

6 Germany Enters the Colonial Race

In November 1882, a Bremen merchant and tobacco trader, F.A.E. Lüderitz, informed the German Foreign Office of his intention to purchase land and establish a trading post in South West Africa. By selecting a spot just outside British territory he could circumvent British import duties on his merchandise, which he stressed would all be of German make. Eventually, he might even exploit the copper and silver fields in the interior. Lüderitz foresaw one problem: if he carried through his plans the British would not hesitate – as they had done at the Gold Coast – to take possession of any land he bought. In this way, a potentially substantial market for German industry would be lost. To prevent this from happening, he asked for *Schutz*, protection, of the German flag.¹ In April of the following year, Lüderitz' agent, Heinrich Vogelsang, landed at Angra Pequena, now Lüderitz Bay in Namibia, north of the Oranje River, the frontier of the British Cape Colony. From there, he travelled into the interior to buy land from the local chief, 'King Josef Frederick'. In April 1884 Lüderitz got what he wanted. South West Africa, by then larger than Germany itself, was placed under the protection of His Majesty Emperor Wilhelm I (Graichen and Gründer 2005: 74).

Initially, the new German Empire had had no colonial aspirations. Like the British government being inundated with requests for the annexation of Pacific islands, so the 1860s and 1870s saw a plethora of German citizens pleading for overseas possessions. All were ignored. Such dreams of overseas German settlements were not yet shared by the government of Prussia and the German Empire. To Bismarck, shaping the new Empire and solving domestic problems came first (Baranowski 2011: 14). Invariably, he turned down the pleas from German businessmen, among them also owners of German firms in Australia, and consuls abroad asking for a German annexation of spots in the Pacific and elsewhere. Had he acceded to such suggestions, Germany would have become the master of parts of Fiji, Samoa and New Guinea, taken possession of Hokkaido in Japan, driven the defeated French out of Cochin China (Bismarck preferred Alsace-Lorraine instead as war booty (Knopp 2011: 19)) and would have acquired Taiwan (Formosa) in China. Germany would also have established itself in Borneo, Sumatra, Timor and the Philippines, and would have administered colonies in Africa

1 Lüderitz to Ministry of Foreign Affairs 23-11-1882 (in Gründer 1999: 81-5).

Figure 6 Bismarck 1880



Source: nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto_von_Bismarck

and Latin America.² Sulu, though in this case the request came from its Sultan, would have become a German protectorate.

For more than a decade after the establishment of the German Empire, and in fact almost up to the moment he embarked on a determined colonial policy, Bismarck nourished a public image of a person opposed to the acquisition of colonies and protectorates. Not everybody in those years believed that Germany was not aspiring to overseas possessions. In April 1875 the Royal Colonial Institute, the British pressure group in favour of further expansion of the Empire, sent a deputation to the Colonial Secretary, Carnarvon, pleading for the annexation of East New Guinea (the western part was Dutch). The reason for concern was Germany. One of its influential members, A. Kinnaird, warned the British government that that country 'was determined to be a great naval Power, and would look to colonisation as the principal means to that end, and if she looked to New Guinea we may lose a very important colony'.³

2 For the early German plans see, for instance, Gründer 1999: 54-63.

3 Young to Granville 9-12-1882 (PRO FO 534 22).

In the 1880s Bismarck changed his mind. In those years the groundwork for the transformation of Germany into a colonial empire had already been laid. The mid-1870s had marked the entrance of the German navy into the Pacific and developments in Samoa had already proven how effective such naval support was for the enforcement of German claims. Germany now had its own, albeit still modest, network of coaling stations and a navy that could lend military support to its overseas business communities and could be used to formally annex parts of Africa and Asia. A surplus population also became an argument in favour. It would be better for the country when those who were forced to seek a new livelihood elsewhere in the world would settle in a German colony, instead of the United States or any other foreign country. There they would lose their Germanness; and, as Carl Peters, one of the leading proponents of colonial expansion, argued, would only add to the strength of Germany's rivals (Gründer 1999: 89). Partly to show Germany's own might, and ostensibly out of chagrin over the behaviour of the British Empire and the way in which German nationals had been treated, especially in Fiji, Bismarck briefly embarked upon an active and aggressive colonial policy in Africa and the Pacific. What his motives were has been much discussed and power relations in Europe have been mentioned as well as domestic political considerations (Conrad 2012: 21). Bismarck blamed Great Britain for his change of mind. Britain's betrayal of German settlers in Fiji had forced him to act. The German nation was 'strong enough to protect the enterprises of its nationals and to demand justice' (Koschitzky 1887-88 I: 158).

Bismarck might have blamed London, but his ideas about colonialism were inspired by the British. He was certainly in agreement with their mercantile colonialism. He favoured the English system of chartered companies (in May 1882 the British North Borneo Chartered Company was founded after years of negotiations over the colonisation of Sabah, which, in fact, was the only one of its kind in those days). No occupation by the state. Private companies had to take the lead. Bismarck emphatically rejected 'artificial' colonisation and a colonial administration paid for by the government or the establishment of military garrisons in regions that did not yield a profit. When German citizens, of their own accord, settled in parts of the world not yet controlled by other colonial empires – when it involved 'constructions which grew naturally from the surplus fluids of the collective German body' – then it was 'the duty of the Empire to follow them with the shield of national protection' (Koschitzky 1887-1888 I: 157, 163). And to counter voices that doubted the commercial potential of some of the coastal regions where German companies wanted to establish

themselves, Bismarck also underlined the importance of the opening up of new markets for German industry. Such, at first glance, useless places, where no estate agriculture was possible, should not be neglected and had to be considered as vanguard points for the opening up of trade with the hinterland (Koschitzky 1887-88 I: 189). The 'Hanseatic merchants' who were to undertake such endeavours could be assured that they were equipped with a *Frei- und Schutzbrief*, a Charter and Letter of Protection (Koschitzky 1887-88 I: 158).

