

# Conservative politics and Whig colonial government, 1830–41\*

Alex Middleton 

University of Oxford, United Kingdom

## Abstract

This article explores Conservative critiques of Whig colonial rule in the 1830s. Its case is that imperial administrative and constitutional issues occupied a more prominent place in the Tories' politics of opposition during the 'decade of Reform' than historians have assumed. Conservative writers and politicians styled themselves as vigorous defenders of imperial integrity, colonial constitutions, and the colonial church, against the incoherent centralizing and liberalizing innovations of the Whigs. These arguments rested on wider assumptions about the inherent failings of Whiggism, Reformed government and the pernicious global consequences of 'liberalism'. The article asks how these claims affect our understanding of Conservative politics after the Reform crisis, and reflects on the emergence of new forms of political engagement with issues of colonial government in early nineteenth-century Britain.

Empire has been a defining issue in the public politics of the British Conservative party. Historians used to locate the birth of this association in the 1870s, and cast Disraeli as its midwife.<sup>1</sup> This fitted neatly with the conventional timetable for the emergence of 'imperialism' as a leading theme in British politics.<sup>2</sup> More recent research has shown that questions of empire arrested the attention of the political classes much earlier on in the nineteenth century, and that Conservatives participated vigorously in the resulting debates. Necessarily, given that Whig and Liberal administrations dominated politics between the 1830s and the 1860s, most of this Conservative argument was oppositional. There are important studies of Tories struggling against the tide on the economics of empire, colonial representation in parliament and West Indian slavery.<sup>3</sup> Tory claims

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<sup>1</sup> R. Blake, *The Conservative Party From Peel to Churchill* (1970), pp. 125–30, was influential on this point. See also F. O'Gorman, *British Conservatism: Conservative Thought From the 1790s to the 1980s* (Harlow, 1986), p. 34; M. Bentley, *The Climax of Liberal Politics: British Liberalism in Theory and Practice, 1868–1918* (London, 1987), p. 52; J. Ramsden, *An Appetite for Power: a History of the Conservative Party Since 1830* (London, 1998), pp. 114–17. For a more measured approach, see J. Charnley, *A History of Conservative Politics Since 1830* (Basingstoke, 2008), p. 51; and for a different chronology, see F. Harcourt, 'Disraeli's imperialism, 1866–1868: a question of timing', *Historical Journal*, xxiii (1980), 87–109. The most detailed assessment of Disraeli's imperial role can be found in R. Shannon, *The Age of Disraeli, 1868–1881: the Rise of Tory Democracy* (London, 1992), pp. 141–2 and ch. 11.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., B. Porter, *The Lion's Share: a Short History of British Imperialism, 1850–1995* (Harlow, 1996), p. 86.

<sup>3</sup> A. Gambles, *Protection and Politics: Conservative Economic Discourse, 1815–1852* (Woodbridge, 1999), ch. 6–7; D. Eastwood "'Recasting our lot': Peel, the nation, and the politics of interest", in *A Union of Multiple Identities: the British Isles, c.1750–c.1850*, ed. L. Brockliss and D. Eastwood (Manchester, 1997), pp. 29–43; Miles Taylor, 'Empire and parliamentary reform: the 1832 Reform Act revisited', in *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780–1850*, ed. A. Burns and J. Innes (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 295–311, at pp. 295–302; Miles Taylor, 'Colonial representation at Westminster, c. 1800–65', in *Parliaments, Nations, and Identities in Britain and Ireland, 1660–1850*, ed. J. Hoppit (Manchester, 2003), pp. 206–20; Michael Taylor, 'Conservative political economy and the problem of colonial slavery, 1823–1833', *Historical Journal*, lviii (2014), 973–95; Michael Taylor, *The Interest: How the British Establishment Resisted the Abolition of Slavery* (London, 2020); and cf. P. E. Dumas, *Proslavery Britain: Fighting for Slavery in an Era of Abolition* (New York, 2016). Disraeli's imperial ideas have attracted particularly detailed attention (J. P. Parry, 'Disraeli and England', *Historical Journal*, xliii (2000), 699–728; S. Borgstede, 'All Is Race': Disraeli on Race, Nation, and Empire (Berlin, 2012); and S. R. Stemberge, 'Disraeli and the millstones', *Journal of British Studies*, v (1965), 122–39).

about the administration and defence of India have also drawn interest.<sup>4</sup> But historians have passed over one of the heaviest imperial guns in the Conservative arsenal: the management of colonial government.

