

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE PRIZE PAPERS TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF NEUTRAL NAVIGATION IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 18TH CENTURY

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In 1793, a grain crisis touched France while major European powers joined forces against the French revolution

This conflict involved four actors:

- 1) The revolutionary government
- 2) Great Britain
- 3) The grain-producing countries
- 4) The neutral Northern powers

The British privateers and the Navy prevented all the ships to sail towards France

- For neutral countries it was a total violation of the principles of trade with the belligerent powers that usually accepted free trade of foodstuffs and continued to supply France

STARVING THE REBELS



The war was declared on the first of February 1793

- From February orders were given to capture all French ships and goods
- Instructions of 8th June 1793/

•Art 1: That it shall be lawful to stop and detain all ships loaded wholly or in part with corn, flour, or meal, bound to any port in France; and to send them to such ports as shall be most convenient in order that such corn, meal, or flour, may be purchased on behalf of his Majesty's government, and the ships be released after such purchase, and after a due allowance for freight, or that the masters such ships on giving due security, to be approved of by the Court of Admiralty, be permitted to proceed to dispose of their cargoes of corn, meal, or flour, in the ports of any country, in amity with his Majesty."

Additional Instructions to the Commanders of his Majesty ships of war and Privateers
given at the Court of St James's, the 8th day of June 1793

London justified the plan to starve France

- First, the war has been declared by a government not recognized by the British authorities
 - Thus, since the grain trade was organized by an illegitimate government it was normal to stop the supply
- It was the only solution to force the enemy to make peace

- These justifications did not mention the needs of cereals in Great Britain because of poor harvests

STANDING INTERROGATORIES *to be administered on Behalf of our Sovereign Lord GEORGE the Third, by the Grace of God of Great Britain, France and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith; To all Commanders, Masters, Officers, Mariners, and other Persons found on board any Ship or Vessel which hath been or shall be seized or taken as Prize by any of his Majesty's Ships or Vessels of War, or by Merchant Ships or Vessels which have, or shall have, Commissions or Letters of Marque and Reprizals, concerning such captured Ships, Vessels, or any Goods, Wares, and Merchandizes on board the same, examined as Witnesses in preparatory, during the present Hostilities.*

1. **L**ET each Witness be interrogated to every of the following Questions and their Answers to each, severally written down:

WHERE were you born, and where have you lived for these seven Years last past? Where do you now live, and how long have you lived in that Place? To what Prince or State, or to whom are you, or have you ever been a Subject, and of what Cities or Towns have you been admitted a Burgher or Freeman, and at what Time, and in what Manner, were you so admitted?

Examination of the cargoes

- The questions to be asked separately to the captain and several crew members were listed on a preprinted document to confuse smugglers.
- The examination was divided into 34 points representing around 150 questions



ADDITIONAL INTERROGATORIES *to be administered to the Witnesses examined in preparatory, in the Cases of any Foreign Ships which now are or may hereafter be brought into the Ports of this Kingdom, carrying Corn or other Provisions, or Naval or Military Stores, from the Ports of Denmark and Norway, or from any other Ports in the North of Europe.*

For vessels from Northern Europe a second supplementary examination of 20 points and about 50 questions were added

The interrogatory looked like a police investigation

- The questions were repeated and overlapping in various forms to confuse the neutrals
- The reports were analyzed, the answers compared and a decision was quickly taken
- In case of doubt but also to supply Britain in cereals, the vessels were seized

14 INTERROGATE. Do you not know, have you not heard, or do you not believe, That Messrs. De la Marre, Duveyrier, and Caftera, French Commissioners or Agents at Copenhagen, have, in the course of last Year, and up to the Present Time, Freightd a very great Number of Danish, Swedish, Hamburg, and other Ships; and have Dispatched them from the Ports of Denmark and Sweden, and other Northern Ports, with Cargoes of Provisions, and Naval and Military Stores, on Account, and for the Supply of France, under Fictitious Papers, in respect to the Property of such Cargoes, and Fictitious also as to the Destination? How many of such Ships have been so Freightd by them, and what were their Names, and the Names of the Masters of such Ships, or any of them, to the best of your Knowledge, Information, and Belief?

