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Hamburg Free Traders and the Business of Empire, 1897–1941

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Abstract

Recent debates among historians and in public have concerned the links between German colonialism and imperialism before the First World War and the Nazi regime and its crimes. While a maximalist position on German colonial continuities is unsustainable, the possibility of important imperial legacies stretching into the Nazi period and the argument for a German colonial *Sonderweg*, or “special path,” are not logically coextensive. This article explores the transformation of Wilhelmine German liberal imperialism by focusing on commercial interests in Hamburg. It argues that empire’s strongest legacy was its absence, an absence that created ambivalent possible futures and blurred the line between liberal and illiberal avenues to German power and international order. This blurriness offers an end-run around problematical attempts to narrate Nazism as little more than an extreme expression of global patterns and around untenable notions of German exceptionalism.

Keywords: economic history; Kaiserreich; National Socialism; empire; Hamburg

Two decades of research have established global entanglements, imperial expansion, and colonial rule as a key problem field for historians of Imperial Germany (1871–1918). One outcome of this global turn has been to depathologize Germany’s pre-1914 imperial expansion and *Weltpolitik* (“world policy”).¹ In many ways—whether one discusses the formation of national identity, navalist politics, the practices of colonial rule, or the world-status aspirations of *Weltpolitik*, Imperial Germany was a thoroughgoing participant in the liberal imperialism of the fin-de-siècle.² Self-consciously modern, inspired by a racial “civilizing mission,” and bullish about the political opportunities of the new global economy—these were the hallmarks of liberal empire, and in these respects Germany was more similar to its fellows than different.³

¹ Erik Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire: Globalization and the German Quest for World Status, 1875–1919* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

² See, on national identity, Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany*, trans. S. O’Hagan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); on navalism, Patrick J. Kelly, *Tirpitz and the Imperial German Navy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 2011); on colonialism, Birthe Kundrus, *Moderne Imperialisten. Das Kaiserreich im Spiegel seiner Kolonien* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2003); the literature surveyed in Geoff Eley and Bradley Naranch, ed., *German Colonialism in a Global Age* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 1–18; and Steven Press, *Blood and Diamonds: Germany’s Imperial Ambitions in Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021); and on liberal imperialism, Matthew Fitzpatrick, *Liberal Imperialism in Germany: Expansionism and Nationalism, 1848–1884* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008); Jens-Uwe Guettel, *German Expansionism, Imperial Liberalism, and the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*.

³ Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*. For a provocative discussion of the similarities between Germany and the United States, not just Germany and the European empires, see Janne Lahti, ed., *German and United States*

Given the global circumstances in which fin-de-siècle empires operated and the high degree of integration among them, this similarity should come as little surprise. Important as global integration was, more attention should be given to the business of Germany's imperial expansion: how mercantile interests interpreted and recast what German empire meant and how it worked—and, indeed, how those interests sought to influence politics after imperial collapse. To what extent did overseas commercial interests run parallel to, perpendicularly against, and askew from political schemes to assert German power in the world?⁴ What does a focus on merchants reveal about German liberal imperialism before 1914, about liberal internationalism in Germany after 1918, and about the relationship between liberal empire and Nazism?

The reevaluation of Imperial Germany has yielded a renewed debate over the legacies of overseas imperial expansion and colonial rule. The major flashpoint in this debate has been the possibility of a German colonial *Sonderweg*, or “special path,” with key causal arrows running from overseas expansion, with its particular modes of violence and rule, to the Nazi regime.⁵ Given the similarity between Imperial Germany and the British, French, Dutch, US, and Japanese empires, a maximalist position on German colonial continuities is untenable. Yet the possibility of important imperial legacies stretching into the Nazi period and the argument for a German colonial *Sonderweg* are not logically coextensive. It is essential that historians understand how the strains of Wilhelmine liberal imperialism “mutated,” to use Erik Grimmer-Solem's term, through war, defeat, imperial collapse, and the Weimar Republic.⁶ Doing so sheds light on the relationship between liberalism and Nazism, makes it possible to look beyond the “vanishing points” of 1941 or 1945, and helps sharpen the often-blunt rhetorical comparisons between Nazi Germany and other world powers.⁷

Historians of Germany, after all, are not alone in their recent interest in imperial legacies. A growing field has emerged around interwar internationalism and the international consequences of imperial collapse and transformation after the First World War.⁸ The reconfiguration of global political economy—how globalization and international political order were rearticulated—was a key feature of the “new international order” of 1919.⁹ Weimar Germans

Colonialism in a Connected World (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), especially Sebastian Conrad, “Settler Colonialism and Financial Imperialism: The German and United States Empires in a Global Age.” Nor should Japan be left out of the conversation. See Hoi-eun Kim, *Doctors of Empire: Medical and Cultural Encounters between Imperial Germany and Meiji Japan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

⁴ On this problem during the Nazi period, and with more emphasis on domestic political economy, see Adam Tooze, “The Sense of a Vacuum,” *Historical Materialism* 22, no. 3–4 (2014): 351–70.

⁵ Jürgen Zimmerer, *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz? Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Kolonialismus und Holocaust* (Berlin: Lit, 2011). Compare Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, “The Pre-History of the Holocaust? The Sonderweg and Historikerstreit Debates and the Abject Colonial Past,” *Central European History* 41, no. 3 (2008): 477–503; Robert Gerwarth and Stephan Malinowski, “Hannah Arendt's Ghosts: Reflections on the Disputable Path from Windhoek to Auschwitz,” *Central European History* 42, no. 2 (June 2009): 279–300.

⁶ Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*, 9.

⁷ Helmut Walser Smith, “The Vanishing Point of German History: An Essay on Perspective,” *History and Memory* 17, no. 1–2 (2005): 269–95.

⁸ Susan Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations,” *American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (2007): 1091–17; Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920–1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013); Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); Peter Becker and Natasha Wheatley, ed., *Remaking Central Europe: The League of Nations and the former Habsburg Lands* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); and Natasha Wheatley, *The Life and Death of States: Central Europe and the Transformation of Modern Sovereignty* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, forthcoming 2023).

⁹ For example, Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War, America and the Remaking of the Global Order, 1916–1931* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014); Adam Tooze and Ted Fertik, “The World Economy and the Great War,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 40, no. 2 (April–June 2014): 214–38; Pedersen, *The Guardians*; Slobodian, *Globalists*; Nicholas Mulder, *The Economic Weapon: The Rise of Sanctions as a Tool of Modern War* (New Haven, CT: Yale

participated extensively in this new order, using it especially as a venue to litigate the concerns of former imperialists and colonial irredentists.¹⁰ Indeed, much like the Austro-Hungarian empire, the end of Wilhelmine Germany's overseas imperial gambits offers a powerful case study in the history of imperial legacies. Whereas the Habsburg Empire proved fertile ground for thinking about the organization of difference across territorial boundaries, Germany best evinced a problem that would become ubiquitous by the end of the twentieth century: globalization after empire.

The decoupling of political and economic sovereignty was among the most striking steps in the transition from a world of empires to a world of international institutions and normative statehood.¹¹ What exactly this decoupling entailed remains a topic of serious debate. It has engendered different and well-known theoretical models, from "formal" and "informal" empire to "dependency" and "third world sovereignty."¹² Germany has rarely figured in such discussions, yet extremes in these two areas—in terms of political control and economic power—are arguably Germany's foundational historiographical problem.¹³

Moreover, of the empires that collapsed in 1918, Germany had invested by far the most time, money, and political energy in building a saltwater empire. That investment had come through liberal imperial norms, and *Weltpolitik's* chief innovation was its focus on economic spheres of influence outside colonial territory.¹⁴ While the pursuit of economic spheres of influence and the coercive economic modernization found in Germany's colonies were twinned processes, at the moment Germany's overseas colonial empire imploded, the prospect of asserting such economic might did not.¹⁵

Understanding what happened at the moment of imperial collapse, and the possible futures created by that collapse, entails first revisiting the *Kaiserreich*. Business and economic histories of Wilhelmine imperial expansion have been latecomers to the new revisionism.¹⁶ Such work entails asking what German merchants, especially those who operated outside Germany's colonial borders, did and thought about the prospect of more robust German imperial expansion. How did they respond to the political setbacks and opportunities of 1919? How did they evaluate their own imperial legacies? Who were these "foot-soldiers of free trade and informal imperialism," and how did their strain of free trade imperialism mutate through the experience of war, imperial collapse, the Weimar Republic period, and the new international order into the early years of the Nazi era?¹⁷

Although business and state interests fit together, they did not do so naturally. Instead, they adopted political geometry: structural affinities and institutional or individual choices

University Press, 2022); Jamie Martin, *The Meddlers: Sovereignty, Empire, and the Birth of Global Economic Governance* (Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 2022).

¹⁰ Pedersen, *The Guardians*, part 3, "New Times, New Norms, 1927–1933"; and especially Sean Wempe, *Revenants of the German Empire: Colonial Germans, Imperialism, and the League of Nations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

¹¹ Two different but illustrative accounts of this decoupling are Pedersen, *The Guardians* and Slobodian, *Globalists*.