Colonial administrative issues have always been marginal in the literature on politics and ideas in Britain's 'age of reform', between the 1830s and the 1850s.<sup>5</sup> Though imperial historians developed an interest in domestic arguments about colonial government in the 1960s and 1970s, their work has been only lightly used by students of early Victorian politics.<sup>6</sup> Yet the second quarter of the nineteenth century saw British colonial rule reshaped. The centralized, authoritarian, protectionist, Anglican imperial framework that had emerged out of the Napoleonic wars gave way to experiments in systematic colonization, religious pluralism, settler self-government, and the loosening of constitutional discipline in various Crown colonies.<sup>7</sup> Most of these changes happened under the aegis of Whig ministries, and all of them attracted extensive domestic debate. What this article emphasizes is that such debate did not take place in an 'imperial' bubble, but both drew on and bolstered wider partisan narratives.<sup>8</sup> In short, these battles should be seen as integral parts of post-Reform politics.<sup>9</sup>

This article deals with the formative era for Conservative discourse on the failings of British colonial rule under Whig and Liberal stewardship: the 1830s. It focuses mainly on the periodical press and the party's parliamentary language.<sup>10</sup> There is undoubtedly scope for closer intellectual-historical inquiry into the small number of Conservative writers and politicians who thought more systematically about the mechanics and

<sup>4</sup> M. Stubbings, 'British Conservatism and the Indian revolt: the annexation of Awadh and the consequences of liberal empire, 1856–1858', *Journal of British Studies*, lv (2016), 728–49; and A. Saab, 'Disraeli, India, and the Indians, 1852–58', in *Internationale Beziehungen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert. Festschrift für Winfried Baumgart zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. W. Elz and S. Neitzel (Paderborn, 2003), pp. 37–52.

<sup>5</sup> Especially in the main synthetic studies that frame our understanding of the period, see esp. B. Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England, 1783–1846* (Oxford, 2006); and J. Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> P. Burroughs, 'The Canadian rebellions in British politics', in *Perspectives of Empire: Essays Presented to Gerald S. Graham*, ed. J. Flint and G. Williams (London, 1973), pp. 54–92; G. Martin, 'The Canadian rebellion losses bill of 1849 in British politics', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vi (1977), 3–22; J. S. Galbraith, 'Myths of the "Little England" era', *American Historical Review*, lxxvii (1961), 34–48; A. G. L. Shaw, 'British attitudes to the colonies, ca. 1820–1850', *Journal of British Studies*, ix (1969), 71–95; and G. Martin, '"Anti-imperialism" in the mid-nineteenth century and the nature of the British empire, 1820–70', in R. Hyam and G. Martin, *Reappraisals in British Imperial History* (London, 1975), pp. 88–120. See also M. J. Turner, 'Radical agitation and the Canada question in British politics, 1837–41', *Historical Research*, lxxix (2005), 90–114.

<sup>7</sup> For this conception of the empire in the Napoleonic era, see C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: the British Empire and the World, 1780–1830* (Harlow, 1989). The literature on the reshaping of the colonial system is vast, and now mostly quite dated, but see W. P. Morrell, *British Colonial Policy in the Age of Peel and Russell* (Oxford, 1930); P. Knaplund, *James Stephen and the British Colonial System, 1813–1847* (Madison, 1953); J. M. Ward, *Colonial Self-Government: the British Experience, 1759–1856* (London, 1976); and more recently Z. Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections, 1815–45: Patronage, the Information Revolution, and Colonial Government* (Manchester, 2005); and A. Lester, K. Boehme and P. Mitchell, *Ruling the World: Freedom, Civilisation and Liberalism in the Nineteenth-Century British Empire* (Cambridge, 2020).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. J. Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival, and Fall of the British Empire: the Ford Lectures and Other Essays* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 79–80.