Bismarck gave the impression that Germany would acquire its colonies for a pittance. The state did not have to spend money to buy land, to pay a colonial civil administration or to station a military garrison in faraway regions. The threat of a German fleet and the occasional deployment of warships could suffice (Koschitzky 1887-88 I: 157). The commercial firms to which the colonisation was to be delegated were expected to bear the costs involved in administering a colony themselves, with, at most, an initial financial incentive from the government. In view of the profits that lay in store, the optimistic view was that having been awarded control over the economic exploitation of the new possessions they would certainly be able to finance the undertaking themselves. In Bismarck's words, and he had New Guinea in mind when he spoke in March 1885, these were 'large, fertile and easily cultivatable regions, which now are overgrown with steppe grass as high as a man's head, located below the equator, and as such excellently suitable to the cultivation of coffee, cotton and similar tropical products' (Koschitzky 1887-88 I: 274). Avoiding costs was also foremost in mind of the British government, but, unlike Bismarck, British politicians used it as an argument to plead against colonisation or the establishment of protectorates, not in favour of it.

Bismarck encountered much opposition in the Reichstag, at times also ridicule, in particular from the left. Opponents called for caution, arguing that the German fleet was still no match for those of Great Britain and France, and they dreaded the additional financial burden a colonial adventure implied for a population already heavily taxed due to plans for a strong army and navy. It was also recalled that earlier German adventures in the tropics 'had ended in bankruptcy and at the roasting spit of savage cannibals', as one avowed opponent of any German colonial adventure, Ludwig Bamberger, phrased it (Koschitzky 1887-88 I: 159). Still others were sure that the climate in Africa and the Pacific did not suit Germans and that in Africa, German settlers only had two options, 'an honourable grave or to be eaten by the darkies' (Koschitzky 1887-88 I: 289). Or, as the *Allgemeine Zeitung* in Munich wrote on 27 November 1882 with regard to a German

annexation of New Guinea, the island was dreaded and avoided as the 'natural burial place of the white'.

In 1878, when Werner, the commander of the *Ariadne*, had established a German presence in the New Britain Archipelago, he was still not sure that Berlin would sanction the act. In fact, Werner need not have worried. The German Empire had not yet publicly expressed colonial ambitions, but for Bismarck it had already become a main objective to see that German trade with faraway quarters of the world could develop free from any dependence on Great Britain. This, too, was part of the rise of Germany as a great power. A network of coaling stations to serve the German merchant and naval fleets was essential if this aim was to be achieved. German ships en route to remote destinations should be able to call at German coaling and repair stations, and should not be dependent upon harbour facilities controlled by other European powers.

The year 1884 was decisive to German colonial policy. After Berlin had enquired, in February (that is, even before Vogelsang had landed at Angra Pequena), November and again in December 1883, whether Great Britain was prepared to protect a German settlement north of the Oranje River – and the only British reaction had been a communication in February of the following year that it was impossible to respond because it was not known where the new German settlement was to be located – Bismarck gave orders for the first German protectorates to be proclaimed. He still rejected the notion of colonies, but it was an 'imperial duty' to protect German overseas settlements, he would tell the Reichstag in June 1884 (Knoll and Hiery 2010: 15). The German Consul General in Tunis, Gustav Nachtigal, was appointed Commissioner of the Empire for the West Coast of Africa and was ordered by Bismarck to conclude treaties of friendship, trade and protection with local rulers. In July 1884 Nachtigal proclaimed Togo and Cameroon German protectorates. The status of South West Africa, which on 24 April had already acquired protection, was confirmed in August. On 7 August, during a ceremony at Angra Pequena attended by a landing party from two German corvettes, the *Leipzig* and the *Elisabeth*, the whole region (with the exception of Whale Bay) was formally placed under the protection of the Emperor. Subsequently, a German gunboat, the *Wolf*, was dispatched along the coast of South West Africa. At various points along the coast the German flag was hoisted with due ceremony and a proclamation declaring South West Africa a protectorate was read out.⁴ London was left no other option

4 In April 1885 Lüderitz was forced to sell the land he had purchased to the Deutsche Kolonial-Gesellschaft für Südwest-Afrika, the German Colonial Society for South West Africa. Among

than to inform Berlin that Great Britain 'friendly welcomed Germany as its neighbour' (Koschitzky 1887-88 II: 87).

In the Pacific attention went to East New Guinea and the New Britain Archipelago. It was there that the territorial ambitions of Germany and Great Britain, or rather of its colonies – in this case Australia – clashed, only adding to the bitterness that had arisen from the disputes over Fiji and Samoa.

Australian claims and fears

In Australia, especially in its most northern colony, Queensland, merchants and estate owners desired New Guinea to be British; though, as Fiji had already indicated, they were less enthusiastic about sharing the costs. British control would secure them land and labour for their business ventures. Supported by politicians and probably a large part of the public, they were adamant that the eastern, non-Dutch portion of New Guinea fell within the Australian sphere of influence. No other country should acquire a colony or protectorate there, and certainly not in those parts nearest to the Australian coast, the southeast of the island. The British administration in London tended to concur, fearing that if it reacted differently political complications with the Australian colonies and New Zealand would be the result. A non-British settlement in those quarters, Colonial Secretary Carnarvon realised, would 'involve the very serious risk of an almost irremediable collision with the Australian Governments'.⁵

Each time real or imaginary rivals appeared on the scene London stressed that Great Britain held special prerogatives. In 1876, after rumours about a French scientific expedition to New Guinea, which might as a sideline hoist the French flag, London, still shrinking from an actual annexation, tried to persuade other European governments to leave the eastern portion of New Guinea alone. France, in earlier decades the principal potential culprit in British eyes regarding annexations in the Pacific, should be made to understand that the British delay 'in taking actual steps with regard to the settlement of New Guinea is not to be regarded as waiving any portion of the claim, which discovery, the proximity of Australia, and the recent operations of British subjects may have established'.⁶

its financial backers were Hanseemann and Bleichröder. In 1885 East Africa would also become a German protectorate.

