

# Rummaging through History: 1851 and an Empire strikes back!

*Edward Spalton*

Punch

A few years back I tidied out the loft. Among the ancient tennis rackets – each heavy enough to require a Hercules to wield it – wicker picnic baskets and crumbling cardboard boxes mostly full of other cardboard boxes, were some old copies of

Issue No 503 of 1 March 1851 contained an article (reproduced below) lampooning critics of the then Foreign Secretary, Viscount Palmerston. was quite a radical rag in those days. Satire was not invented in the 1960s!

At the time of its writing, Austria included great swathes of central and Eastern Europe, as well as parts of Italy. It was also the leading power of the [German Confederation](#), but

Many of the themes in this article are still with us today, albeit in different guises. There is the clash of ideas between European unity and order on the one hand, versus democracy and liberty on the other. The notion of Italy being rolled finally into the great German sausage would no doubt strike a chord with many Italians today, suffering under the yoke of a single currency that prioritises German economic ideas and interests. Palmerston's prototype liberal interventionism, which saw him cast somewhat as a would-be liberator of Europe, invites comparisons with Blair's interventionist ethical foreign policy albeit Palmerston did not resort to dodgy dossiers. And of course, the Emperor referred to in the article is the very same Emperor Franz Josef whose impossible ultimatum to Serbia touched off the Great War of 1914-18, which not only ensured his own empire's destruction, but gave birth to supranationalist ideas for creating a United States of Europe.

## **HURRAH FOR AUSTRIA!**

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Today the continuing influence of the House of Habsburg is

cleansed of most of its Serb population so that an ethnically and religiously pure Croatia became a fit candidate for EU membership.

To quote from a foreign policy [conference report](#) of 1995:

Adventurism by the Noble House of Austria in the Balkans cost millions of lives in the Great War. There is no guarantee that the Western intervention of the Nineties will have any happier long-term outcome than Austria's annexation of Bosnia Herzegovina in 1908.

What we can be certain of is that the geopolitical interests of the old Central Powers today are not those of Britain. I am sure my -subscribing ancestor would have agreed. Perhaps