15 INTERROGATE. Do you know, or have you had any Connections in Trade with Mr. Elick Backman, or Messrs. Tournier, Merchants at Gottenburgh, Mr. Sieveking, Messrs. Dennas and Lubbert, Mr. Ernst, Mr. Parish, Mr. Amberg, Mr. Chapeaurouge, Mr. Olivier, Messrs. Pierre, Boué and Sons, Mr. Jacob Burmester; the Senator Rucker, the Senator Kleucker, the Senator Poppe, the Senator Westphal, the Senator Adami, Henry Westphal, Mr. Gabe, Mr. Mackelers, Pierre, Springhorn, Mr. Glasshoff the younger, Jan David Bredermann, Mr. Wippe, Mr. Wiper, Mr. Wilcke, Jacob Hahn, Pierre Janfen, Henry Hansen, Henry Doltz, all Merchants at Hamburg; Mr. Otto Matthies, Mathias Mattheies, Jan Ernest Matthiesen, Henry Kuper, Bohne Hansen, Mr. Theden, Mr. Tandau, and Mr. Bickers, all Merchants at Altona; the French Agents Albite, Honnore, Delamaire, and Ceteraij residing at or near Altona; Messrs. Hansen, Merchants at Randers; or Mr. J. Gummer, Merchant at Stockholm, or any, or either, and which of them? Do you not know, have you not heard, or do you not believe, that some one or more of the Persons abovementioned, or some other Person or Persons, and who in particular, not mentioned by Name in the Ship Papers, had some and what Interest in, or controul over, or connection with, the Cargo of the Ship in question, either directly or indirectly? Can you take upon Yourself to Swear positively, that no one of such abovenamed Persons, or any other Person or Persons not mentioned in the Ship Papers, had any such Interest in, Controul over, or Connection with the Cargo in question.

INTERROGATE

The British were extremely knowledgeable about the traffic and the merchants who participated in such trades

- To do this, the British authorities set up an intelligence service to obtain information concerning the French trade
- Fabre d'Eglantine, compared these agents to "vampires" ordered by the "infernal genius" of Downing Street that is to say William Pitt whose mission was to destabilize the Republic by any means

392 Danish ships seized by the British during the years 1793, 1794 and 1795 (list not exhaustive)

A BLESSED TIME FOR THE NEUTRALS



Lettre de Pierre Peschier de Copenhague à Gildemester de Lisbonne

Navigation documents,
such as bills of lading or
charter parties, indicated
fictitious destinations

The traders used their
correspondents who
certified that the
shipments were intended
for them

Mr. Gildemester

Lisbonne

Copenhague le 13 mai 1794

Messieurs

Conformément à ma lettre du 8 janvier dernier, j'ai l'honneur de vous remettre sous ce pli connaissance du capitaine Thomas Atlefssen pour :

979 tonneaux froment chargés à bord du navire danois *Isabella Margaretha* à votre adresse. Je vous prie de recevoir ce chargement bien duement et d'en prévenir la vente la plus avantageuse... J'espère que vous y réussirez parce que je vous envoie que du très bon et excellent froment de la Baltique.

J'ai remis facture au capitaine s'élevant avec les frais à courant danois Rx 9814. C'est ce qu'il me revient et de là vous devez tabler les prix pour me faire jouir d'un petit bénéfice. Vous ajouterez au montant de la facture le fret à payer au capitaine montant à f. 3582.5 courant de Hollande notté au pied de la facture pour votre gouverne. Au reste, je compte sur vos bons soins pour mes intérêts et me réfère à ma lettre qui vous parviendra par la poste, celle-ci n'étant que pour vous adresser le capitaine Thomas Atlefssen que je vous recommande tout particulièrement.

J'ai l'honneur d'être avec une parfaite considération...