5 Herbert to Tenterden 31-7-1876 (PRO FO 534 22).

6 Derby to Lyons 3-7-1876 (PRO FO 534 22).

Consequently, the British ambassador in Paris, Viscount Lyons, was instructed to inform the French government that Great Britain's claim to New Guinea was 'prior to that of any other European Power'.⁷ What London wanted was out of reach. Lyons had to report that the French would never acknowledge an unsubstantiated claim that was not backed up by concrete evidence; but, from what the French Minister of Foreign Affairs Louis Decazes had told him, he concluded that it was very unlikely that France would try to appropriate a portion of New Guinea. For the moment Lyons was satisfied, even when, a month later, Decazes informed him that two months previously a French natural history expedition, led by Achille Raffray and Maurice Maindron, had left for the Sunda Islands in the Netherlands Indies and New Guinea. France would think twice before risking 'the inconvenience of raising a painful question with England'. Other European countries would do the same: '[A] power which desired to be on cordial terms with the British Government would hardly disregard the closer interest which England has in the question, and the priority of her claim to the island'.⁸

Back home, in London, Carnarvon had his doubts. It would only be a matter of time before others would try to establish themselves on the island.⁹ Annexation could not be postponed much longer. Lyons, having read Carnarvon's assessment, now tended to agree with him. At that moment there were no indications that others had any intention of occupying New Guinea, but as he wrote with a prophetic eye to Foreign Secretary Derby, 'if circumstances should arise which should make any country covet the possession of it, the first notice of the change which we should receive would very probably be the intelligence that a foreign flag has been hoisted there'.¹⁰

France and Germany were not the only potential intruders. In March 1879 articles appeared first in Italian and British newspapers, and later on also elsewhere in the world, reporting that Domenico Menotti Garibaldi, the eldest son of the famous Giuseppe Garibaldi, was to head an expedition to establish a colony complete with a town, Italia, on the south coast of New Guinea. Four ships with about three thousand well-armed emigrants were said to be fitted out. The object, *The Times* (18-3-1879) wrote, was 'to find an outlet for that spirit of adventure and enterprise which the making of Italy aroused in many who are still young men'. The Russian Empire was another possibility. Russia, it was speculated, might want to obtain a coaling

7 Lyons to Derby 14-7-1876 (PRO FO 534 22).

8 Lyons to Derby 25-7-1876 (PRO FO 534 22).

9 Herbert to Tenterden 31-7-1876 (PRO FO 534 22).

10 Lyons to Derby 15-8-1876 (PRO FO 534 22).

station on the coast of New Guinea, a suspicion fortified by the exploits of N.N. Miklouho-Maclay, a famous Russian explorer. Miklouho-Maclay twice stayed in New Guinea, first in the 1871 and then again in 1883. Both times he travelled to and from his destinations aboard a Russian warship, charting the waters (the route along New Guinea was one of the ways a fleet on its way from Europe to Asia not sailing the Suez Canal could take).

For the Australian public and their politicians a foreign occupation of East New Guinea was a sensitive issue, evoking apprehension and jingoist bravado. In London Arthur Gordon told the Dutch envoy, C.M.E.G. Graaf van Bijlandt, during a formal dinner that if Italy attempted to acquire its colony in New Guinea 'the whole British population of Australia would move to New Guinea to prevent such a venture and to beat the Italians to it'.¹¹

A foreign presence in the Western Pacific was seen as a direct threat to the peace and security of Australia. Part of this derived from speculation that a foreign government might look at New Guinea as an ideal location for a penal colony. Such a possibility had indeed come up in relation to the Italian plans – when such an institution had been presented as a more humanitarian alternative to capital punishment – and would remain one of the concerns of Australians and New Zealanders when they discussed foreign settlements in the Western Pacific. A penal colony in New Guinea, as Derby, now Colonial Secretary, put it in the House of Lords in April 1883, would 'cause great annoyance to the Australian Colonies'.¹² Convicts might well succeed in escaping to Australia. The concern about a convict colony was not confined to New Guinea. It stretched to other island groups in the Pacific – New Caledonia and the New Hebrides – and as such contributed to the wider territorial ambitions in Australia. Feelings were such that as late as 1883, when protests against a possible annexation by Germany of New Guinea swelled, the *Sydney Morning Post* could still write that if Great Britain would not take possession of it, the island should go to Germany, and certainly not to France, convinced as Australians were that France would send its criminals there (Ward 1976: 316).

Even more threatening was the thought that a foreign occupation, especially of the south coast of New Guinea, would bring Australia within close range of a foreign navy, a concern entertained since the close of the eighteenth century (Hoffman 1990: 4). In 1883 *The Argus* predicted that such

11 Van Bijlandt to Van Heeckeren 8-4-1879 (ARA FO A-dos. 110 box 218).

12 Derby in House of Lords 20-4-1883 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/lords/1883/apr/20/question-observations).

a naval base would fundamentally change life in Australia. With foreign naval establishments far away,

we live free from the apprehension of any serious danger even in time of war. At worst we would only be exposed to the flying visit of a few hostile cruisers, and competent naval officers have even questioned whether a modern ship of war would run the risk of so long a trip, and incur the chances of being left without coal before it was finished (*The Argus* 11-4-1883).

It was an apprehension that was shared in London. Carnarvon, by then a former Colonial Secretary, called attention in the House of Lords to the consequences of a foreign 'armed fort' in New Guinea. It was 'a monstrous thing' and a 'menace' to the Australians. Torres Strait, where Queensland and New Guinea come closest, 'would cease to be English territory' and the result would be 'an enormous military burden on the Australian Colonies'.¹³

The Moresby annexation

Despite such Australian anxieties, the British government did not look forward to claiming New Guinea. In 1873, feeling 'that the occupation of this island by any foreign maritime power ... would be a standing menace to Queensland', and 'also impressed by the richness and beauty' of the place, John Moresby, Captain of the HMS *Basilisk*, had hoisted the British flag on the southeastern New Guinea shore and had taken possession of the region 'in the name and on behalf of the most gracious Majesty Queen Victoria' (Moresby 1876: 207-8). He named the place Port Moresby, after his father Admiral Sir Fairfax Moresby. The ceremony, complete with a *feu de joie*, the shots frightening the natives, gave the coast its name: Possession Bay. The affair had not been without incident, however. Moresby and the crew of the *Basilisk* had been confronted by hostile Papuans.

