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978-1-107-62180-0 - Free Trade and Protection in the Netherlands 1816–30:

A Study of the First Benelux

H. R. C. Wright

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BY

H. R. C. WRIGHT

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PREFACE

Ultimately, the result of the collapse of the Dutch world market was the protective tariff system for the benefit of the Dutch textile and metal industries undertaken by King Willem I in 1816... Ultimately, the results of the war were to lead to the economic re-orientation of the Netherlands under the competent guidance of Willem I.¹

Thus Mr C. H. Wilson, after explaining why Dutch commerce could not recover from the fourth English war of 1780–4, looked forward into the nineteenth century. His book suggested to me the tariff policy of King William I as a topic for research. This led, however, not into a study of Dutch economic revival, for that occurred only in the second half of the century and under a policy of free trade, but of the union of the Dutch and Belgian Netherlands from 1815–30. It is true that many of the practical achievements of William I, though not in my opinion his tariff policy, ultimately contributed much to Dutch revival; but it has been necessary to limit the present study to short-term effects. It is a study, therefore, of an experiment that failed; for all William I's work, including that 'definitive tariff policy' which Mr Wilson considered to have been so effective,² was dominated until 1830 by the purpose of strengthening the union.

The kingdom entrusted to William I by the Allies after the defeat of Napoleon consisted of three elements: the Dutch provinces, whose economy, centred on the international staple market in Holland, had been disrupted by the Continental System; the Belgian provinces, where French rule, after breaking down local rigidities, had stimulated capitalist undertakings and then left them in the lurch; and the restored Dutch colonies, which under British rule had become dependent on British commerce. The aim of the king was so to integrate these fragments that each would be useful to the others, and the whole kingdom would be independent of the favours of foreign powers. By 1830 he had shaped a coherent policy to this end and had achieved much success, only to see his work ruined by failure on the political side.

William I's economic policy has been studied in some detail by Continental, though never by British, historians. Some have seen in it an anticipation of List's 'National System';³ others merely a belated

¹ C. H. Wilson, *Anglo-Dutch Commerce and Finance in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1941), pp. 200, 204.

² *Ibid.* p. 196.

³ R. Häpke, 'Die Wirtschaftspolitik im Königreich der Niederlande, 1815–30' in *Vierteljahrsschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (1923).

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Preface

mercantilism.¹ The king himself was no theorist and had no ‘system’ in mind. He certainly did not foresee in 1815 that by 1830 the cumulative effect of decisions taken, each on its own merits, under pressure of circumstances would in fact be to create ‘the economic system of William I’.

This book, which is based on my Ph.D. thesis of 1948, owes much to the patient criticism and advice of Professor Postan, and Professor A. J. C. Rüter of Leiden University, my Directors of Studies. My thanks are also due to the Ministry of Education, whose grant enabled me to take up post-graduate research after the war.

I have used the term ‘Belgium’ whenever it has seemed convenient, without wishing to imply that a Belgian nation already existed at the particular date. I have also referred to King William I by that title on certain occasions when he had not yet assumed it.

H. R. C. W.

JOHANNESBURG

SOUTH AFRICA

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¹ I. J. Brugmans, ‘De economische politiek van Koning Willem I’, in *Bijdragen voor Vaderlandsche Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde* (1930).

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE NOTES

A.R.A.	Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague.
Ged.	H. T. Colenbrander, <i>Gedenkstukken</i> (X deelen) (The Hague, 1905–22).
<i>Knuttel</i>	The <i>Knuttel</i> collection of pamphlets in the Koninklijke Bibliotheek at the Hague.
<i>2de kamer</i>	J. J. F. Noordziek (ed.), <i>Verslag der handelingen van de tweede kamer der Staten-Generaal 1814–30</i> (The Hague, 1863).
<i>Mem. en cor.</i>	I. J. A. Gogel, <i>Memoriën en correspondentiën</i> (Amsterdam, 1844).
<i>Post. Doc.</i>	N. W. Posthumus, <i>Documenten betreffende de buitenlandsche handelspolitiek van Nederland in de 19de eeuw</i> , 6 vols. (The Hague, 1913–31).
<i>Rec. Fin.</i>	<i>Recueil des pièces relatives au nouveau système de finances du Royaume des Pays-Bas</i> (The Hague, 1822).
<i>Verzam. gran.</i>	<i>Verzameling van stukken betreffende de onbeperkte vrijheid van den handel in granen</i> (The Hague, 1823).
B.K.I.	<i>Bijdragen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië.</i>