Pierre Peschier

The most common destinations were Ostend, San Sebastián, Bilbao and Lisbon

- Thus, “vessels sailing along the coasts of France will try to find a port and meet a French vessel. The captain will let himself be seized and taken to this port. Our goal will be fulfilled. ”

Ships loaded with grains bound to France (Delamarre, French agent in Copenhagen)

Date	Ship	Captain	From	To	M	Q
04-août	Le Gustave	Olof Nordstrøm	Copenhagen	Lisbon	Tonde	880
06-août	La Catherine et Sophie	Paul Christensen	Copenhagen	Lisbon	Last	66
10-août	La Dorothée Margretha	Herm. Christ. Fries	Danzig	Bilbao	Last	41
06-août	La Fortune	Bane Pet. Pauelsen	Copenhagen	Lisbon	Tonde	2090
03-août	Anna Cecilia	Peter Möller	Pillau	Lisbon	Last	100
09-août	Birgita Maria	Anders Andersen	Copenhagen	Lisbon	Tonde	2530
07-août	Jacob Zacharias et trois sœurs	Nicolaj Heiss	Copenhagen	Lisbon	Tonde	2948
06-août	Les Trois sœurs	Lars Ohnhamer	Dantig	Bilbao	Last	42
09-août	Le Neptune	Paul Nilson	Copenhagen	Coruna	Tonde	1540
06-août	Frederic Gustave	Jens Petersen	Pillau	Bilbao	Last	70
06-août	Le Finland	Boye Petersen Sen.	Copenhagen	Bilbao	Tonde	2200
06-août	Nicolay Martha	Reinerts Wattne	Pillau	Bilbao	Last	110

According to the American merchant Swan : “The agents that we have in the various ports of the Baltic have set up such an intelligent way of operating there that we are sure that of all our shipments are safe from all risks of war ... “

Coding system: "We have established in our correspondence a way of expressing ourselves which ... could not compromise our cargoes. It is agreed that Le Havre is called Falmouth, Brest Saint Sebastien ...”

The charter contracts for neutral vessels loading in Barbary states indicated "that the return destination from Barbary was stipulated for Genoa only by simulation and to better cement the expedition but in reality the only destination was Marseille.”

Pierre Peschier from Copenhagen

- Huguenot born in Switzerland who specialized in the grain trade from the ports of the Baltic, Denmark and Hamburg
- In reality, he was a businessman working for Ernst Schimmelmann, the Minister of Finance of the Scandinavian kingdom
 - Schimmelmann regularly speculated on the benefits of Danish neutrality in European conflicts with members of the Danish government
- No doubt that during the Revolutionary Wars these men had also invested in grain trade.