<sup>9</sup> Historians are also beginning to recover the significance of some of these debates for the history of political thought. See A. Plassart and H. Bonin, 'Democratic struggle or national uprising? The Canadian rebellions in British political thought, 1835–1840', *Global Intellectual History*, forthcoming.

<sup>10</sup> The influence and parameters of the Tory press are set out in Gambles, *Protection and Politics*, ch. 1.

history of colonial government.<sup>11</sup> This article, however, ranges broadly and synthetically across mainstream public political argument. It makes the case that the ‘decade of reform’ saw Conservative politicians and commentators formulate a comprehensive critique of the Whigs’ conduct of British colonial government, drawing on examples of mistaken policy and practice from across the empire.<sup>12</sup> Condemnation of the threats posed by high-handed, arbitrary and irreligious Whig administration allowed Conservatives to emphasize their own credentials as the true friends of settler colonial constitutionalism and self-government, not to mention imperial integrity and the colonial church.<sup>13</sup> But this critique rested more on convictions about the cardinal errors of Whiggism, than it did on a philosophically distinct vision of what imperial government ought to look like. Tory attacks on Whig colonial policy, in fact, sounded very much like their attacks on the Whigs’ domestic and Irish programs. These Tory arguments, moreover, did not amount to a programme for government. As in the cases of other major religious, constitutional and economic issues, the negative unity forged in opposition came apart not long after the Conservatives returned to power in 1841.<sup>14</sup>

The article develops these points in four sections.<sup>15</sup> The first considers where arguments about imperial government sat within the firmament of Conservative political discourse in the early nineteenth century. The second examines the assumptions about colonial administrative and constitutional policy Tories carried forward from the 1820s, and how they affected political debate during the Reform crisis of 1828–32. The third and fourth sections then explore, respectively, the political and the religious critiques Tories urged against Whig colonial rule, in the period between the Great Reform Act of 1832 and Sir Robert Peel’s return to office at the head of a Conservative ministry in 1841.

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Early nineteenth-century Conservatism was not a creed about colonial government. None of the more celebrated texts attached to Conservative politics in this period – most famously Peel’s Tamworth Manifesto of 1834 and Benjamin Disraeli’s *Vindication of the English Constitution* of 1835 – had anything to say about the system of imperial administration.<sup>16</sup> The pulpits were mostly silent on the question, and what we know of popular Conservatism in this period suggests that the empire played no greater role

<sup>11</sup> For starting points, see J. M. R. Cameron, ‘John Barrow, the *Quarterly Review*’s imperial reviewer’, in *Conservatism and the Quarterly Review: a Critical Analysis*, ed. J. Cutmore (London, 2007), pp. 133–50; C. Hall, ‘“The most unbending Conservative in Britain”: Archibald Alison and pro-slavery discourse’, in *Recovering Scotland’s Slavery Past: the Caribbean Connection*, ed. T. M. Devine (Edinburgh, 2015), pp. 206–24; and, on a more politically ambiguous figure, F. H. H. King, *Survey Our Empire: Robert Montgomery Martin (1801?–1868), a Bio-Bibliography* (Hong Kong, 1979) and A. Middleton, ‘Robert Montgomery Martin and the origins of “Greater Britain”’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, forthcoming. There is more to be said also about the views of particularly engaged Conservative politicians like Lord Ellenborough, the Duke of Wellington and Lord Aberdeen.

