

**Francis Démier, La nation, frontière du libéralisme. Libre-échangistes et protectionnistes français, 1786–1914, Paris (CNRS Éditions) 2022, 464 p., ISBN 978-2-271-13204-8, EUR 26,00.**

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**Jeff Horn, New York**

Francis Démier's latest work is the culmination of a long career. It traces debates regarding free trade and protectionism and their expression in tariff policies from the Anglo-French commercial treaty of 1786 to the outbreak of the first Great War. Démier places those intellectual exchanges and government measures in the context of French conceptions of the nation and of liberalism seeking to tie together different strands of economic thinking and government practice. By emphasizing that, in France, protective tariffs were not antagonistic to liberalism, Démier rejects English language understandings of liberal thinking based on partial readings of Adam Smith (p. 10).

»La Nation, frontière du libéralisme« is fundamentally a work of intellectual history. Démier's sources are overwhelmingly published though there are some archival references. Workers and the poor appear only as collective abstractions; none of his cast of characters has dirt under their fingernails. To flesh out his sources, Démier has thoroughly read the secondary literature in French and, far more selectively, works in English. Rather, this work of synthesis relies heavily on Démier's impressive oeuvre for its analysis, approach to the period, and evidence. For example, Démier repeatedly mines his 1979 *thèse de 3<sup>e</sup> cycle* on Adolphe Blanqui to provide detail into a question, problem, or debate (see, in particular, p. 111–115, 198–200, 204–208, 238–245). This work's clear narrative of the period functions as a summary of Démier's entire scholarly career.

There are four sections organized both chronologically and thematically. »La nation politique, socle de l'industrialisation 1786-1830« asserts that three schools of thought can be discerned in the great debate between »libre-échange aristocratique et protectionnisme révolutionnaire«: Colbertian mercantilism among government officials; Physiocratic liberalism associated with the landholding aristocracy; and the English model as described by Adam Smith. Démier shows the shifting alliances of various interest groups focusing both on key moments like the treaties with Great Britain/the United Kingdom in 1786, 1802, and 1814–1815 and the Continental System as well as more amorphous turning points in policy during the transition from the Consulate to the Empire and across the 1820s. In the introduction and conclusion, Démier makes the case that the history of France can be understood as the intersection of these ideas and these policies. I suspect that scholars engaged in the history of ideas will find his overall



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argument more convincing than those who study economic development.

Part two: »L'Orléanisme liberal face à la ›forteresse des tarifs«, 1830–1848« focuses on state-sponsored liberalism and the emergence of new pathways to development based on tariff policy. Démier devotes considerable attention to the attractions and limits of »the English model« of protectionism as well as the shift toward free trade after 1846. This discussion would have benefited greatly from greater attention to English-language sources such as the work of Robert C. Allen, William J. Ashworth, and the relevant chapters of »The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain«, among a genuine host of others<sup>1</sup>. The rupture of the revolutions of 1848 closed the Orléanist experiment in state management of protectionism.

The third section, »De Lamartine à Jules Ferry, la tentation libre-échangiste, 1848–1881« goes in multiple directions. Démier pays close attention to party politics in a way that assumes considerable, ongoing, ideological consistency. The role of liberal economics and economists in engaging the shifting stances on free trade expressed by the Second Republic, Second Empire, and early stages of the Third Republic is elucidated clearly. In both this and the final section, the linkages to broader economic developments particularly the Anglo-French commercial treaty of 1860, the Great Depression, and French imperialism with the chapters on the Second Empire standing out for how effectively they showed that French liberalism could easily accommodate a dictatorial regime.

Part four: »La ligne de douane, l'autre ›défense républicaine«, 1891-1914« seemingly skips the decade from 1881–1891, yet the first chapter considers »Le socle républicain menacé, 1881-1892«. No explanation for the missing decade is provided. This part centers on the Méline tariff of 1892 and ongoing debate surrounding the tariff of 1910. For this reader, part four was less convincing as an interpretation of French thought and its links to the socio-economic structure than earlier material. The socialist challenge is depicted intellectually rather than practically, emotionally, or at the level of practical politics below the National Assembly. Démier concludes that although pressure to globalize is especially fierce in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Adam Smith and Karl Marx recognized that free trade could be dangerous (the former) and was fundamentally destructive (the latter). As Francis Démier has revealed concretely: from 1786 to 1914, protectionism had a powerful role to play in shaping France's economy and society.

<sup>1</sup> Robert C. Allen, *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective*, Cambridge 2009; William J. Ashworth, *The Industrial Revolution: The State, Knowledge and Global Trade*, London 2017; Roderick Floud, Jane Humphries, Paul Johnson (ed.), *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain*, 2 vols., Cambridge 2014.



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