¹² John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *Economic History Review*, second series 6, no. 1 (1953): 1–15; Fernando H. Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dependencia y desarrollo en América Latina: Ensayo de interpretación sociológica* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1967); Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹³ Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 1; Harold James, *A German Identity, 1770–1990* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1989), 2.

¹⁴ Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*, 10.

¹⁵ That turn-of-the-century colonial modernization and the broader patterns of globalization should not be separated I take from Geoff Eley, "Empire by Land and Sea? Germany's Imperial Imaginary, 1840–1945," in *German Colonialism in a Global Age*, 19–45.

¹⁶ Three important recent contributions are Press, *Blood and Diamonds*; Heidi J. S. Tworek, *News from Germany: The Competition to Control World Communications, 1900–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019); and Kim Sebastian Todzi, "Der Woermann-Konzern und der deutsche Kolonialismus, 1837–1916" (PhD diss., Universität Hamburg, 2021).

¹⁷ I borrow the phrase from Niall Ferguson, *Paper and Iron: Hamburg Business and German Politics in the Era of Inflation, 1897–1927* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 37.

that produced congruity, overlap, and opposition at different points.¹⁸ These shapes were neither purely tactical nor the products of overdetermined continuity. Globalization was highly political, not only among states, colonizers, and colonized, but also within the constituencies that drove imperial expansion. What follows is a political history of one such constituency.

Already in the nineteenth century, the residents of Hamburg and its many visitors had begun to construct a global aura about the place. While historians have punctured the myth of Hamburg as an un-German enclave on the continent, the city on the Elbe was nonetheless Germany's largest entrepôt, the site of its *Kolonialinstitut*, and the home to a remarkable assemblage of free-trade imperialists, colonial aspirants, and budding internationalists.¹⁹ Hamburg's peculiarity reveals one side of German liberal imperialism—but a key side, at that. Polycentrism was a feature, not a bug, in Germany's relationship with the world, much as regional variation and national feeling coexisted in Germany after 1870.²⁰ More importantly, the fin-de-siècle globalization that underpinned *Weltpolitik* ran directly through Hamburg.²¹

The specific case discussed below focuses on one Hamburger and his extensive network of political and economic connections. Though largely lacking historical treatment, Franz Heinrich Witthoefft embodied some of the more distinctive entanglements among Wilhelmine imperial expansion, Weimar internationalism, and Nazi empire. Witthoefft's network, his elected positions, and his membership in prominent political organizations confirm his centrality to Hamburg's politics. Named *Präses* (President) of the *Handelskammer* Hamburg (Hamburg Chamber of Commerce) and elected to the National Assembly in the first set of postwar elections, Witthoefft held the mandate of his fellow Hamburg elite. As a member of the technical committee sent with the German delegation to Versailles, he represented Hamburg's interests at the international level and rubbed shoulders with the key architects of Germany's postwar settlement. As a founder of the interwar *Übersee-Klub*, key member of the *Ostasiatischer Verein*, and vice president of the *Hansa-Bund*, Witthoefft sat at the heart of Hamburg's political and social life. Witthoefft's political and economic trajectory across half a century reveals one story of the attractions and repulsions between German liberal imperialism and Nazism, set against the backdrop of domestic and international upheaval. This is the story of how Witthoefft, and many Hamburg free traders like him, responded to political change and sought to influence it. Though Witthoefft's story cannot address major questions about the legacies of colonial rule and the transformation of ideas

¹⁸ See again Tooze, "The Sense of a Vacuum."

¹⁹ On the "myth of Hamburg," see especially Richard J. Evans, *Death in Hamburg: Society and Politics in the Cholera Years, 1830–1910* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005 [1987]). Still important are Helmut Washausen, *Hamburg und die Kolonialpolitik des Deutschen Reiches* (Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag, 1968), and Ekkehard Böhm, *Überseehandel und Flottenbau. Hanseatische Kaufmannschaft und deutsche Seerüstung, 1879–1902* (Düsseldorf: Bertelsmann Universitätsverlag, 1972). The historiographical developments outlined previously, combined with increasing public attention toward Germany's colonial legacies, have fueled a renewed scholarly interest in Hamburg and its global connections. See, for example, Todzi, "Der Woermann-Konzern und der deutsche Kolonialismus, 1837–1916"; Kim Sebastian Todzi and Jürgen Zimmerer, ed., *Hamburg: Tor zur kolonialen Welt. Erinnerungsorte der (post-)kolonialen Globalisierung* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2021).

²⁰ On Germans abroad, H. Glenn Penny and Stefan Rinke, "Germans Abroad: Respatializing Historical Narrative," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 41, no. 2 (2015): 173–96; David Blackburn, "Germans Abroad and Auslandsdeutsche: Places, Networks, and Experiences from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 41, no. 2 (2015): 321–46. On regional variation, Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); and for Hamburg, Jennifer Jenkins, *Provincial Modernity: Local Culture and Liberal Politics in Fin-de-Siècle Hamburg* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

²¹ The academic elaboration of *Weltwirtschaft* (world economics, or globalization), so expertly historicized and traced into the corridors of Wilhelmine power by Erik Grimmer-Solem, necessitated the observation of German migration and of German businesses operating out in the world. Hamburg was the key node for both; Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*.

about racial hierarchy, it nonetheless traces how the free-trading element of German liberal imperialism could mutate into genuine support for Nazism.

Witthoefft was enthused about *Weltpolitik* and the prospect of a more robust German liberal imperialism that would coexist with Britain's. Yet, a decade later, he began to hedge his bets against the instability of the fin-de-siècle inter-imperial system. Although the outbreak of war confirmed Witthoefft's fears, it also injected Hamburg with newfound political energy and an intensified belief in global, often colonial, commerce as a vector of German power in the world. Witthoefft took up more prominent political positions, working on Hamburg's behalf to create a new liberal international order with new rules of the game. After several years, this work proved unsuccessful, but, rather than turning to autarky, Witthoefft retreated into a nationalist vision of globalization that he had first cultivated in 1907. Thus, Witthoefft remained wedded to an idea of global economic integration that slowly lost its liberal content. Empire's strongest legacy was its absence, an absence that had propelled Witthoefft and many of Hamburg's free traders toward a new international order, but also, eventually, led them to see the Nazi Party as their best political option.

An Empire of Merchants

Hamburg had thrived within the economic architecture of the British empire. Its merchants raised capital in London, traded in British colonies, benefited from Britain's gunboat diplomacy, hired English governesses, and gave their children English names. Hamburg was as much a node in Britain's vast empire of free trade as was any other port.²² By the late 1870s, however, Hamburg's colonial lobby had begun to petition Berlin for more coordination between the city's colonial ventures and Germany's as yet unrealized *Kolonialpolitik*.²³ An interest in colonial rule and the projection of power overseas had deep roots among the German middle and professional classes.²⁴ That interest reached its public apogee during the 1890s, as German imperial policy moved from merely acquiring colonial "protectorates" and toward the world-status aspirations of *Weltpolitik*. Across *Weltpolitik*'s seminal pronouncements—from Kaiser Wilhelm II's observation that Germany "has become a world empire" to State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Bernhard von Bülow's declaration that Germany would seek its "place in the sun"—the activity of German merchants appeared as key justification for newly robust imperial designs.²⁵

Because the suite of imperial repertoires that made up *Weltpolitik* conformed to inter-imperial norms and drew on liberal nationalist currents, Hamburg's merchants and shippers greeted it optimistically. Like liberal empire in general, *Weltpolitik* was both polycentric and uneven; Hamburg's free traders did not ape Berlin, nor did their vision of empire align perfectly with that of *Weltpolitik*'s other major stakeholders.²⁶

Nonetheless, Franz Heinrich Witthoefft, like many in Hamburg, adopted the language and goals of *Weltpolitik* and fit them to his own agenda. He and his partners enthused at the prospect of more robust political support, readily offered their own help to such schemes, did not envision conflict with Britain, and had little interest in contravening inter-imperial norms. As *Weltpolitik* yielded few tangible returns, however, Witthoefft began to worry that other empires were not committed to playing fair. In response to the instability of inter-imperial competition, around 1907 Witthoefft began to wonder whether there were not better ways to protect his—and Germany's—overseas commercial designs.

²² Ferguson, *Paper and Iron*, 31–48; Evans, *Death in Hamburg*, 1–27.

²³ Washausen, *Hamburg und die Kolonialpolitik des Deutschen Reiches*.

²⁴ Fitzpatrick, *Liberal Imperialism in Germany*.

²⁵ Wilhelm II quoted in John C. G. Röhl, *Wilhelm II: The Kaiser's Personal Monarchy, 1888–1900*, trans. Sheila de Bellaigue (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 924; Bülow quoted in Rüdiger vom Bruch and Björn Hofmeister, ed., *Deutsche Geschichte in Quellen und Darstellung*, vol. 8, *Kaiserreich und Erster Weltkrieg, 1871–1918* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 2013), 268–70.

²⁶ See here Penny and Rinke, "Germans Abroad," and Blackburn, "Germans Abroad and Auslandsdeutsche."