<sup>12</sup> As a result, the article does not dive very deeply into the detail of arguments about particular colonies, and especially not those with the most complex political issues, the West Indies and Canada.

<sup>13</sup> It should be stressed that rhetoric did not always match reality, and that Conservative frontbenchers could on occasion be much more constructive in their private engagement with Whig colonial policy. See I. Newbould, *Whiggery and Reform, 1830–41: the Politics of Government* (Stanford, Calif., 1990).

<sup>14</sup> See esp. I. Newbould, ‘Sir Robert Peel and the Conservative party, 1832–1841: a study in failure?’, *English Historical Review*, xcvi (1983), 529–57.

<sup>15</sup> All attributions of anonymous articles in what follows are from *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824–1900*, ed. W. E. Houghton (5 vols., Toronto, 1966–89).

<sup>16</sup> *The Times*, 18 Dec. 1834, p. 2; B. Disraeli, *Vindication of the English Constitution in a Letter to a Noble and Learned Lord* (London, 1835).

in that sphere.<sup>17</sup> Nor is there much about the management of the colonies in Tory political novels.<sup>18</sup> As late as 1850 Disraeli could be found remarking in correspondence that colonial schemes were not of sufficient inherent interest to furnish a unifying basis for a British political party, in the way that a great foreign war or a comprehensive plan to settle some pressing domestic question might.<sup>19</sup>

The problem of how to rule the empire coiled itself around Conservative political argument in other ways. Colonial government may not have been an issue that determined party affiliations, but under the right circumstances it could be connected with almost every other significant problem in contemporary political life.<sup>20</sup> All the constitutional, religious, fiscal, jurisprudential and social questions around which domestic politics was arranged had their analogues in the colonies, where new polities were being forged under the aegis of British authority, in many cases with substantial British settler populations. The existence of these responsibilities generated a substantial reflective literature on the principles of imperial policy and colonial polity.<sup>21</sup> But developments in the colonies were also tied to more mainstream partisan arguments, and assimilated to existing narratives about ministerial conduct. At the most basic level, failures to keep the colonies contented and prosperous were used to attack governments, while successes in imperial policy were adduced as evidence of executive vigour and wisdom more generally. Somewhat more subtly, colonies could be represented as laboratories, in which principles and policies could be tested out in advantageous experimental conditions, free from the distortions imposed by the complex social and political accretions of 'old' countries. These frameworks were well established, and bore importantly upon early nineteenth-century political discourse about the empire.

1832 shifted the parameters of imperial political debate. After the Great Reform Act British politics was dominated by heightened expectations (and fears) of government activity, and this applied in the colonial sphere as much as in the domestic. It came to be accepted across the political spectrum that Britain was responsible for securing good government in its dependencies, rather than just turning a profit from them: claims of solicitude for sound colonial governance became a staple among politicians and political

<sup>17</sup> For popular politics, see esp. J. Neuheiser, *Crown, Church, and Constitution: Popular Conservatism in England, 1815–1867* (Oxford, 2016); and further N. Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel: a Study in the Technique of Parliamentary Representation, 1830–1850* (London, 1953); J. Vernon, *Politics and the People: a Study in English Political Culture, c.1815–1867* (Cambridge, 1993); and P. Salmon, *Electoral Reform at Work: Local Politics and National Parties, 1832–1841* (Woodbridge, 2002). For the pulpit, see R. Hole, *Pulpits, Politics, and Public Order in England, 1760–1832* (Cambridge, 1989); and R. Saunders, 'God and the Great Reform Act: preaching against reform, 1831–32', *Journal of British Studies*, liii (2014), 378–99.

<sup>18</sup> Though see Disraeli's pre-Tory *The Voyage of Captain Papanilla* (London, 1828), in part a satire on the colonial system, and, somewhat later on, [B. Hofland], *The Island of Liberty; or, Equality and Community* (London, 1848).