The act had found no favour in the eyes of then Colonial Secretary Carnarvon. Costs had been a major consideration. Contrary to some of the advocates of colonisation, the British government took the position that the economic prospects of New Guinea and other spots in the Western Pacific

¹³ Carnarvon in House of Lords 2-7-1883 (hansard.millbanksystems.com.lords/1883/july2/motion-for-papers).

on the list of annexation were poor. With no prospect of economic gain, Australia, the main if not only beneficiary of such annexations, should share in the costs of occupying and administering such regions. Carnarvon deemed such a contribution essential to persuade the British public and Parliament to consent to taking hold of new possessions. This meant the end of the Port Moresby project. London refused to recognise the annexation. Without London's support for colonisation plans, the administration of Queensland had to restrict itself, for the time being, to claiming all islands within sixty miles of its coast in 1877. This meant that almost the whole of Torres Strait became British.

Other initiatives that could herald British rule in New Guinea were also discouraged. Among these was a plan in 1876 for the newly established and London-based New Guinea Colonising Association to buy a ship from the British Admiralty and send a small expeditionary force of some two hundred men and fifty officers, commanded by its founder Lieutenant R.H. Armit, to New Guinea. The participants, all volunteers, would receive no pay. They would be rewarded with a plot of land. The greatest damper for the Association must have been that the British government, having learned its lesson in Fiji, left no doubt that any land title acquired from the Papuans would not be recognised should a British jurisdiction over New Guinea become a fact.

In those years nobody had an inkling of what to expect in New Guinea. It was still a largely unexplored island and the same stories circulated about it as about other islands in the Pacific prior to their colonisation. New Guinea was said to be strategically located – the Dutch envoy in Rome called New Guinea an Indies Cyprus, connecting Australia with British India and Japan¹⁴ – and to hold great wealth; the sight of coconut palms along its shores greatly contributing to such images. Or, as the Premier of New South Wales Henry Parkes put it in 1874, 'There probably is no country in the world which offers so fair and certain a field for successful colonisation as this great island, as there certainly is none so rich and attractive, and at the same time so close to British rule' (Ward 1976: 312). People caught up in a Pacific fantasy imagined that New Guinea could be put on a par with the success stories that Samoa, Hawaii and Fiji seemed to be, or that the prospects it offered resembled those of Australia. In Melbourne, *The Argus* presented New Guinea as one of the richest islands in the world:

It possesses every natural advantage for the formation of a great colony. The climate, though of course purely tropical, is not unhealthy; there are

14 Dutch envoy in Rome to Van Heeckeren 28-3-1879 (ARA FO A-dos. 110 box 218).

great tracts of exceedingly fertile soil, abundantly watered with large rivers; and there is reason to believe that minerals abound, with, for ought we know, coal among them' (*The Argus*, 11-4-1883).

Such a vast track of land, not yet claimed by any other nation, could not but titillate the imagination, not only of politicians and merchants looking for new land and new opportunities, but also of crooks. A prospectus of the Australasian Colonisation Society issued around the same time spoke about the prospect of 'a favourable site being discovered in a healthy climate'. It was very clear about what might eventually be offered:

[A] [f]irst-class harbour, at the mouth of a Navigable River, in the immediate vicinity of a large area of soil for Cotton, Tobacco, or Sugar growing, backed by Mineral bearings and Auriferous Ranges similar to what may be observed in Victoria, New South Wales, or New Zealand.

To whet the appetite of potential investors yet further, the brochure mentioned trade in *bêche-de-mer*, tortoise shells, copra and coconut oil, ebony and sandalwood, pearl shell, gold and silver, not to mention copper, lead, diamonds and coal mines; all of this was designed to make people part with their money. The prospectus even laid out the plan of a city to be built, complete with the width of the streets and the size of the plots that a certain number of shares entitled holders to.

Enthusiasm was not tempered by occasional stories about an unhealthy climate or ferocious inhabitants. Among the voices of caution was that of one Reverend MacFarlane, a clergyman who had founded the first permanent mission station in New Guinea, in Port Moresby, and had lived there for five years. In May 1879, in an effort to dissuade others from travelling to New Guinea, *The Sydney Morning Herald* warned that Europeans could not live on the island 'because fever and ague abounded' (*The Argus* 15-5-1879). And then there were the natives, who might slay people who set foot on their shores. This, *The Age* (20-3-1879) concluded, made the situation along the coast 'very unsettled'. To demonstrate this the newspaper called attention to the fate of two men, Mr Irons and Mr Willis, who had ignored warnings by a missionary not to go ashore. Seven days later they were both dead, killed by Papuans: 'They admitted that they had found Mr Willis sick of fever laying on the beach, and they had speared him. Soon after that, they had found Mr Irons walking about looking for cedar, and they killed him and cut his head off'. A group of 'native teachers and their families', employed as missionaries, did not fare much better, readers of *The Age* were made to

understand. Nine had died of fever and seven had been poisoned by natives out for their possessions. According to the newspaper, they had 'proceeded about the poisoning of the teachers with the most diabolic cunning'.

Bismarck's Reichstag debacle

In 1878, in an effort to attract new money, Godeffroy converted his private firm into a limited company, at the same time giving it a new name: the German Trading and Estate Company of the South Sea Islands in Hamburg, the *Deutsche Handels- und Plantagen-Gesellschaft der Südsee-Inseln zu Hamburg*, or DHPG for short. The issuance of shares was not a success. As yet, there was little faith in Germany's commercial circles in the profitability of the economic exploitation of the Pacific islands, and the economic and political problems in Fiji and Samoa may well have contributed to this feeling. Most of its shares were owned by Godeffroy, but due to speculation in the mining industry in Europe, which fell through, he almost went bankrupt the following year and had to pledge his shares and his South Sea estates as a security to his creditors, the British Baring Brothers and Co. and John H. Schroeder, both, it was pointed out in the Reichstag, of German origin (Koschitzky 1887-88 II: 22-25; Staley 1935: 5-6). DHPG was unable to settle Godeffroy's debts and secure the shares and estates for Germany.