Witthoefft hailed from the marshy lowlands of Kirchwerder, a short trip upriver along the Elbe from Hamburg.²⁷ Though he did not come from merchant stock, Witthoefft attended a commercial school and joined Behn, Meyer as an apprentice in 1881.²⁸ By 1896, he had become a partner at Behn, the largest German merchant house in the British and Dutch colonies of Southeast Asia, and at Arnold Otto Meyer, its Hamburg-based legal representative. Witthoefft's interest in *Weltpolitik* began shortly thereafter.

On December 28, 1897, Arnold Otto Meyer of Hamburg, previously of Singapore, sent Admiral Alfred Tirpitz a letter. Meyer was senior partner in both Behn, Meyer and its German counterpart, the eponymous firm Arnold Otto Meyer. Tirpitz, meanwhile, was on the cusp of his first great political victory; Imperial Germany's first Navy Bill was wending its way through the *Reichstag* and would be passed the following spring.²⁹ Thus, Meyer's tone was supportive. "My friend and business partner (*Geschäftstheilhaber*), Herr F. H. Witthoefft," he wrote, "has for a long time worked with the idea of bringing all the Germans in Singapore and Penang closer together in a patriotic fashion, and indeed in such a way that the national feeling of the English, under whose protection we live over there, will be spared. The movement in favor of expanding the fleet has evidently given fresh impetus to German efforts in Singapore."³⁰

Meanwhile, in Singapore, Adolf Laspe, another of Behn's partners, had announced the new "German Association" (*Deutsche Vereinigung*). As explained in a circular, the association's "purpose [was] to foster German economic and national relationships with the homeland." It continued: "One of the first tasks to which the Association has set itself is lobbying in Germany for the establishment of a branch of a strong German bank. Other tasks include being able to represent a general opinion of the local Germans [in Singapore] on national questions like naval armament and subsidies for post steamer lines."³¹

Meyer's correspondence with Tirpitz continued, and in July 1898 he and his son, Eduard Lorenz Meyer, planted in Tirpitz's head a plan to establish a German coaling station and trading outpost at Langkawi on the Malay Peninsula.³² Such plans to purchase sovereignty via merchant intermediaries were typical of both Germany and the other European empires at the time. They were one of the common vectors by which official imperial interests and their mercantile fellows connected.³³ Apparently, Witthoefft was instrumental in drafting

²⁷ Witthoefft has not received in-depth historical treatment. His role in the settlement between Hamburg's Majority Social Democratic Party and its liberals is covered in Ferguson, *Paper and Iron*, 152–97. He is one of the central figures in Emil Helfferich's history of Behn, Meyer & Co. and Arnold Otto Meyer in Emil Helfferich, *Zur Geschichte der Firmen Behn, Meyer & Co., gegründet in Singapore am 1. November 1840 und Arnold Otto Meyer, gegründet in Hamburg am 1. June 1857* (Hamburg: Christians, 1957–67). Helfferich was a contemporary and business partner of Witthoefft, as well as the younger brother of economist and nationalist politician Karl Helfferich. After the Second World War, Emil Helfferich became a prolific apologist author. His history of the firm is valuable, though it must be read carefully.

²⁸ Helfferich, *Zur Geschichte der Firmen Behn, Meyer & Co., gegründet in Singapore am 1. November 1840 und Arnold Otto Meyer, gegründet in Hamburg am 1. June 1857*, 78.

²⁹ Kelly, *Tirpitz and the Imperial German Navy*, 140–55.

³⁰ Arnold Otto Meyer to Tirpitz, December 28, 1897, quoted in Helfferich, *Zur Geschichte der Firmen Behn, Meyer & Co., gegründet in Singapore am 1. November 1840 und Arnold Otto Meyer, gegründet in Hamburg am 1. June 1857*, 144. Meyer knew Tirpitz and may have traveled with the admiral during his well-known journey through the United States. See Staatsarchiv der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg (StAHH), 621-1/79, 1 Band 2, unsigned to Alfred Tirpitz, May 1, 1899. The letter is in the *Kopierbuch* of Arnold Otto Meyer's Hamburg offices, and therefore was sent by Meyer himself or by Witthoefft.

³¹ Helfferich, *Zur Geschichte der Firmen Behn, Meyer & Co., gegründet in Singapore am 1. November 1840 und Arnold Otto Meyer, gegründet in Hamburg am 1. June 1857*, 146.

³² Matthew P. Fitzpatrick, *The Kaiser in the Colonies: Monarchy in the Age of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 43.

³³ Steven Press, "Buying Sovereignty: German 'Weltpolitik' and Private Enterprise, 1884–1914," *Central European History* 55, no. 1 (2022): 15–33. On the international legal implications of coaling stations and their afterlives, see

the plan.³⁴ Whatever foray Witthoefft had made into the world of private empire-building, however, it was brief and Germany's designs unsuccessful.³⁵ Yet some of Witthoefft's new efforts proved more durable. The German Association's agenda established desiderata that Witthoefft would hold throughout the Wilhelmine period and, indeed, until his death in 1941: increased German investment and closer ties to Germany through shipping lines.

As with the attempt to purchase a Southeast Asian coaling station for Berlin, this agenda reflected a general mercantile interpretation of what *Weltpolitik* meant and what it might yield. Merchant shipping, in particular, came to embody a sort of commercial "naval theater" much like that associated with the actual navy.³⁶ There can be little doubt that Witthoefft came to take a more active interest in Germany's place in the world. He soon joined those political associations most associated with merchant interests: the *Ostasiatischer Verein Hamburg-Bremen*, the *Bund des Auslandsdeutschen*, the *Kolonialgesellschaft*, and the *Hansa-Bund*, even being elected vice president of the latter's North German chapter.³⁷

For Witthoefft and for other Hamburg free traders, the prospect of a more robust German imperialism did not imply open conflict with Britain. Witthoefft and his partners, at the time, saw little contradiction between their liberal-nationalist agenda and their deep cooperation with—indeed, reliance on—the economic architecture of Britain's vast "virtual" empire.³⁸ This worldview explains, for example, why Meyer would write to Tirpitz that it was important to spare the "national feeling" of their British counterparts in Singapore. That interest held for Witthoefft and Laspe, as well. Indeed, into the 1920s Witthoefft waxed lyrical about the time he had spent in Singapore. Writing to his sons Heinz and Peter-Ernst as they visited Singapore in 1923, Witthoefft advised them to visit his old house and the former German Club. "Who knows," he wondered, "perhaps within ten years everything will be back in such a way that Singapore will be our headquarters and we can live there again exactly as before."³⁹

The successes in Singapore and Britain's other Southeast Asian territories were many. By 1867, German firms had established themselves as second only to the British, though they continued to rely on British shipping and British credit.⁴⁰ The 1880s saw an increased number of merchant steamers flying under the German flag, but the relationship with Britain remained "harmonious."⁴¹ In fact, Behn's German partners were proud not only to have established themselves as competitors with the better-funded British firms, but also to have gained recognition in the British colonial press. The firm's fifty-year anniversary, for

also Steven Press, "Sovereignty at Guantánamo: New Evidence and a Comparative Historical Interpretation," *Journal of Modern History* (September 2013): 592–631.

³⁴ Helfferich, *Zur Geschichte der Firmen Behn, Meyer & Co., gegründet in Singapore am 1. November 1840 und Arnold Otto Meyer, gegründet in Hamburg am 1. June 1857*, 134.

³⁵ On the German coaling station at Langkawi, see Fitzpatrick, *The Kaiser in the Colonies*, 43–45.

³⁶ Mark Russell, "Picturing the *Imperator*: Passenger Shipping as Art and National Symbol in the German Empire," *Central European History* 44, no. 2 (2011): 227–56; Mark Russell, "Steamship Nationalism: Transatlantic Passenger Liners as Symbols of the German Empire," *International Journal of Maritime History* 28, no. 2 (2016): 313–334; and Mark Russell, *Steamship Nationalism: Ocean Liners and National Identity in Imperial Germany and the Atlantic World* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020). On battleship "naval theater," see Jan Rüger, *The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

³⁷ StAHH 621-1/79, 1 Band 5, Witthoefft to Deutscher Kolonialkongress, September 12, 1905; 1 Band 13, Bund der Auslandsdeutschen, Landesverband Nordwestdeutschland to Witthoefft, November 10, 1921; 1 Band 11, Witthoefft to Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft, January 26, 1920; 1 Band 6, Witthoefft to Jakob Riesser, June 13, 1912.

³⁸ John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830–1970* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 10.

³⁹ StAHH 621-1/79, 1 Band 16, Witthoefft to Heinz and Peter-Ernst Witthoefft, December 28, 1923.

⁴⁰ Helfferich, *Zur Geschichte der Firmen Behn, Meyer & Co., gegründet in Singapore am 1. November 1840 und Arnold Otto Meyer, gegründet in Hamburg am 1. June 1857*, 46.