<sup>19</sup> Benjamin Disraeli to E. H. Stanley, 2 Nov. 1850, [2053X], in *Benjamin Disraeli Letters*, ed. J. A. W. Gunn and others (8 vols., Toronto, 1982–), vi, 528. Though cf. Disraeli to Lord Derby, 18 Dec. 1851, [2209], in *Disraeli Letters*, v, 501. Disraeli's novels were generally unsympathetic to the class of colonial governors.

<sup>20</sup> As Miles Taylor has described, domestic anxieties about the existence of empire increased exponentially when colonial developments seemed liable to affect the stability of the British polity (Miles Taylor, 'Imperium et libertas? Rethinking the radical critique of imperialism during the nineteenth century', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, xix (1991), 1–23).

<sup>21</sup> For this period, see, most prominently, H. Merivale, *Lectures on Colonization and Colonies, Delivered Before the University of Oxford in 1839, 1840, and 1841* (2 vols., London, 1842). On aspects of this literature, see M. Francis, *Governors and Settlers: Images of Authority in the British Colonies, 1820–1860* (Basingstoke, 1992). For the bigger picture, but mostly relating to the later nineteenth century, see D. Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton, 2016), esp. ch. 1–2.

writers, much more generally than had been the case in the 1810s and the 1820s. More than this, however, it became common to treat colonial policy as an index of the true (and perhaps deliberately concealed) principles and objectives of those who held power at home. The argument ran that because the colonies were the field in which ministerial authority was most untrammelled, and least restricted by the workings of public opinion, actions taken in the empire revealed the directions in which ministries really wanted to move in Britain. Straws in the wind could come from anywhere, so it was necessary to pay attention to what governments did even in strategically and commercially insignificant colonies – and indeed in the directly ruled crown colonies, as much as in those with representative assemblies. In short, the 1830s presented new opportunities for opposition parties and politicians to exploit questions of imperial rule.

In this context, there was a new premium on drawing sharp dividing lines between partisan positions on colonial government. Conservatives, as we will see, did this with alacrity, while Edward Bulwer-Lytton could be found claiming for the Whigs in 1839 that they differed with the Tories on every single branch of colonial policy.<sup>22</sup> Substantive party-political disagreements in this period concentrated on how ministers wielded their power over the colonial empire, and especially on their approach to colonial constitutions and imperial ecclesiastical policy. But the focus of domestic debate on the activities of responsible office-holders concealed important common ground. Running parallel to, and sometimes overlapping with, these essentially political controversies were powerful systemic critiques of the mechanisms of British colonial government. These focused on the vast centralized authority of the colonial office, the irresponsibility of its permanent staff, the challenges of government over distance and the prevalence of oligarchic tyranny across much of the empire. These arguments were articulated mainly by Radicals in the 1830s, and echoed only very selectively in the Conservative press.<sup>23</sup> There was, in fact, a meaningful Tory tradition of criticism of the machine of colonial government, and especially of the financial drains it imposed, which dated back to before the Treaty of Vienna, and which would become more prominent again in the 1840s.<sup>24</sup> Though this thread of critical thinking was less visible under the pressures of the 1830s, it is important to stress that Conservatives were not wedded to the system as it stood. Indeed it is striking that we do not find any spirited Tory vindication of the administrative system of colonial government in this period, in the way that Conservatives defended other threatened institutional arrangements.

Finally here it is necessary to say something about where India fitted in. For most Conservative commentators in this period, the Indian empire was a distinct political problem from the colonial empire. It had a different history and carried different political baggage.<sup>25</sup> This dissimilarity was particularly clear when it came to administrative and

<sup>22</sup> [E. Bulwer-Lytton], 'Lord Lyndhurst's review of the last session', *Edinburgh Review*, lxx (1839), 245–81, at p. 257.

<sup>23</sup> A. Middleton, 'Corruption, despotism, and the colonial office, c.1820–1850', in *The Many Lives of Corruption: the Reform of Public Life in Modern Britain*, ed. I. Cawood and T. Crook (Manchester, forthcoming 2021).

