party.

The Austrians viewed the Peace of Lunéville as less than satisfactory, but they made the best of it. They abandoned their dynastic claims in Italy in exchange for territory in the Holy Roman Empire in order to shore up their declining position in Germany, and in doing so inadvertently eliminated what little credibility they still possessed among the princes. Austrian Vice-Chancellor Cobenzl, and his second Franz Colloredo, determined to alter the situation as soon as possible, and this meant the successful reconstruction of the Habsburg army by Kaiser Franz's brother, the Archduke Charles, as well as the development of improved relations with the new Tsar. Cobenzl and Colloredo quietly explored the potential for a Russo-Austrian *rapprochement* in 1803 when Napoleon's blatant violations of Lunéville and the sovereignty of the *Reich* convinced Alexander and his foreign minister Czartoryski to actively develop an anti-French coalition.

In Vienna, Cobenzl and Colloredo began a campaign to marginalize the Archduke Charles and his court faction, as they were vehemently opposed to a Russian alliance.[4] Alexander and his father were blamed in part for the territorial redistributions of the Holy Roman Empire through their cooperation with Napoleon prior to the *Reichdeputations-hauptschlu*. Furthermore, Alexander found fertile ground in May 1804, concluding a convention with Prussia to preserve the remnants of German neutrality in response to the French occupation of Hanover and the kidnapping of d'Enghien. This agreement was viewed by some in Vienna as a maneuver by the two powers to further alienate Austria from the empire. Even after Austria and Russia concluded an agreement in October 1804, Kaiser Franz remained suspicious of British and Russian interests in both Germany and Italy, particularly after open and direct discussions commenced between the two states on an alliance. Cobenzl and Colloredo preferred to use Russia as an intermediary, to establish a united front on demands for English subsidies, and secondly to keep Napoleon in the dark on Austrian intentions.[5]

When all was said and done, and Austria and Russia had come to terms, Pitt could still not get Alexander to fully accede to an alliance with Britain until August 1805. Austria and Russia had begun their own military planning in mid-July. Time was running short, as the continental powers were not facing an imminent invasion, whereas in the summer 1805 Napoleon still had opportunity to conduct a

channel crossing with the combined Franco-Spanish fleet. What this reveals is that while Britain was a force to be reckoned with, what happened in Britain did not dictate what happened in Vienna, Berlin or St. Petersburg.

NOTES

[1] Paul Schroeder, "The Collapse of the Second Coalition," *Journal of Modern History*, 59 (1987): 244-290. Schroeder's thesis is that the pursuit of individual objectives by the Second Coalition led ultimately to the collapse of the alliance.

[2] Ole Feldbæk, *Denmark and the Armed Neutrality 1800-1801: Small Power Policy in a World War* (Gad: Copenhagen, 1980). Russia, Prussia, Sweden and Denmark comprised the league.

[3] See Sir Arthur Paget, *The Paget Papers, 1794-1807*, 2 vols. (New York, 1896) and J. H. Rose, *Selected Dispatches from the British Foreign Office Archives Relating to the Formation of the Third Coalition against France, 1804-1805* (London, 1904).

[4] See specifically the succinct account of events in Manfred Rauchensteiner, *Kaiser Franz und Erzherzog Karl* (Munich, 1972), 58-74; for negotiations with Russia see, F. Martens, *Recueil des Traités et Conventions conclus par la Russie avec puissances étrangères* (St. Petersburg, 1875), II, 405.

[5] Colloredo to Cobenzl, 26 January 1805, and Cobenzl to Kaiser Franz, 22 March 1805 in Auguste Fourier, *Gentz und Cobenzl: Geschichte der österreichischen Diplomatie in den Jahren 1801-1805* (Vienna, 1880), 151 and 303-304.

Frederick C. Schneid High Point University fschneid@highpoint.edu

Copyright © 2007 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and its location on the H-France website. No republication or distribution by print media will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France.

H-France Review Vol. 7 (February 2007), No. 18

ISSN 1553-9172