⁴¹ Helfferich, *Zur Geschichte der Firmen Behn, Meyer & Co., gegründet in Singapore am 1. November 1840 und Arnold Otto Meyer, gegründet in Hamburg am 1. June 1857*, 56.

example, was widely covered, with the British papers seeing Behn's success as proof that their empire of free trade was working.⁴²

Harmonious though it may have been, the decade around 1900 yielded new projects for imperial expansion and diplomatic prestige not only in Germany, but around the world.⁴³ Increasingly robust imperial projects in Europe, the United States, and Japan resulted from the same set of global conditions: the closing of continental and overseas frontiers, popular stadial ideas about ethnic and racial difference, new integrative technology, and the emergence of mass political organization. Turn-of-the-century social, political, and economic transformations created overlap and cooperation, as in Singapore, but they also produced violence, instability, and uncertainty.⁴⁴

That uncertainty came to a head in Germany around the year 1907, and Witthoefft, like German imperialists of all stripes, began to worry that the machinations of other imperial powers were to blame. *Weltpolitik's* power-political goals as construed in the mid-1890s appeared a failure, with the Anglo-French Entente and the Anglo-Russian Convention limiting Germany's diplomatic room to maneuver.⁴⁵ Overseas investment took on a more significant role as a vector of German imperial power, and interest in colonial rule was reinvigorated.⁴⁶ Colonial acquisition began to regain its political luster, and the ultra-nationalist elements of Germany's imperial ambitions grew more prominent, resulting in particularly contentious *Reichstag* elections.⁴⁷

Witthoefft channeled this new uncertainty during a 1907 visit to Behn's branch offices in Singapore and the Dutch East Indies. In the time since he had left Singapore for Hamburg, large-scale plantation agriculture had replaced import-export as Behn's most profitable venture, but this economic change combined with soul searching about the direction of *Weltpolitik* and increasing inter-imperial instability's potential to exacerbate the challenges Witthoefft and Behn had faced for several decades. Specifically, compared to its British and Dutch competitors, Behn's greatest weakness was its relatively small capital basis.⁴⁸ German merchant houses could rely less on domestic banks and stock exchanges than could their counterpart British and Dutch firms. The obvious next step was to interest Germany's major banks in the Southeast Asian business.⁴⁹

Witthoefft combined his observations in a treatise on German "Economic Policy in Southeast Asia." "German commerce," he argued, "has never had the same support from national capital as the British and Dutch."⁵⁰ Given the scale of investment required, he

⁴² Helfferich, *Zur Geschichte der Firmen Behn, Meyer & Co., gegründet in Singapore am 1. November 1840 und Arnold Otto Meyer, gegründet in Hamburg am 1. June 1857*, 56–66.

⁴³ For example, Darwin, *The Empire Project*, 255–301; Sven Beckert, "American Danger: United States Empire, Eurafica, and the Territorialization of Industrial Capitalism," *American Historical Review* 122, no. 4 (2017): 1137–70. A worthwhile comparison can be made with the inter-imperial system from more than a century earlier. See Jeremy Adelman, "An Age of Imperial Revolutions," *American Historical Review* 113, no. 2 (2008): 319–40.

⁴⁴ On this dialectic, Jeremy Adelman, "Mimesis and Rivalry: European Empires and Global Regimes," *Journal of Global History* 10, no. 1 (March 2015): 77–98.

⁴⁵ Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*, 310–29, 446–64; Andreas Rose, *Zwischen Empire und Kontinent. Britische Außenpolitik vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2011) 362–69; Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London: Allen Lane Penguin, 2012), 137–40, 158–59, 429–48.

⁴⁶ Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*, 10, 290–339; Press, *Blood and Diamonds*, 33, 68, 178–79.

⁴⁷ Erik Grimmer-Solem, "The Professors' Africa: Economists, the Elections of 1907, and the Legitimation of German Imperialism," *German History* 25, no. 3 (2007): 313–47.

⁴⁸ Helfferich, *Zur Geschichte der Firmen Behn, Meyer & Co., gegründet in Singapore am 1. November 1840 und Arnold Otto Meyer, gegründet in Hamburg am 1. June 1857*, 94. Max Warburg had already diagnosed this problem, which he further elaborated during the war. Max Moritz Warburg, "Finanzielle Kriegsvorbereitung und Börsengesetz," in *Verhandlungen des III. Allgemeinen Deutschen Bankiertages zu Hamburg am, 5. und 6. September 1907* (Berlin: 1907), 26–37, and StAHH 621-1/95, 1473, Max M. Warburg, *Finanzielle Kriegslehren*, August 1, 1915. See also Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*, 334.

⁴⁹ Helfferich, *Zur Geschichte der Firmen Behn, Meyer & Co., gegründet in Singapore am 1. November 1840 und Arnold Otto Meyer, gegründet in Hamburg am 1. June 1857*, 117.

⁵⁰ Helfferich, *Zur Geschichte der Firmen Behn, Meyer & Co., gegründet in Singapore am 1. November 1840 und Arnold Otto Meyer, gegründet in Hamburg am 1. June 1857*, 118–19.

maintained that this situation could not stand. Quickly, however, Witthoefft's diagnosis of the situation became more sinister. He alleged that German commerce and shipping were "controlled by powerful groups of British and Dutch financiers" that were "undermining [the German] position and obstructing its future." He claimed that German business in the Dutch East Indies had thrived against the odds and intimated that the situation would not continue. Observations became a proposal: the "Prospectus on Founding a German Investment Trust on the Anglo-Dutch Model."⁵¹

That trust was the Straits & Sunda Syndicate, founded on July 10, 1910, and capitalized at 100,00 Marks. Emil Helfferich headed the consortium, whose aim was to have more than 10 million Marks available for the "acquisition and operation of investments in Southeast Asia."⁵² The Deutsche Bank, the Hamburg Commerz- und Disconto Bank, Arnold Otto Meyer, and M. M. Warburg & Co. helped provide the capital. For several years, the Straits and Sunda project continued. In the summer of 1913, Witthoefft was still making overtures to Warburg's and the Commerz & Disconto Bank. His aim was "to achieve more influence and control for German interests in eastern banking" and "to bring a whole range of large plantations under German financial control."⁵³ Witthoefft and Helfferich argued that financial support would benefit not only their firms and others like it, but also German banking and indeed the German economy in general.⁵⁴

When war came, it was not immediately obvious what would happen to Behn and its operations in British and Dutch colonies.⁵⁵ With the passage of the Alien Enemies (Winding Up) Ordinance (1914), however, German firms in British territory were confiscated and liquidated. The Dutch remained formally neutral, so Helfferich was able to continue his activity in Penang and Java, and the German population there swelled with former occupants of Singapore and the Straits Settlements.⁵⁶ The war, then, seemed to confirm the vulnerabilities Witthoefft had identified seven years earlier. It also seemed to confirm one of *Weltpolitik's* most seductive notions: that inter-imperial competition was a game in which Britain set the rules, but did not feel itself obliged to play by them. Some of *Weltpolitik's* enthusiasts therefore retreated into visions of autarky and continental models of power.⁵⁷ But not Witthoefft, who soon reached prominence as a representative of Hamburg's interests. He and the city's other free traders saw in *Weltpolitik* a vision of German imperial power that fitted their commercial activity and liberal imperialism generally. While the war laid *Weltpolitik's* flaws bare, it also provided Hamburg with a novel opportunity to correct them.

International Order and German Globalization

Witthoefft embraced this opportunity and had little interest in returning to the period before the war. There was reason to worry: the economics of World War I affected Hamburg more severely than any other German city. Shipyards had benefited from military contracts during the war, but, afterward, major shipping lines and the smaller merchant houses struggled with capital losses and confiscation of property held abroad. Dearth and

⁵¹ Helfferich, *Zur Geschichte der Firmen Behn, Meyer & Co., gegründet in Singapore am 1. November 1840 und Arnold Otto Meyer, gegründet in Hamburg am 1. June 1857*, 118–19.

⁵² Helfferich, *Zur Geschichte der Firmen Behn, Meyer & Co., gegründet in Singapore am 1. November 1840 und Arnold Otto Meyer, gegründet in Hamburg am 1. June 1857*, 120. An extension of the contract between the syndicate and Helfferich can be found at StAHH 621-1/79, 6, "Arbeitsvertrag mit E. Helfferich, 14.12.1911."

⁵³ StAHH 621-1/79, 1 Band 6, Witthoefft to Lincke (Commerz und Disconto Bank), August 29, 1913.

⁵⁴ StAHH 621-1/79, 1 Band 6, Witthoefft to Warburg, August 29, 1913.

⁵⁵ StAHH 621-1/79, 1 Band 6, Witthoefft to J. Lütjens, September 29, 1914; Witthoefft to Ostermayer, January 9, 1915.

⁵⁶ Helfferich, *Zur Geschichte der Firmen Behn, Meyer & Co., gegründet in Singapore am 1. November 1840 und Arnold Otto Meyer, gegründet in Hamburg am 1. June 1857*, 143, 149.