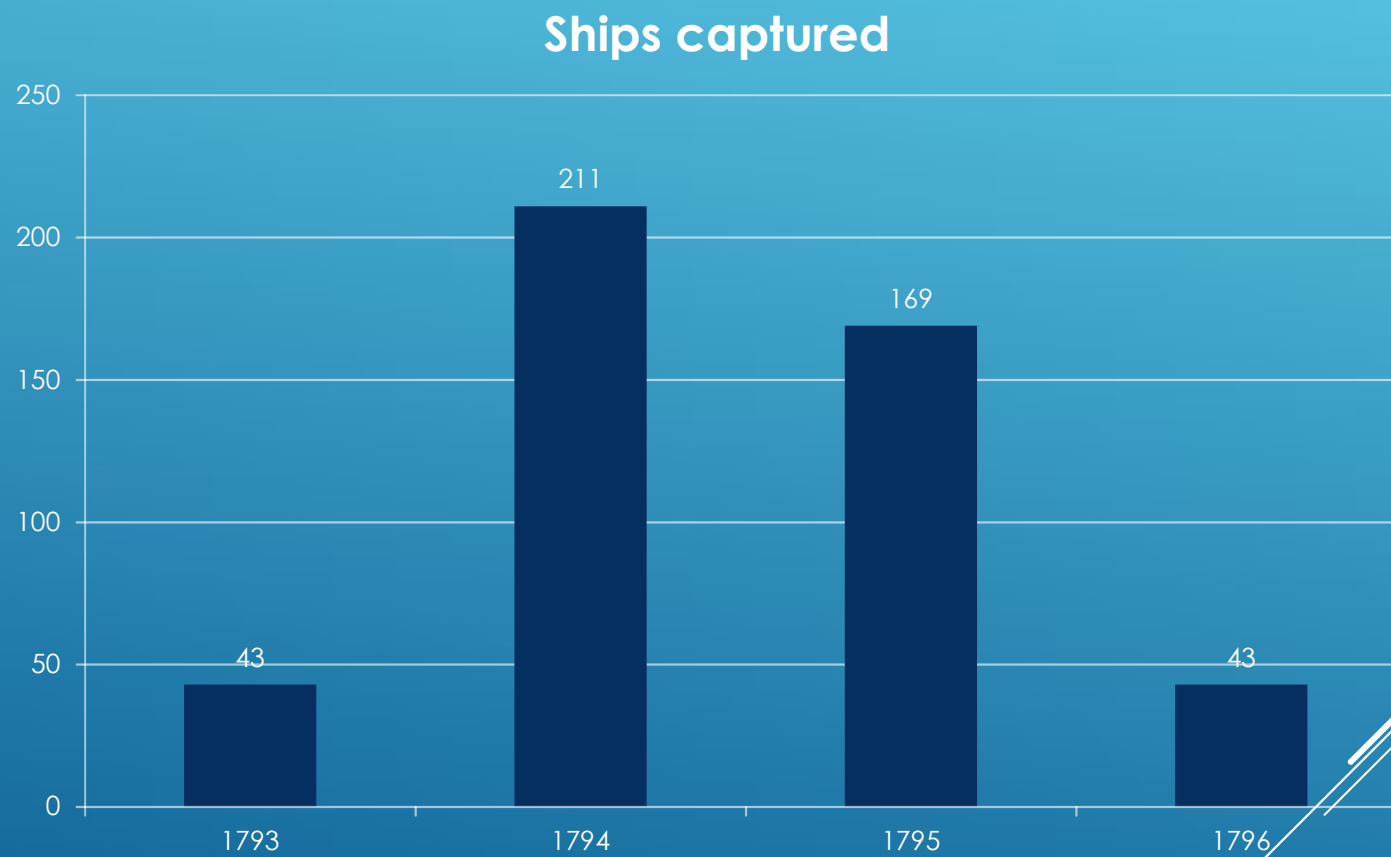
THE RESULTS OF THE BLOCKADE



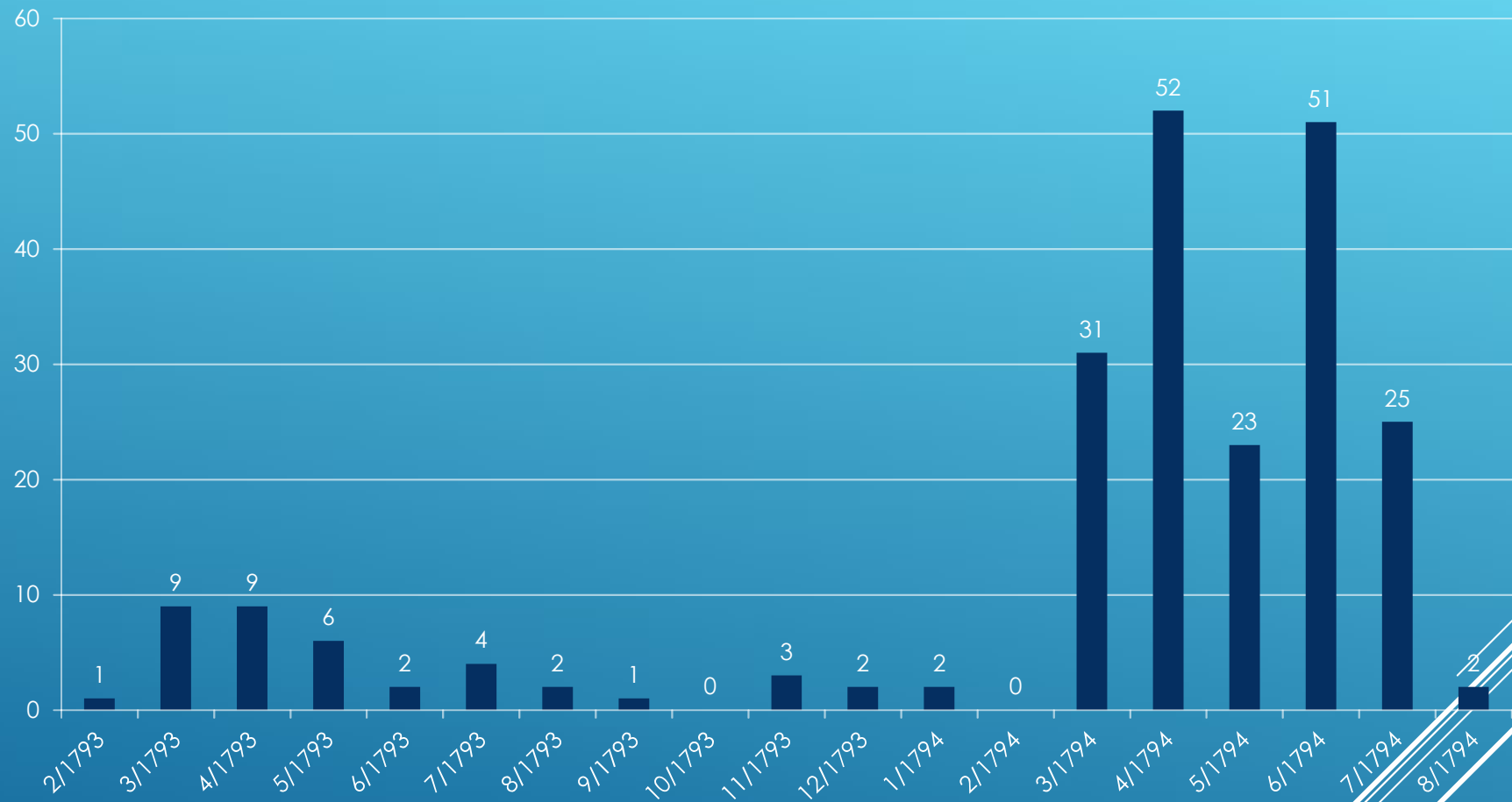
The application of the blockade was not systematic