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., 'Natural and political history of Malta', *Quarterly Review*, ix (1813), 1–29, at pp. 1, 14–15, 29; and [W. H. Smith], 'Colonisation – Mr Wakefield's theory', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, lxx (1849), 509–28, at p. 523.

<sup>25</sup> G. D. Bearce, *British Attitudes Towards India, 1784–1858* (London, 1961); and J. Wilson, 'The silence of empire: imperialism and India', in *Languages of Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. D. Craig and J. Thompson (Basingstoke, 2013), pp. 218–41. Radicals and reformers were much more prone to connect the Indian and colonial empires, especially by the early 1850s. See, e.g., Z. Laidlaw, '"Justice to India – prosperity to England – freedom to the slave!" Humanitarian and moral reform campaigns on India, aborigines, and American slavery', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, xxii (2012), 299–324; and Miles Taylor, 'Joseph Hume and the reformation of India, 1819–1833', in *English Radicalism, 1550–1850*, ed. G. Burgess and M. Festenstein (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 285–308.



constitutional questions, as India's system of government was entirely separate from that of the colonies. Not only was the rule of East India Company functionally unlike that of the colonial office, but the fact that India did not (under normal circumstances) inflict any charges on the British exchequer meant that it intersected with domestic politics on different terms. There were, it is true, overlaps in how the Indian and colonial empires were handled in Tory political discourse. In both cases, Conservatives regularly accused the Whigs of pursuing domestic political popularity by misguided liberal gestures: governor general Lord William Bentinck's lifting of restrictions on the freedom of the press in India in 1835, for instance, was presented as a move 'to propitiate home politicians and demagogues'.<sup>26</sup> In both cases, too, there was much criticism of the Whigs' tendency of making appointments to imperial office on the basis of party affiliation.<sup>27</sup> With regard to the substance of policy and political critique, however, a working distinction between the colonial and the Indian empires prevailed throughout the 1830s.

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Colonial government was not a major political issue for most of the 1820s. The West Indies were a subject of growing controversy, and a number of individual colonial governors drew criticism from Radicals on account of questionable authoritarian practices.<sup>28</sup> For the most part, however, criticism of the management of the colonies was confined to enthusiasts, and rarely crossed over into mainstream political debate. In the closing years of the decade, however, as demands for domestic constitutional reform began to dominate British politics, a counterpart crisis of colonial government was diagnosed. Calls from a number of colonies for the extension of constitutional and civil rights created standoffs with imperial authorities, most seriously in Lower Canada, which descended into deadlock. Intense criticism of the past and present handling of that colony compelled the appointment of an important select committee, while pressure for the redress of complaints from the Cape, New South Wales and Ceylon gathered steam.<sup>29</sup> By 1829 causes of colonial discontent seemed to Tory commentators 'to be daily increasing', and the management of the dependencies was widely counted among the fields of government activity that required examination and amendment.<sup>30</sup> Even government ministers admitted that action was needed to 'improve the system of colonial administration generally' and to correct 'anomalies which had sprung up in the lapse of years'.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> [G. H. Bell], 'India', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, xxxix (1835), 803–8. Also [A. Alison], 'Affairs in the East', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, xlv (1838), 769–78, at pp. 769–71.

<sup>27</sup> On the appointment of Lord Heytesbury to India, e.g., see James Winthrop Praed, in Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser., xxix (29 June 1835), cols. 30–9; and Sir Robert Peel, in Hansard, 3, xxix (29 June 1835), cols. 59–63.

<sup>28</sup> E.g., on Sir Thomas Maitland of the Ionian Islands, see Joseph Hume, in Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 2nd ser., v (7 June 1821), cols. 1133–4; on the Cape, see 'Government of Lord Charles Somerset', *New Monthly Magazine*, xx (1827), 209–14.