⁵⁷ Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*, 544–58.

hunger remained even after a deal between the city's progressive liberals—including Witthoefft—and the Majority Social Democratic Party effectively ended attempts at workers' revolution in Hamburg.⁵⁸

Witthoefft captured the seriousness of Hamburg's material situation in a 1920 article published in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, which he wrote at Max Warburg's request.⁵⁹ Witthoefft paired a clear-eyed assessment of Germany's dangerous material position with an optimism that, were the country's economic activity left to prosper, all would be well. The war not only had catalyzed a reorganization of global economic relations, but also had spurred hopes of a new international order to accompany globalization. Unlike Germany's "blockade-phobes" and protectionists, Witthoefft and his fellow free traders concluded that the economic weapons of the war had proven so potent that any subsequent liberal international order would write them out of existence.⁶⁰ Indeed, Hamburg's merchants believed that the coming order would conform to their vision of the world and that its ascendancy would benefit both their home city and Germany's nascent republic.⁶¹ When such hopes foundered, Witthoefft still clung to the prospect of global economic integration as a lever for German political power—with one important caveat.

Soon after the armistice of November 1918, the Kaiser's abdication, and the declaration of the Republic, Witthoefft agreed to represent Germany's new right-liberal party, the *Deutsche Volkspartei* (DVP), in the coming National Assembly elections.⁶² Witthoefft had taken some time to decide whether he would represent the DVP or the left-liberal *Deutsche Demokratische Partei* (DDP). He sympathized with both parties and had decided to stand for election before choosing.⁶³ These mixed sympathies meant that Witthoefft opposed cooperating with the further-right nationalist parties, specifically the *Deutsch-Nationale Volkspartei* (DNVP). As he wrote Rose at the DVP's Hamburg office in early January: "If I were now to agree to connect our [campaign] list with the right-wing parties ... then it could rightly be said that politics had corrupted my character."⁶⁴ Unlike the nationalist right, Witthoefft insisted on pitching a forward-looking campaign.

The war convinced Witthoefft that "Germany's political future depended" on how successfully it reentered the world of global economic integration and developed new institutions for doing so.⁶⁵ His campaign painted a picture of postwar German politics that was entirely dependent on the organization of economic questions to the point that Witthoefft doubted the usefulness of both "political discussions" and of political parties.⁶⁶ Politics, yes—but only to safeguard business life.

His campaign speeches circled a theme that would remain consistent for Witthoefft: "I said to myself ... a practical man, a practical economic man must be voted into the

⁵⁸ Ferguson, *Paper and Iron*, 152–97.

⁵⁹ StAHH 621-1/79, 1 Band 12, Franz Heinrich Witthoefft to Max Warburg, December 30, 1920; F. H. Witthoefft, "Our Commercial Situation," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 92, no. 1 (1920): 96–98.

⁶⁰ Of course, they were mistaken. See here Mulder, *The Economic Weapon*, on "blockade-phobia," especially, 226–33.

⁶¹ Tooze, *The Deluge*.

⁶² StAHH 621-1/79, 1 Band 10, Witthoefft to Rose, December 27, 1918.

⁶³ StAHH 621-1/79, 1 Band 10, Witthoefft to Rose, January 9, 1919. Picking a liberal party was rarely straightforward in Germany, given the different "permutations" of German liberal party associations from before unification until March 1933. See Eric Kurlander, *Living with Hitler: Liberal Democrats in the Third Reich* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 5–7, for a sketch of those permutations. Hamburg's distinct constitutional arrangements and occasional resistance to national-level party organization further complicated matters.

⁶⁴ StAHH 621-1/79, 1 Band 10, Witthoefft to Rose, January 9, 1919.

⁶⁵ StAHH 621-1/79, 1 Band 10, Witthoefft to Eduard Rosenbaum, January 25, 1919; StAHH 621-1/79, 24, fourth speech, 3.

⁶⁶ StAHH 621-1/79, 1 Band 10, Witthoefft to Rosenbaum, January 25, 1919; Witthoefft to Jakob Riesser, June 6, 1919.

National Assembly, because economic interests play such an important role.”⁶⁷ Witthoefft explained his attachment to the DVP as less important than his commitment to economic liberalism—interested, no doubt, in attracting voters away from the DDP, the other party most attractive to Hamburg’s merchants.⁶⁸ In an appeal to both groups, Witthoefft elaborated the common refrain in Hamburg that “if mercantile acumen (*der kaufmännische Verstand*) had been on the spot in July 1914 and been able to secure enough influence, we might never have fought the war against such a constellation [of foes].”⁶⁹ Witthoefft thus promised to pursue a “new organization of foreign policy” because Wilhemine Germany “did not have the right men in the right places.”⁷⁰

Three days after his first campaign speech, Witthoefft was voted to chair the meetings of the *Handelskammer* Hamburg, further indicating that he had taken on the role of political spokesman for the city’s free traders.⁷¹ He was eventually elected to represent Hamburg’s Bergedorf district in the National Assembly. The third office that accrued to Witthoefft in early 1919 was a position on the technical committee sent with the German delegation to Versailles. He was accompanied by other prominent Hamburg associates, including the banker Max Warburg, Warburg’s business partner Carl Melchior, and the new managing director of the *Hamburg-Amerikanische Packetfahrt-Aktien-Gesellschaft* (Hamburg-America Line, hereafter HAPAG), Wilhelm Cuno.

They went to Versailles bearing the expectations of Hamburg’s merchant elite. *Wirtschaftsdienst*, the periodical published out of the Hamburg Welt-Wirtschafts-Archiv that represented these mercantile interests, summarized the situation at the start of 1919: “The old world economy collapsed under terrible storms. The general belief is that only a reconstruction of all national economies and a reorganization of all world economic relations will allow peoples to overcome the devastation of war and its consequences.”⁷² Hamburg was asking for a new international order to manage economic relations, one that would remove wartime controls on trade and finance, free German ships held in foreign harbors, reverse the mandatory liquidation of German property abroad, and allow Germany to return to the ranks of Europe’s great powers and regain access to global economic institutions.⁷³

The Paris Peace Conference and its intricacies are well known, as is their negative reception among Germans of nearly all political persuasions.⁷⁴ Yet, after the disappointments at Versailles, Witthoefft’s ideas remained forward-thinking. “I am,” he explained to the National Assembly in July 1919, “not an advocate of the free play of forces in the old liberal sense, according to which state and market go forth like two separate worlds and where the state simply plays the role of a night watchman charged with ensuring law and order. I understand that the Economics Minister considers himself fully responsible for the German economy; for in the coming years the German people will depend on it.”⁷⁵ Four days later, however, Witthoefft had decided not to serve a second term, writing to Rose that the position was “costing [him] thousands” and that he had a business to focus on.⁷⁶

⁶⁷ StAHH 621-1/79, 24, December 31 1918, speech, 2.

⁶⁸ StAHH 621-1/79, 24, December 31, 1918, speech, 3.

⁶⁹ StAHH 621-1/79, 24, December 31, 1918, speech, 5.

⁷⁰ StAHH 621-1/79, 24, fourth speech, 4–5.

⁷¹ Archiv der Handelskammer Hamburg (HKA) Protokoll 1919, January 2.

⁷² Hamburg Welt-Wirtschafts-Archiv (HWWA) *Wirtschaftsdienst*, January 1, 1919 (<http://webopac.hwwa.de/PresseMappe20Bookmark/PM20bm.cfm?i=Wirtschaftsdienst%201916-1943,%201949%20-&mid=F043693&dn=4&pg=1>).

⁷³ HKA Protokoll 1919, January 10, January 24, January 31; StAHH 621-1/79, 1 Band 10, Witthoefft to Staatssekretär des Reichswirtschaftsministeriums August Müller, November 26, 1918.

⁷⁴ On the Paris Peace Conference’s political flaws and on Germany’s capacity to pay reparations, see Theo Balderston, *Economics and Politics in the Weimar Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Sally Marks, “Mistakes and Myths: The Allies, Germany, and the Versailles Treaty, 1918–1921,” *The Journal of Modern History* 85, no. 3 (September 2013): 632–59; Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2003); and Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire*, 591–99.

⁷⁵ Nationalversammlung 65, Sitzung, July 24, 1919, 1861C–1866A.

⁷⁶ StAHH 621-1/79, 1 Band 10, Witthoefft to Rose, July 28, 1919.