- On June 29, 1793, the Danish consul in Bordeaux remarked: « it seems that the English are currently allowing neutral ships loaded with wheat to go to France. Two Danish ships and one from Hamburg have just arrived in our port after having been rigorously inspected at sea »
- The rules of June 1793 were deleted in August 1794 and reintroduced in the spring of 1795
 - At this date England was suffering from poor harvests and this was a way to cope with its difficulties

The number of ships seized varied according to the period



Ships captured (February 1793-August 1794)



France continued to receive foodstuff

- The risks were limited for the neutrals because the British were buying the goods and paying the freight
- When the ships arrived in France the profits were important, especially as payments were made with a very favorable exchange rate in luxury goods and confiscated objects (furniture, books, mirrors...)
- Difficulties to know exactly the number of ships and the quantities of cereals that came to France
 - The French administration was disorganized and port records were very sketchy or nonexistent

1489. Peter Lausteen af og fra Kiø-
benhavn, til Lisabon, med. -
1500. Ldr fremmedgrynne. 75: -
1/2, at ring 3: -
Den 6te 72: -

November 5 1794

Peter Lausteen af og fra Kiøbenhavn til
Lisabon med 1500 tdr fremmed hvede

95. Peter Lausten af og til Kiøbenhavn
fra Bordeaux, med. -
131 1/2 Ldr Stadt Vin. 227 1/2 -
1/2, at ring 2: - 3: -
Den 6te 218 1/2 - 18: -

January 4 1795

Peter Lausten af og til Kiøbenhavn fra
Bordeaux med 131 1/2 fade Stadt Vin

Sound Toll Registers

- Many ships indicating to go to Bilbao and Lisbon on their westward voyage had French products loaded in Bordeaux or Le Havre when crossing the Sound eastward on their way back to the Baltic

Large quantities of grains from the Baltic entered in France

- The information given by French sources for 1793-1794 and 1795 gave the quantity of 36,000 tonnes
- However, according to the Sound's Registers, deliveries were undoubtedly close to 100,000 tonnes

Ships loaded with grains to France ?