The German interests in the Pacific, now represented by DHPG, had to be saved for nationalistic reasons. DHPG and its South Sea estates falling into foreign hands was presented as a blow to the prestige of the nation. All over the world, and as far away as Japan, it would be seen as a German defeat (Koschitzky 1887-88 II: 26). Closer to home, in Great Britain, the news of Godeffroy's downfall would have been greeted with malicious pleasure, and any plans to save the company with anxiety. In German minds the reason for such a reaction was clear. Because of their diligence and thoroughness, German merchants were far superior to their British counterparts in the not-yet-colonised parts of the world. The only option left to the British to beat German trade was to annex the regions where German settlers were active (as they had done in Fiji). London only refrained from such annexations out of awe for the German Empire, Heinrich von Kusserow – a senior civil servant at the Foreign Office and son-in-law of the influential banker and *Geheimer Kommerzienrat* Adolph von Hanseemann (Staley 1935: 6) – explained in the Reichstag.

Afraid of an English or American takeover, and in view of the vital position of DHPG in the German commercial activities in the Pacific, Bismarck

suggested to the Reichstag that the government should provide financial support to the firm; thus, going beyond an occasional show of force by German naval vessels to protect the German economic interests in the South Pacific. Bankruptcy might leave the door wide open for an advance of 'the British and Americans who already for a long time were scheming against the preponderance of the Germans' in Samoa (Koschitzky 1887-88 I: 143). For the first time, and it may have helped that one of the Godeffroys was a personal friend of his, Bismarck tried to involve the German Empire directly in the business interests of German nationals and firms in Asia and Africa (Masterman 1934: 67). A rescue plan was developed. In return for financial backing by the government, a number of German financiers set up a consortium to save DHPG. The initiative was taken by Adolph von Hanseemann, 'one of the richest bankers of the Bismarck era', and Bismarck's private banker Gerson von Bleichröder, another successful German tycoon, who was also involved by Bismarck in the financial dealings connected with the political plans he made (One Man – One Bank 2003; Steinberg 2011: 227). A *Seehandels-Gesellschaft* (Maritime Trading Company) was to buy up the Godeffroy estates. In turn, the German government would provide a dividend guarantee. It would reserve money – a maximum of ten million Marks was agreed upon – to assure the investors a net profit of 4.5 per cent on the invested initial capital, and this for a period of ten years. Those in favour of government support played a fiercely nationalist, anti-British card, hinting at the territorial greed of Great Britain and its Pacific colonies. Others should not reap the harvest of German labour.

The efforts were in vain. Doubts about the feasibility of the Pacific endeavour prevailed. If the estates in Samoa did indeed form a profitable prospect financially, strong firms would certainly have been eager to step in without the promise of a financial guarantee by the state. Similar questions were raised about the prospects of trade. Bamberger made disparaging remarks about German trade with Samoa consisting of 'shotguns, gunpowder, brandy, beer and some cotton, which fitted the sartorial needs of the Samoans, because they wrap a piece of it around the loins' (Gründer 1999: 77). On 27 April 1880 Bismarck failed to get the support of the Reichstag for his Samoan Subsidy Bill. He suffered an embarrassing defeat: 128 representatives voted against, 112 in favour (Koschitzky 1887-88 II: 22-9). In the Bundesrat opposition also prevailed.

Nevertheless, for those in favour of German imperialism something good came out of the Samoa debate. Defeated in the Reichstag, proponents of colonisation started a campaign to mobilise public opinion in support of DHPG and the German presence in the Pacific. Wanting to outdo 'the

jealously admired Englishmen', made them long for a German India in Africa and a German Hong Kong in the Far East (Graichen and Gründer 2005: 82). In December 1882 the *Deutscher Kolonialverein*, German Colonial League, with its journal the *Kolonialzeitung* (first published in January 1884) was founded in Frankfurt; a fact which was immediately reported by the British ambassador in Berlin to the Foreign Office in London.¹⁵ Influenced by the swelling campaign in Germany for the acquisition of colonies, people – according to the British, mostly ordinary citizens and clergymen¹⁶ – parted with their money to support DHPG (Nuhn 2002: 37).

The *Deutscher Kolonialverein* stressed that colonies would provide Germany with new markets and new investment opportunities. Similar to the opponents of a colonial policy, it showed itself not to be in favour of large agricultural colonies – arguing that all the land in the temperate zones was already occupied by others – leaving to Germany regions not fit for Europeans to employ in the agricultural sector. What it pleaded for was mercantile stations in the tropics.¹⁷ As an additional argument, also advanced by other German nationalists, the Colonial League pointed out that colonies would provide Germans who, out of economic necessity, had to consider migration an alternative to the United States or South America. Emigrants should not settle in countries like the United States and Australia, which were Germany's economic rivals. Just as Russia had Siberia, and Great Britain and the Netherlands had their colonies for their excess population, Germany should have its own colonial possessions where such people could go and find employment (Hardy and Dumke 1949: 386; *De Indische Gids* 1887, p.1388).

For Bismarck, the defeat in the Reichstag in April 1880 was difficult to swallow. In the following years he would repeatedly stress that the opposition against his colonial policy was directed against him personally and not against his plans. According to him, such an attitude played into the hands of Great Britain and did not represent public opinion in Germany: 'It is probably that had the country been consulted, the verdict would have been very different' (Townsend 1930: 74). And in 1883, still chagrined over the opposition he encountered in the Reichstag, he would say that colonies 'only belong to a mother country in which national feeling is stronger than

15 Ampthill to Granville 8-12-1882 (PRO FO 534 22). In 1884 a *Gesellschaft für Deutsche Kolonisation* (Society for German Colonization) would follow. In 1887 the two merged in the *Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft* (German Colonial Society) (Gründer 1999: 64-5, Graichen und Gründer 2005: 85).