Corollary to any new organization of global political economy would be a new balance of power within Germany. Witthoefft supported a series of Hamburg-inspired efforts to reform the German Foreign Office and prioritize middle-class recruits and mercantile interests.⁷⁷ Budget cuts scuttled those plans, which had made some headway in the years immediately after the war.⁷⁸ The inimitable Warburg had been central to the proposals.⁷⁹ He led Hamburg's response to the failure, founding a free-trade club that would aggregate information from abroad, liaise between the city's merchants and government interests, and provide a private vector through which to intensify Hamburg's global connections and demonstrate their political value.⁸⁰ Witthoefft threw his support behind the new "*Übersee-Klub*" (Overseas Club) from Warburg's first pitch in the *Handelskammer* meeting rooms and joined Warburg on the supervisory board for the now-defunct Foreign Office Hamburg's economic bureau, which was to be effectively privatized and funded by the club.⁸¹

Witthoefft's address at the club's opening night on June 27, 1922, circled a topic that would become a theme for the club: "It is the pride of Hamburg, that its political and economic life still occur in colorful unity, as in the great cities of antiquity...." It was Hamburg's mission to rally all Germans to this union of world politics and economics.⁸² Warburg's speech elaborated the same concerns. He sketched a potted history of Wilhelmine German politics, insisting that politics and economics had been too separate from one another. "It would be a calamity," he wrote, "if the state and the bearers of *Weltwirtschaft* continued to mistrust one another. Before 1914 the state nurtured such mistrust, and since the Revolution it is nurtured by the merchants."⁸³ That same separation, in Warburg's view, held at the international level.⁸⁴ Despite the lofty aim of lending a commercial, Hamburg-inspired perspective to postwar reconstruction, by the late 1920s, the club was in financial trouble, its debt serviced by the *Handelskammer* and its goals unmet.⁸⁵

Like the *Übersee-Klub*, Witthoefft's burst of political energy yielded no noticeable change to the rules of the game and put him, and many of Hamburg's merchants, in a contradictory position. They emerged from the war with a renewed commitment to globalization—part self-interest, part political ideology, part realism about Germany's few routes back to world status. But they emerged from the war's settlements hoping for a different international order to replace the one enshrined at Versailles and worried that their prewar fears about Britain had been confirmed. Hamburg's free traders and erstwhile liberal imperialists had different avenues out of this contradiction. Witthoefft responded by returning

⁷⁷ StAHH 132-5-3, 8, *Hamburger Vorschläge zur Neugestaltung des deutschen Auslandsdienstes*, Hamburg, April 1918; on the reorganization of the Foreign Office after the collapse of the Second Empire, see Eckart Conze, *Das Auswärtige Amt. Vom Kaiserreich bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2013); Kurt Doß, "Vom Kaiserreich zur Weimarer Republik. Das deutsche diplomatische Korps in einer Epoche des Umbruchs," in *Das Diplomatische Korps 1871-1945*, ed. Klaus Schwabe (Boppard/Rhein: H. Boldt, 1985), 81-110; and Hajo Holborn, "Diplomats and Diplomacy in the Early Weimar Republic," in *The Diplomats, 1919-1939*, ed. Gordon Craig and Felix Gilbert (New York: Atheneum, 1963), 123-71.

⁷⁸ Conze, *Das Auswärtige Amt*, chap. 3.

⁷⁹ Stiftung Warburg Archiv (SWA) Max Warburg to Albert Ballin, April 9, 1915; Gabriele Hoffmann, *Max Warburg* (Hamburg: Ellert & Richter Verlag, 2009), 80-87; Lamar Cecil, *Albert Ballin: Business and Politics in Imperial Germany, 1888-1918* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 260-64.

⁸⁰ StAHH 371-12, I A VI 15, Programm page 2; 132-5-3, 9, "Der Verwaltungsrat der Zweigstellen des Auswärtigen Amtes für Außenhandel," 18-19.

⁸¹ HKA Protokoll 1922, April 7; StAHH 132-5-3, 9, "Der Verwaltungsrat der Zweigstellen des Auswärtigen Amtes für Außenhandel," 18-19; HKA Protokoll 1919, February 28; Protokoll 1919, April 4.

⁸² "Gründung des Überseeklubs Hamburg," *Hamburger Fremdenblatt*, June 28, 1922.

⁸³ Der Übersee-Club e.V., speeches, Max Warburg, "Gesellschaft für wirtschaftlichen Wiederaufbau Deutschlands und Auslandskunde," 1922, 1-3 (<https://www.ueberseeclub.de/index.php/en/database>).

⁸⁴ Warburg, "Gesellschaft für wirtschaftlichen Wiederaufbau Deutschlands und Auslandskunde," 4. Warburg did not attend the meeting, having received death threats after Walther Rathenau's assassination. Princeton University Special Collections, Max M. Warburg, *Aus meinen Aufzeichnungen* (Gluckstadt: J. J. Augustin, 1952), 108.

⁸⁵ StAHH 371-12, I A VI 15, UCH Bericht über das Jahr 1925, 5-6; UCH Bericht über das Jahr 1927, 5.

to the hedge he had made in 1907 and throwing his business and political interests into German money, German ships, and German business partners.

Before the war, Witthoefft and Behn had flourished under British colonial rule. That changed in 1914, and Witthoefft spent much of his energy after the war rebuilding operations in Southeast Asia and pursuing legal avenues to recoup his wartime losses. His principal concern was the forced liquidation of the firm's plantations and real estate under the 1914 ordinance, which he, like many German merchants, considered an arbitrary intervention on behalf of his British competitors rather than a genuine act of national security during wartime.

More broadly, Witthoefft had two goals in mind. Unfortunately for him, both lay just out of reach. The first put Witthoefft in the company of many Germans who had made their careers in the overseas territory of other European empires, and that was money for the property that had been confiscated and liquidated during the war. The second was related, but more specific to Witthoefft's particular business dealings. He wanted the HAPAG and North German Lloyd, Germany's two leading shipping firms, to regrant Behn, Meyer their agencies in South Asia. Through his mistrust of Britain, his disappointment with postwar international arrangements, and his increasing obsession with the German shipping lines, Witthoefft slowly drifted into a vision—and, indeed, a business—of globalization in which only Germans could be trusted.

In total Behn had lost between 12 and 15 million gold Marks across Singapore, Malaya, and the Philippines.⁸⁶ The company offices in London were moved to Amsterdam and incorporated as Straits Java Trading Co. Though the agency for the HAPAG proved elusive, Witthoefft managed to secure a deal with Hugo Stinnes's new shipping concern and represented the group in Argentina, South Africa, and Southeast Asia. Deals with Beiersdorf, IG Farben, and even Ford also arrived, as Behn moved further into chemicals, dyes, and the import/export of industrial goods.⁸⁷

For Witthoefft, rebuilding German globalization looked a great deal like building it before the war, with one important innovation. As he wrote Gustav Stresemann in late 1920, "What is German must once again become German, insofar as it is cut off from Germany." The only way to accomplish that was to garner support for Germany abroad and overturn the Versailles treaty.⁸⁸ In Hamburg before the war, nothing had more symbolized the successes of German globalization than the Hamburg-America Line's monumental steamers, floating symbols of the global age and Germany's imperial ascendancy.⁸⁹ Witthoefft thus set about trying to regain the HAPAG agency in South Asia, which it had lost during the war. Because Germans had been barred from commercial activity in enemy colonies during the war, the HAPAG had turned to foreign agents, and Witthoefft was determined to convince Cuno to reverse the decision. By 1926, he was still unsuccessful. "What it would mean for Germans," he pleaded, "if the largest Hamburg line would reject the oldest German firm, which had served it faithfully for 50 years, in favor of a new Swiss firm, is barely imaginable."⁹⁰

Witthoefft could not understand why the HAPAG would not instantly return its agency to a German firm. He turned to Hugo Stinnes for German capital, taking the industrialist on as a silent partner, only to have to clean up the mess left by his death.⁹¹ Even after selling off

⁸⁶ Not to be confused with the paper Mark associated with the wartime and postwar inflation. StAHH 621-1/79, 3 Band 4, Witthoefft to Geheimrat Dr. Kreuter, May 21, 1937; Shakila Yacob, "Rising of the Phoenix: Mitigating Political Risk through Knowledge Management—Behn, Meyer & Co., 1840–1959," *Enterprise and Society* 19, no. 4 (2018): 946–78; here, 963.

⁸⁷ Shakila Yacob, "Trans-generational Renewal as Managerial Succession: The Behn Meyer Story (1840–2000)," *Business History* 54, no. 7 (2012): 1166–85.

⁸⁸ StAHH 621-1/79, 1 Band 12, Witthoefft to Stresemann, November 10, 1920.

⁸⁹ Ferguson, *Paper and Iron*, 31; Russell, "Picturing the Emperor."

⁹⁰ StAHH 621-1/79, 1 Band 21, Witthoefft to Cuno, October 28, 1926.

⁹¹ Helfferich, *Zur Geschichte der Firmen Behn, Meyer & Co., gegründet in Singapore am 1. November 1840 und Arnold Otto Meyer, gegründet in Hamburg am 1. June 1857*, 157.

Stinnes's old steamships—to a German firm, of course, rather than the English bidder—Witthoefft took over portions of the business in Latin America, China, and British South Africa.⁹² Now active in Buenos Aires, Witthoefft took it “like a bolt from the blue (*wie ein Blitz aus heiterem Himmel*)” when the HAPAG transferred its agency to Delfino & Compañía. “Delfino & Cía.,” he complained, “is a South American firm, in which no German capital operates.”⁹³ Indeed, moments like these suggest that Witthoefft was not just another example of the protectionism of the interwar period. After all, he had spent the better part of a decade arguing for free trade as the only principle of global economic intercourse—whether in his role in the *Handelskammer* Hamburg or his position with the Hamburg free-trade advocate *Übersee-Klub*.⁹⁴ This was something different, a version of free trade that had a national character. Others in Hamburg responded to the war by replacing British financial support with American support. The United States, after all, exited the war as the world's banker. Witthoefft, however, remained wedded to the old proposals from Singapore in 1897: German ships, German finance.