To	From	1793	1794	1795
Ostende				
•	Copenhagen		3	48
•	Memel		1	
			4 ships	48 ships
			403 tonnes	6 907 tonnes
France				
•	Bayonne	1	24	6
•	Bordeaux	3	2	5
•	Nantes -Lorient		3	3
•	Le Havre-Rouen	1	1	17
•	Boulogne- St Val.-Dieppe			4
•	Dunkerque			55
•	France			4
		5 ships	30 ships	94 ships
		580 tons	3 805 tons	19 365 tons
Bilbao				
•	Copenhagen	19	22	3
•	Königsberg	8	1	
•	Dantzig	12	16	
•	Memel	2	1	
•	Libau	8	14	
•	Pillau	9		
•	Riga	1		
•	Rostock-Wismar			6
		59 ships	54 ships	9 ships
		7 153 tons	28 205 tons	784 tons
Lisbonne				
•	Copenhagen	5	54	9
•	Königsberg -Memel	9	9	
•	Dantzig	10	30	2
•	Libau	4	3	
•	Pillau	16	35	
•	Riga	2	6	3
•	Autres	5	13	14
		51 ships	150 ships	28 ships
		7 631 tons	13 220 tons	4 977 tons
Total		15 264 tons	45 623 tons	23 023 tons

CONCLUSION



The failure of the British strategy

Journey	Sund (STR)	British prize (PRO)
Copenhagen-Ostende	1	0
Copenhagen-Le Havre	2	0
Copenhagen-Rouen	1	0
Copenhagen-Bordeaux	17	3
Copenhagen-San Sebastian	4	0
Copenhagen-Bilbao	28	7
Copenhagen-Porto	1	0
Copenhagen-Lisbonne	47	10
Copenhagen-Cadix	5	1
Copenhagen-Barcelone	3	0
Copenhagen-Gênes	4	1
Copenhagen-Livourne	3	0
Copenhagen-Port à port	1	1
Total	116	23

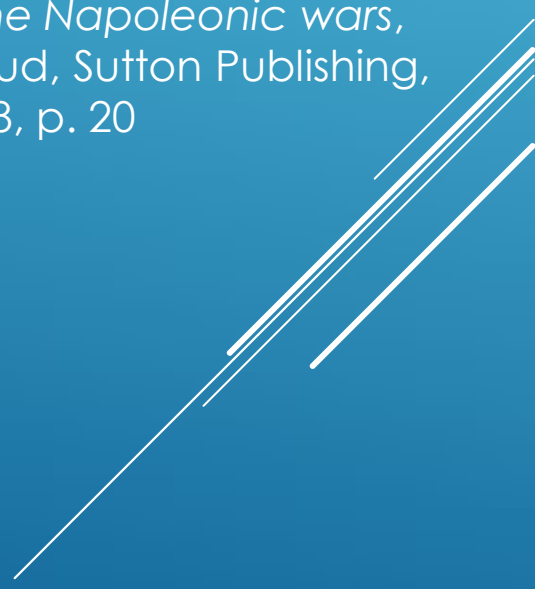
Danish ships loaded with grain from Copenhagen and seized by the British in 1794

The cost of a total blockade was too high and England had not the possibility to control all the French coasts

- In addition, the merchants often quote prices above market prices in the documents, especially in time of crop failure

“... among the captures of neutral ships [...] there appears to be many cases where such ships are not laden with military stores or provisions, and where there is no ground to support the suspicion of the enemy's property, which has occasioned much expence and inconvenience to government [...] the only ground on which they ought to be stopped is a reasonable suspicion of their being enemy's property; and [...] in all those cases the captors must take on their own risk the proof of such suspicion...”

Richard Hill, *The Prizes of War. The naval prize system in the Napoleonic wars*, Stroud, Sutton Publishing, 1998, p. 20



Different reasons to stop the Blockade

- The cost
- ✓ The disillusion about the war
- The necessity to adopt a more conciliatory attitude towards the neutral powers

The embargo had failed in its objectives

- A lot of traffics were out of the British control and the merchants knew how to bypass the rules
- The French population was not starving and even showed a new vigor in the fight against its enemies

However, the English may have noticed that due to inflation and unfavorable exchange rates it was perhaps more interesting to let France trade abroad

- Buying high-priced products on foreign markets fed inflation and accentuated the economic crisis affecting revolutionary France.