16 Powell to Salisbury 25-2-1887 (PRO FO 534 35).

17 Ampthill to Granville 14-2-1883 (PRO FO 534 22).

party spirit'. What could be done, he continued, was 'only support of trading companies; but even for that it would be necessary to have a Reichstag which would have other and higher objectives than constant discussions and the creation of difficulties for the administration' (ibid.: 77). The following year he would even, observing enthusiastic popular support for his colonial policy, speak of a *Völkerfrühling*, a dawn of the nation. The nationalistic feelings that had spread were, as Bismarck worded it, a sure sign of 'God's blessing of German policy since 1866', the year the *Norddeutscher Bund* was established, which had continued after the 'big victory' of 1870 (Koschitzky 1887-88 I: 271, 276).

The New Guinea expedition

Bismarck's defeat in the Reichstag meant that the *Seehandels-Gesellschaft* had to be liquidated. What rested was to save and reorganise the ailing DHPG. To achieve this the bank consortium of Hansemann and Bleichröder stepped in. Hansemann and Bleichröder had great plans: Still, in the autumn of 1880 in a memorandum to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and written at the request of Bismarck himself, Hansemann suggested that Germany should take possession of the northeastern part of New Guinea, and the islands of New Britain and New Ireland. There was still much 'vacant' territory in the Pacific. For various reasons Germany was entitled to part of it. This right rested, Hansemann wrote, on 'the numerous German settlements and trading posts scattered over many islands, on the considerable share of its merchant flag in the shipping of the South Sea, on the high esteem its sea power enjoys in the Pacific, and on the ports which its sea power has secured'. German trade had to 'emancipate' itself from the dominant role the British claimed for the ports of Sydney and Auckland in Pacific sea trade. The whole of the non-Dutch portion of New Guinea should also be prevented from becoming British. German explorers had to find the 'best harbours' along the north coast of New Guinea. His consortium would establish trading posts at all suitable places along the north coast, which concurrently could serve as coaling stations for the German navy. Hansemann, after whom a mountain and a coastal region in New Guinea were to be named, praised the island's fertility, which would make the development of an estate economy possible. Nor did he fail to mention that the climate along the north coast of New Guinea would not pose the same problems as it did in the south. Equally, the warlike tribes living in the north would pose no problem: Germany's 'military organisational skills' could 'discipline' them

and use their warlike mentality for the defence of the colony. Hansemann was confident that New Guinea had a large potential for the development of a plantation culture, and that its harbours could become the centre of Pacific shipping. In so many words, he also hinted that New Guinea might be a stepping stone from which to acquire part of the Malay Archipelago. The Dutch had only transformed Java into a prime example of colonisation, but the rest of the Archipelago, equally richly endowed with natural resources, had remained underdeveloped.¹⁸

The Samoan Subsidy Bill debate had clearly shown that a majority of the Reichstag members opposed an active German colonial policy. In February 1881, aware that the Reichstag would never consent to such plans, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on behalf of Bismarck, had to inform Hansemann that he could not count on any government support, apart from naval and consular protection (Koschitzky 1887-88 II: 202). The bankers had to postpone their plans. The consortium continued to work in secret in order to avoid attention abroad and steer clear of the complications plans for the colonisation of New Guinea might have for Germany's relations with Great Britain and its Australian colonies. DHPG, with Mioko as its main settlement in the New Britain Archipelago, was to be its vehicle. The Robertson & Hearnshaw Company was also contacted, but refused to cooperate with DHPG.

In 1882, true to their words, Hansemann and Bleichröder founded the Neuguinea-Konsortium. Rumours about the consortium's activities began to circulate in 1883. In March the Antwerp newspaper *Le Précurseur* carried a report of a company to be formed in Germany to colonise New Guinea. One of its first steps on the way to achieving its ambition was the intention to equip a scientific expedition for the exploration of the island. The *Précurseur* revealed that the company, which was to take the same form as the North Borneo Company, wanted to establish a 'first-class colony', fashioned after the Dutch model. No problems were expected, it was added, as that part of the island belonged to no European power.¹⁹ In papers submitted to the British Parliament, there was also a note by the British ambassador in Berlin dated May 1883 about a company that had been recently founded in Germany, and which was designed to facilitate the colonisation of New Guinea.²⁰

18 Hansemann to Ministry of Foreign Affairs 9-9-1880 (in Gründer 1999: 78-80), Koschitzky 1887-1888 II: 202.

19 Lumley to Granville 31-3-1883 (PRO FO 534 22).

20 De Willebois to envoy in Berlin 28-7-1883 (ARA A-Dos. 110 box 218).

The Queensland annexation

In Australia in the meanwhile, in February 1883, *The Sydney Morning Herald* published a translation of an article in the *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung* of November 1882 in favour of a German occupation of the north coast of New Guinea. The ensuing discussions in the Australian press contributed to an atmosphere of 'widespread fears and rumours as to an impending occupation of New Guinea by Germany' (Legge 1956: 20). Alarmed, the Premier of Queensland, Sir Thomas McIlwraith, contacted London. Through the Agent-General for Queensland in London, Thomas Archer, he informed Derby of 'the strong feeling which prevailed in the Colony in favour of the annexation of New Guinea or at least of that portion of it which most nearly adjoins the Australian coast'.²¹

On 26 February McIlwraith reported to London that Queensland was prepared to bear the cost of the annexation. The commitment did not satisfy Derby, who wrote back that he needed firm assurances that money was indeed forthcoming, also in the future. McIlwraith did not await the results of the deliberations and instructed Henry Marjoribanks Chester, the police magistrate on Thursday Island in Torres Strait, to sail to Port Moresby and take possession of eastern New Guinea. On 4 April 1883 Chester hoisted the British flag at Port Moresby. It did not go completely peacefully: '[A]s befitted an old naval officer, [Chester] took the opportunity of shelling a warlike party of Motu who were thought to threaten the security of the port'.²²

The annexation took many in Europe by surprise, including Colonial Secretary Derby himself. A few days later when the annexation was discussed in the House of Lords, Derby had little to tell, except that he had been 'quite unprepared' and that the government did not yet want to commit itself before it had received more news from Australia. Derby explained that after meeting Archer, he had written to McIlwraith, avoiding any wording that might be construed either as a positive or negative response. Before a reply by mail could reach London, he had learned about the annexation from a 'Reuter telegram' in the London newspapers. Immediately, he had sent a telegram to McIlwraith. McIlwraith also replied by wire. In his telegram he confirmed that Queensland had taken possession of New Guinea (in the Netherlands there was some fear that the broad wording included the

21 Derby in House of Lords 20-4-1883 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1883/apr-20/question-observations).