For a decade, the Weimar Republic fielded a conflict between models of German world status that rejected internationalism and those that saw internationalism as a vector for national concerns.⁹⁵ *Weltpolitik* had managed to harness the dialectic between international integration and nationalist interests in a loose, albeit volatile and violent, coalition. Indeed, both models grew out of fin-de-siècle liberal imperialism and could be found elsewhere in the world. Witthoefft had begun as an archetype of the latter camp, but he slowly drifted toward an affinity with ultra-nationalist visions of Germany's place in the world. This drift was neither an autarkic rejection of globalization after the war nor a case of obvious “liberal failure.” It was something less noticeable but more powerful, baked into the intimate relationship between liberalism and nationalism, exacerbated by war, and made possible by the obviously bankrupt liberal international order meant to fix the problems of prewar imperial competition. Yet it was also merely one option among several.

“Stepchildren of the Reich”

Pursuing this option, in 1932, Witthoefft began to correspond with his former employee Emil Helfferich and Carl Vincent Krogmann about the future of German politics. Helfferich and Krogmann, a scion of one of Hamburg's old merchant families, were among Hamburg's first merchants to offer their support to Nazism. By the time the Nazi Party had consolidated power in March 1933, the two men held sinecures befitting their early commitment: Krogmann served as Hamburg's *Bürgermeister*, and Helfferich took over as chair of the supervisory board at the Hamburg-America Line. Helfferich and Krogmann spent several months of 1932 in near-constant contact with Wilhelm Keppler, economic adviser to Adolf Hitler and eponym of the “Keppler Circle,” a collection of leading business figures who supported Hitler's bid for the chancellorship. Of Hamburg's participants in the circle, the most interesting was Franz Heinrich Witthoefft, who signed the circle's November 1932 proposal that Hitler be made chancellor.⁹⁶

Witthoefft's case is all the more interesting when we recall his political development from the end of the Great War. He was a self-avowed republican, who laid the blame for the war at

⁹² Helfferich, *Zur Geschichte der Firmen Behn, Meyer & Co., gegründet in Singapore am 1. November 1840 und Arnold Otto Meyer, gegründet in Hamburg am 1. June 1857*, 166.

⁹³ Helfferich, *Zur Geschichte der Firmen Behn, Meyer & Co., gegründet in Singapore am 1. November 1840 und Arnold Otto Meyer, gegründet in Hamburg am 1. June 1857*, 167.

⁹⁴ HKA Protokoll 1922, April 7; “Gründung des Überseeklubs Hamburg,” *Hamburger Fremdenblatt*, June 28, 1922.

⁹⁵ Consider the opening vignette in Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*, 3–33.

⁹⁶ A copy of the letter, known as the *Industrielleneingabe*, can be found in Wolfgang Michalka and Gottfried Niedhart, ed., *Die ungeliebte Republik. Dokumente zur Innen- und Außenpolitik Weimars 1918–1933* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1980), 340–42. Along with the *Keppler-Kreis*, different collections of business figures coordinated by Keppler went under the names *Freundeskreis der Wirtschaft* (Circle of Friends of the Economy) and, later, the *Freundeskreis Reichsführer SS*, in reference to *Reichsführer* for the *Schutzstaffel* (SS) Heinrich Himmler.

the Kaiser's feet. Though he retained a bourgeois skepticism of a politically active working class and an opposition to any form of "*Planwirtschaft*," he nonetheless supported parliamentary government. Witthoefft was a right-liberal, a member of the DVP's leftward wing. He was clearly not a traditional conservative.

Nor did he drift ideologically to the radical right, as Helfferich had done by the late 1920s. Even after the Nazi seizure of power, Witthoefft's ideological acclimation was, at best, a resignation. As he wrote his son Gerd in April 1933:

I have completely resigned myself to the National Socialist idea, because working against this movement would be futile and in the end it contains a good core. There must also be people in the movement who think rationally, in order to bring the hot-heads around to the real state of things. I have worked with Hitler in this capacity for months and indeed only on economic matters.

Mutti and I still voted for the *Volkspartei* in the last elections. It has in the meantime been dissolved and has encouraged its members to go over to the National Socialists. Hitler intends to destroy the other parties. He really wants to create a single Germany, and I believe he will succeed.⁹⁷

These were not the words of an ideological convert. Yet he was a convert all the same.⁹⁸ We can reconstruct Witthoefft's aims from his lobbying efforts during the early years of the Nazi regime, from 1933 to 1940. After that, circumstances in Hamburg and Germany had sufficiently changed to make any comparison unhelpful. During these efforts, it was the same old items—German money and shipping connections—that so animated Witthoefft. The German globalization he sought seemed, finally, to be possible.

Witthoefft spent the next years attempting to wring commercial benefits out of his early support for the Keppler Circle. Keppler's supporters soon put their new political connections to work. A group of Hamburg merchants met at Helfferich's villa on the Elbe on May 2, 1933. The basis for discussion was a pair of draft memoranda, one written by Helfferich and Krogmann and the other by Witthoefft, which proposed that Berlin offer financial support to Germany's overseas merchant houses. They eventually produced one single document, which began by reference to the Great War, Britain's supposedly unfair treatment of German property abroad, forced liquidations, and the state of German business interests in neutral countries.⁹⁹ These were the same points that Witthoefft had been making for more than a decade. He referenced the same hardships while looking for benefits from the new regime, becoming increasingly obsessed with the issue of German property overseas, even by his earlier standards.

On May 23, Krogmann distributed the proposal for a *Kreditaktion* to Reichsbank President Hjalmar Schacht and to Minister for Economics Alfred Hugenberg. An "underwhelming" answer from Hugenberg explained that now was not the time for such action, and Helfferich had the impression that no one else in the cabinet had even read the document.¹⁰⁰ However, after a meeting with Schacht on June 8, in September news arrived that Berlin

⁹⁷ StAHH 621-1/79, 3 Band 1, Witthoefft to Gerd Witthoefft, April 21, 1933.

⁹⁸ Though he joined the Nazi Party in 1933, Witthoefft was not a committed antisemite. For example, in 1934 he suggested to Max Warburg that funding available to the Hamburg Scholarly Society could be distributed to "non-Aryans." See StAHH 621-1/79, 3 Band 2, Witthoefft to Warburg, July 24, 1934: "Wir sind ja auch nicht gebunden durch irgendwelche besonderen Vorschriften, nur Arier zu berücksichtigen. Ich meine, in diesem speziellen Falle liegt wirklich etwas vor, dass der Unterstützung wert ist." See also Frank Bajohr, "*Aryanization*" in *Hamburg: The Economic Exclusion of the Jews and the Confiscation of their Property in Nazi Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 55–58.

⁹⁹ Emil Helfferich, 1932 bis 1946. *Tatsachen: Ein Beitrag zur Wahrheitsfindung* (Jever: Mettcker, 1968), 37–40.

¹⁰⁰ Helfferich, *Tatsachen*, 40–41.

would allocate 25 million Reichsmarks to be apportioned among the merchant houses. Helfferich had been named to the committee that would determine who received what.¹⁰¹

Witthoefft had by then fallen to begging and badgering his better-connected bedfellows. In August he had asked Keppler for any news on potential financial support, having heard that difficulties might arise in the Finance Ministry.¹⁰² Likewise, in one of several supplications to Helfferich, he made the case that subsidies for German shipping were wasted if they did not pass to merchant houses as well and asked for a 3 million Mark, interest-free loan. “I beg you, dear *Herr Helfferich*,” he wrote to his former subordinate, “as you are a confidant of the government, do your best to bring through a project that will be of immeasurable worth in the future.”¹⁰³ Witthoefft’s position with Helfferich was especially precarious because, as we have seen, recapturing the HAPAG agency in Southeast Asia had been one of Witthoefft’s primary aims since the end of the war. Helfferich now had the power to grant that agency, but he does not seem to have been in a hurry. In December 1933, Witthoefft asked Bruno Claußen, State Secretary for Labor, to pressure Helfferich to grant Behn the agency.¹⁰⁴

In early 1934, Witthoefft stepped down from the *Handelskammer* Hamburg. Soon thereafter, he received a disappointing message from the Society for Reconstruction Abroad, confirming that, despite hopes to the contrary, the *Reich* Finance Ministry was not planning a compensation campaign for firms that had been liquidated by the Allies during the Great War.¹⁰⁵ Witthoefft wrote his son Heinz that agreements with the government proved hard to come by. “The people,” he wrote, “are all extraordinarily *misstrauisch*.” “Hopefully,” he closed, the “political position will now improve, so that foreign countries will regain confidence in Germany.”¹⁰⁶ That, as we know, is not what happened.