22 Chester, Henry Marjoribanks (1832-1914) (adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A030365b.htm).

Dutch part of the island as well, or might be interpreted in this way) 'in Her Majesty's name' and explained that this step had been taken to prevent any other power from annexing the island. Derby concluded that this was all that had passed and thought it better not to comment on the annexation until Queensland had provided him, by mail, with more detailed information.²³

From the beginning it was clear that the British government was not happy with the self-willed attitude of Queensland. As Derby was to explain in the House of Lords, 'the annexation even of an island in the Pacific may raise a question of foreign policy in which the Imperial Government is very deeply concerned'.²⁴ That McIlwraith had not asked for permission and had not informed London beforehand was a source of irritation. A wire to London would only have caused a delay of 24 hours, Derby stated in the House of Lords, suggesting that the Queensland authorities had been well aware that the government's answer would have been a 'No' and had tried to force their hand.²⁵ Derby himself, moreover, was no advocate of adding new territories to the British Empire. The British responsibilities with 'Possessions scattered ... over every part of the world' were already heavy enough.²⁶ Derby did not look forward to the annexation of a virtually unknown and vast region inhabited, it was thought in those days, by three to four million people. Besides the costs involved in administering the population, there was the problem of policing them, not to speak of the not unlikely prospect that force had to be used to have the Papuans accept British rule. Great Britain could not take on the administration of New Guinea, because of the 'enormous extent of territory, the absolute unknown character of the interior, the certainty that the large Native population, numbering several millions, would object to foreign annexation, and the enormous expense'.²⁷

There was also the taxpayer to consider. Ten years earlier it had made a bad impression in London that the Australian colonies had refused to share in the costs of the annexation of Fiji. The same issue emerged with regard to New Guinea. Could the British government justify that the people of the home country bore all the immediate and future costs of the annexation of a region in the world that would hardly bring it any profit? Would Parliament consent? The Queensland commitment that it was prepared to bear

23 Derby in House of Lords 20-4-1883 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1883/apr/20/question-observations).

24 Derby in House of Lords 2-7-1883 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1883/july/2/motion-for-papers).

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

the costs of the annexation did not make a great impression. In London it was felt that Queensland, with its small population, would not be able to keep up its promise, neither financially nor in providing the manpower needed for such a venture. Or, as former Colonial Secretary Carnarvon said, Queensland would not be able to bear the costs of an annexation, 'because Queensland, though a prosperous and thriving Colony, had not more than 250,000 of population, and £2,000,000 of income'.²⁸

It also did not help the Queensland cause that one of the first acts after the annexation was sending a labour recruitment ship to New Guinea. In Germany, as well as in Great Britain, the move was detested. In Germany it added to the impression that Australia aimed at undermining German commerce in the Pacific by preventing it from getting the labour its estates needed (Nuhn 2002: 59). In Great Britain the fact that the annexation had brought New Guinea under the Queensland labour regulations, which were less strict than those of the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific, made an unfavourable impression. It gave rise to the suspicion that the desire to secure an influx of Islanders for labour on the estates had been the main reason for the annexation. It signified, as a correspondent of *The Times* (15-5-1883) put it, 'the perversion of New Guinea into a miserable preserve of forced labour for the Queensland sugar plantations under the disgraced authority of the British flag'. For some the labour recruiting issue formed an argument for turning New Guinea into a Crown Colony, placing it under the jurisdiction of London and not that of the Australian colonies.

It took the British government, which had just become entangled in Egypt, about three months to decide, not least because consultation with Queensland – because of the nature of the matter at stake, and maybe also because of the costs involved – had to be conducted by mail and not by wire. In early July, reproving the Queensland administration for having exceeded its powers, the home government cancelled the annexation. London could not agree to the 'singular and unusual proceeding'.²⁹ On 2 July Derby defended the decision during a debate in the House of Lords. He explained that the additional information he had received from Australia had not been satisfactory. It spoke, he said, avoiding any mention of Germany, of 'strong reports throughout Australia of intentions of some Power – nobody knew what Power – to seize upon some part – nobody knew what part – of

28 Carnarvon in House of Lords 2-7-1883 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1883/july2/motion-for-papers).

29 Derby in House of Lords 2-7-1883 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1883/july2/motion-for-papers).

New Guinea'.³⁰ Derby claimed, and he would do so a number of times, that there was not the least bit of proof to substantiate the rumours about an impending foreign occupation:

They were simply a creation of the anxiety of the Colonists in this subject; and, as a matter of fact – and, of course, I have taken all possible pains to inquire – we are tolerably well assured that, as regards the leading European Powers, – that is to say, the only Powers that are at all likely to interfere in such a matter – no such intention is entertained.³¹

He assured the House of Lords, or rather the Australian people, that London would 'not view it as a friendly act' when a foreign nation attempted to establish a settlement in New Guinea.³² The Australian colonies were made to understand that in important matters such as an annexation London had to be informed in advance by wire.³³

In spite of its reservations, the British government was prepared to make some concessions, provided that the political and economic costs would not be substantial. Derby shared the view that Queensland could not take on the costs of the administration of New Guinea alone. Queensland itself still had vast unsettled territories, a small population, and its capital, Brisbane, was far away from New Guinea, some 1,000 miles. 'If, therefore, anything is to be done in the way of conquering and administering New Guinea, one thing is clear – that it must be done by the Imperial Government, or the Australian Colonies acting together, or by those two agencies combined'.³⁴

On 11 July 1883 Derby informed the Governor of Queensland, Arthur Hunter Palmer, of this possibility. London showed itself sensitive to the fear of a foreign penal colony or military station in New Guinea; though Derby left no doubt that he himself did not share such anxieties. As he had stated a few days earlier, the Australian colonies underrated 'their own powers and their own importance'.³⁵ There was no need of British control over the millions of Papuans in the interior about whom little or nothing was known. Carefully, any impression was avoided that the British government condoned an extension of labour trade. Responding to the argument that an

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Service to Lord Loch 20-12-1884 (home.vicnet.net.au/~centfed/defence/def_e3.htm).

34 Derby in House of Lords 2-7-1883 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1883/july2/motion-for-papers).

35 Ibid.

annexation of New Guinea would provide Queensland with a new reservoir from which to recruit labour, it was pointed out that the Papuans certainly would not be willing to work on the estates of their own free will. It was an additional reason to reject an annexation of the island.

What London might be prepared to do, it was hinted, was to establish control over the coast of New Guinea. One of the ways this might be accomplished was by strengthening the presence of the British High Commissioner for the Western Pacific in New Guinea. When Queensland, if it had to be in cooperation with the other Australian colonies, would finance the stationing of one or more Deputy Commissioners in New Guinea, London might expand the British naval station in Australia. When he proposed this, Derby was well aware that the jurisdiction of the High Commissioner only extended to British subjects. His suggestion was a response to the outcries in Great Britain and Australia about the excesses of labour trade and the other abuses committed by white settlers. He ventured that London could enter into negotiations on this point with other countries. Derby did not worry about the local population: 'As to the Natives, I believe it would be seldom necessary to exercise jurisdiction over them, if their rights or their lands were not interfered with'.³⁶

In May 1884 Derby became more specific. In a circular dispatch to the Australian colonies and New Zealand he wrote that the British government was prepared to station a High Commissioner 'on or near the eastern coasts of New Guinea', providing that the Australian colonies contributed £15,000 to furnish this functionary with a steamship and a staff; expenditures would be accounted for by the British government.³⁷ He forgot to mention whether an annual or once-only contribution was meant, which would later lead to some complications (Legge 1956: 36); his Under-Secretary Evelyn Ashley would correct this in July in the House of Commons; it was annually.³⁸ Derby spoke of a precautionary measure, a step to provide government protection to British citizens in case a threat to their safety arose. He again gave the impression that he considered foreign annexation unlikely, or, as he wrote, 'Her Majesty's Government are confident that no Foreign Power contemplates interference with New Guinea'.³⁹ Nevertheless, Derby now also

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Evelyn Ashley in House of Commons 7-7-1884 ([hansard.millbanksystems.com./commons,1884/jul/07/western-pacific-the-australian-colonies](http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1884/jul/07/western-pacific-the-australian-colonies)).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Service to Lord Loch 20-12-1884 (home.vicnet.net.au/~centfed/defence/def_e3.htm).

felt some urgency. As explained in his dispatch, the Australian colonies had not yet replied to his suggestion of sharing the costs, while it was

always possible that the subjects of a Foreign Power might require the protection or intervention of their Government; and British subjects, also, by coming into collision with the Natives, or by setting up claims to land, might cause complications which would give much trouble hereafter.⁴⁰

This was as far as the British government wanted to go. Any expansion should remain confined to the coast of New Guinea. Already reluctant to take this step, London had no desire to add still more islands in the Western Pacific to the British Empire. Derby could not agree to the larger territorial ambitions of Australia and New Zealand. Probably also fearing international complications, British nationals in the Pacific were reminded of the fact that there were international agreements on the independence of a number of the island groups, such as Samoa and the New Hebrides; while islands like New Britain and New Ireland, where Germans had their trading posts, were 'for the most part, of great size, and inhabited by warlike and cannibal tribes'.⁴¹

In Australia such reluctance did not go down well. There was, Legge (1956: 29) concludes, an 'extraordinary unanimity of Australian opinion' about the incorporation of New Guinea. The government in London was viewed as being characterised by, as the newspaper *The Argus* put it on 11 April 1883, 'an extreme reluctance to accept fresh responsibilities'. If it had not been for that hesitation, *The Argus* (11-10-1884) wrote on another occasion, testifying to a rather idyllic view of the conditions in New Guinea, Australians 'would have had herds grazing in the grass lands before now, and possibly sugar mills at work on some of the rivers' there.

Strictly speaking, Derby's words in the House of Lords about Germany not aspiring to a colony in New Guinea were within the bounds of truth, but this did not mean that, as the founding of the Neuguinea-Konsortium indicated, no German plans were made to gain control over part of New Guinea. German traders were well-established in the New Britain Archipelago. In September 1883 Baron von Plessen, the German Chargé d'Affaires in London, could inform the British government that DHPG, by now simply

40 Ashley in House of Commons 7-7-1884 ([hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons,1884/jul/07/western-pacific-the-australian-colonies](http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1884/jul/07/western-pacific-the-australian-colonies)).

41 The Colonial Office to the Agents General of New South Wales, New Zealand, Queensland and Victoria 31-8-1883.

referred to by insiders as the German Firm or just The Firm, had taken over the last Australian trading post in that region, and that there were, in total, eighteen German stations in the islands. These stations, it was maliciously noted in *The Argus* (27-10-1884) a few months later, probably consisted of 'huts of traders who sell arms and stores to the natives in return for copra, bêche-de-mer, pearl-shell, and tortoise-shell, and who act as recruiting agents for Samoa'. How large or how small these posts were did not matter much; more important was that German commercial circles wanted to expand their business to the opposite north coast of East New Guinea.