That hope began to matter even more, however, as Witthoefft slowly realized that the support he wanted was going to remain out of reach. He continued to lean on his contacts from 1932, though with little success. After trying several times to get a hold of Schacht in person, Witthoefft eventually drafted a letter which argued that it was in the regime’s interest to support his firm in its attempts to recapture the shipping agencies of North German Lloyd and the HAPAG and to reestablish its position among the European merchant houses in Southeast Asia.¹⁰⁷

Even when Witthoefft did receive aid, it came in a form he found unsatisfactory. As he explained to Helfferich in 1937, the firm would struggle to pay back the 5 million Marks that it finally received from the government and sympathetic banks. By Witthoefft’s accounting, it might take fifty years to pay back the loan. Though the particulars had changed, Witthoefft’s central complaint remained the same. As he put it to Helfferich, “Since we are now, from a national economic point of view, no less important than the banks or shipping, I think I can assert the claim that we not be treated like stepchildren of the *Reich*.”¹⁰⁸ He likewise continued to justify the complaint by reference to the original war indemnities from 1918–1919. “Would it be fair,” he asked, “if these banks should get returns on ... our payments, after they have already been indemnified indirectly by the *Reich*, while my company has seen very little of the original war indemnity—as stated earlier—and indirectly got into its uncomfortable position as a result of the banking crisis?”¹⁰⁹

Witthoefft’s entreaties were apparently unsuccessful because by late 1940 he had reached an unhappy conclusion: “Indeed, our own government always gives us the prettiest words, but I doubt very strongly that they will bring themselves to reimburse the losses brought

¹⁰¹ Helfferich, *Tatsachen*, 42–45.

¹⁰² StAHH 621-1/79, 3 Band 1, Witthoefft to Wilhelm Keppler, August 23, 1933.

¹⁰³ StAHH 621-1/79, 3 Band 1, Witthoefft to Helfferich, October 20, 1933.

¹⁰⁴ StAHH 621-1/79, 3 Band 1, Witthoefft to Bruno Claußen, December 11, 1933.

¹⁰⁵ StAHH 621-1/79, 3 Band 1, Verein Wiederaufbau im Auslande, Rundschreiben, January 15, 1934.

¹⁰⁶ StAHH 621-1/79, 3 Band 1, Witthoefft to Heinz Witthoefft, February 1, 1934.

¹⁰⁷ StAHH 621-1/79, 3 Band 2, Witthoefft to Hjalmar Schacht, January 14, 1935.

¹⁰⁸ StAHH 621-1/79, 3 Band 4, Witthoefft to Helfferich, April 9, 1937.

¹⁰⁹ StAHH 621-1/79, 3 Band 4, Witthoefft to Helfferich, April 9, 1937.

on us by the English.”¹¹⁰ He likewise doubted that the answer to the “anxious question ... whether the German banks can offer ... a replacement” to foreign ones would be answered in the affirmative.¹¹¹ Lacking damages payments from the government and doubting that German banks would be significant enough overseas to provide the credit Witthoefft needed, he recognized “that the German banks as they are now will probably not be able to replace foreign finance entirely.”¹¹²

Witthoefft died in 1941, unsuccessful in his political aims and unknowing of the world that would follow the end of the Second World War and the collapse of the Nazi dictatorship. His support for the latter, sincere though it was, had not yielded the economic conditions he had hoped for. Doubtless, Witthoefft had benefited from Nazi expropriations, and his firm had benefited directly from the “Aryanization” of the tanning company Blau & Schindler.¹¹³ But, like many of Germany’s other overseas-looking nationalists and colonial irredentists, Witthoefft lacked the political capital and the institutional capacity to influence Nazi policy.¹¹⁴ Witthoefft’s many entreaties to the Nazi establishment reflected interests he had held since the Wilhelmine period. But his political choices in pursuit of those interests—the institutions he relied upon and the ideas that animated him—followed because Witthoefft had left the liberal imperialism of *Weltpolitik* behind. Although the legacy of liberal empire and its possible futures remained with Witthoefft, that legacy was more powerful in its absence than in the presence of obvious institutional or ideological continuity.

Moreover, it matters that Witthoefft was so quickly marginalized. Reviewing Witthoefft’s career, it becomes clear how the liberal imperialism of *Weltpolitik* could mutate into genuine support for Nazism, yet it is difficult to argue that the dashed hopes of overseas liberal empire were the principal motor behind Nazi dynamism. This is especially the case because Witthoefft’s peculiar political trajectory represented but one road out of liberal empire.¹¹⁵

Conclusion

It would be simpler if the history of German liberal imperialism were marked either by sharp rupture or obvious continuity. The stakes are high—for historians and in general. How Germany went from a thoroughgoing participant in a Western-ordered liberal imperial system to a seismic challenger to the norms of Western international order is a question with nontrivial real-world relevance. That relevance holds for critics of liberal international order and its defenders.

Witthoefft, representative among Hamburg’s merchants, supported *Weltpolitik* because it was designed to coexist with Britain and other fin-de-siècle liberal empires. Yet Witthoefft also hedged his bets, preparing for a future in which only German firms could be relied upon. This hedge was not a German pathology; the entire inter-imperial system was in flux before the guns of August 1914. The outcome of the war directed and intensified these imperial revolutions. It drove a wedge between political and economic sovereignty, but it also reopened the dialectic between nationalism and liberalism that had marked liberal empire.

Imperial collapse then encouraged Hamburg’s free traders to intensify their belief in the political opportunities afforded by globalization. They looked eagerly to a new international order that would build the economics of free-trade empire into new political architecture. When that political architecture did not materialize, different options remained available.

¹¹⁰ StAHH 621-1/79, 3 Band 6, Witthoefft to Dr. J. Schilling, November 29, 1940.

¹¹¹ StAHH 621-1/79, 3 Band 6, Witthoefft to Dr. J. Schilling, November 29, 1940.

¹¹² StAHH 621-1/79, 3 Band 6, Witthoefft to Dr. J. Schilling, November 29, 1940.

¹¹³ Frank Bajohr, “Arisierung” in *Hamburg: die Verdrängung der jüdischen Unternehmer 1933–1945* (Hamburg: Christians, 1997), 350.

¹¹⁴ Wempe, *Revenants of the German Empire*; Willeke Sandler, *Empire in the Heimat: Colonialism and Public Culture in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

¹¹⁵ To take only Hamburg-based examples, Max Warburg, Wilhelm Cuno, and Emil Helfferich all offer related but distinct cases to that of Witthoefft.

Witthoefft retreated into German globalization, the hedge he had made in the years before the war. When it comes to the presence or absence of imperial continuities, Witthoefft's support for Nazism made sense only because he had left liberal imperialism behind. More peculiar was his way station in between and the whiplash from enthusiasm about liberal international order to a nationalized vision of global economic integration.

These arguments point to several conclusions. First, the history of liberal empire in Germany appears more durable than long believed. Liberalism's lasting effect on German power in the world—especially on the problem of economic integration after empire—should be further explored.¹¹⁶ That Witthoefft was able to square global economic integration with an increasingly nationalist view of the world speaks to the durability of commercial models of state power. Global dimensions likewise prompt a reassessment of the fate of German liberalism in general: To what extent did the mutation of German liberal imperialism interact with domestic politics, particularly conflicts between different models of nationhood?¹¹⁷ What do the affinities between German liberal imperialism and its foreign counterparts suggest about domestic liberal democracy, particularly concerning its relationship to violence, exclusion, and ethnic division?

Second, however, the line between liberal and illiberal internationalisms appears more easily blurred. At what point did Witthoefft's global visions stop being liberal? This blurriness offers an end run around problematical attempts to narrate Nazism as little more than an extreme expression of global patterns and around untenable notions of German exceptionalism. It also suggests a German vantage point from which to view liberal visions of world order across the twentieth century, and, indeed, how that history runs through Germany.

Acknowledgments. I should like to thank Erik Grimmer-Solem, Harold James, Yair Mintzker, Steven Press, Sean Andrew Wempe, and Natasha Wheatley for reading earlier drafts; Monica Black and the anonymous readers at *Central European History* for their suggestions; Casey Eilbert for digitizing Max Warburg's published memoir; the Princeton European History Seminar and the University of Hamburg Doctoral Seminar in Global History for inviting me to present my research; and Kathrin Enzel and Martina Nützmänn at the Handelskammer Hamburg; Dorothea Hauser at the Stiftung Warburg Archiv; and the staff at the Staatsarchiv Hamburg for their help.

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¹¹⁶ Consider Hans Kundnani, *The Paradox of German Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). In domestic politics, the classic account of the durability of the European bourgeoisie's grip on economic institutions is Charles S. Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe: Stabilization in France, Germany, and Italy in the Decade after World War I* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975). See also, quite recently and concerning central and east-central Europe, Máté Rigó, *Capitalism in Chaos: How the Business Elites of Europe Prospered in the Era of the Great War* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2022).

¹¹⁷ See especially Eric Kurlander, *The Price of Exclusion: Ethnicity, National Identity, and the Decline of German Liberalism, 1898–1933* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006) and James, *A German Identity*. On liberal democrats during the Nazi period, see Kurlander, *Living with Hitler*. The differences between Witthoefft and Emil Helfferich, for example, suggest a profitable imperial corollary to Kurlander's discussion of "völkisch liberalism." In either case, accounting for liberal imperialism would require a more thoroughly global framework that addresses Germany's extensive integration with the wider world.

Cite this article: Jack H. Guenther. "Hamburg Free Traders and the Business of Empire, 1897–1941," *Central European History* 56, no. 4 (December 2023): 535–552. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000893892300002X>.