<sup>29</sup> H. T. Manning, 'Colonial crises before the cabinet, 1829–1835', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, xxx (1957), 41–61, at pp. 42–3; and H. T. Manning, 'Who ran the British empire 1830–1850?', *Journal of British Studies*, iv (1965), 88–121, at p. 91. See, e.g., the debate on Lord Milton's petition for a representative government at the Cape, in Hansard, 2, xxiv (24 May 1830), cols. 1004–24; John Stewart's motion on Ceylon, in Hansard, 2, xxiv (27 May 1830), cols. 155–71; and, on Canada, [J. Galt], 'Canadian affairs', *Fraser's Magazine*, i (1830), 389–98.

<sup>30</sup> 'Agricola' [J. Galt], 'Thoughts on the times', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, xxvi (1829), 640–3, at p. 642; and [R. Southey], 'State and prospects of the country', *Quarterly Review*, xxxix (1829), 475–520, at p. 517.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Wilmot Horton, in Hansard, 2, xix (2 May 1828), col. 332.

Domestic critics of the Duke of Wellington's government did not hesitate to link these imperial discontents with wider failings in his administration. Whigs and Radicals argued that the problems had arisen because the Tories had exploited the colonies over decades as sources of perquisites, propping up selfish oligarchies to defend their material interests.<sup>32</sup> The colonial office under Lord Bathurst, 'the tutelary genius of colonial tyranny', had spent fifteen years restricting colonial liberty, as the government now sought to at home.<sup>33</sup> In the context of an economic downturn, excessive spending on imperial civil and military establishments was represented as more unjustifiable and corrupt than ever.<sup>34</sup> And some of the ministry's opponents suggested that the maintenance of unwanted and extravagant church establishments in the colonies, as at home and in Ireland, had been a leading motor of discord.<sup>35</sup> The empire did not feature in any substantial way in the debates over the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828, or the passage of Catholic Emancipation in 1829.<sup>36</sup> But by the time Wellington resigned, colonial government had become a more significant issue in mainstream political debate than it had been at any point since the eighteenth century.

This assimilation of a crisis of colonial rule to wider arguments about the erroneous policy and principles of the government at home set the tone for imperial political debate over the coming decades. It also, however, forced Conservative politicians and commentators to be more articulate about what they deemed the basic tenets of British colonial government to be.

Guiding all other Conservative positions on the empire was the conviction that it ought to be retained. Robert Peel was in accord with all the major organs of his party in disdaining the disposition to underrate the value of the British possessions, and rejecting the 'abstract reasoning or political philosophy' that proposed their abandonment.<sup>37</sup> In many cases, Tories defined that value primarily in economic terms. The protectionist, historicist vision of empire as an integrated network of diverse yet complementary interests was an intellectually serious counterpoint to the free-trading alternative, and one that remained powerful between the 1820s and the early 1850s.<sup>38</sup> In other hands, the empire was a sign of Britain's appointed moral and religious responsibilities. William Huskisson insisted that the nation could not 'forgo the high and important duties imposed on us by our relative situation towards those colonies', to which in every quarter of the globe 'the seeds of freedom, civilization, and Christianity' were being spread.<sup>39</sup> Most generally, however, it was an article of Tory faith that the empire was a significant element in Britain's national greatness, conferring both power and prestige. And it was clear that

<sup>32</sup> See, e.g., *Examiner*, 15 June 1828, pp. 386–7; *Examiner*, 17 May 1829, p. 307; and 'Financial reform', *Westminster Review*, xii (1830), 394–404, at p. 403.

<sup>33</sup> *Examiner*, 13 Jan. 1828, p. 17.

<sup>34</sup> See, most prominently, H. Parnell, *On Financial Reform* (London, 1830), pp. 234–57.

<sup>35</sup> See, e.g., Joseph Hume, in Hansard, 2, xxi (6 Apr. 1829), cols. 455–7; and Lord Howick, in Hansard, 2, xxv (14 June 1830), col. 341.

<sup>36</sup> Even though these pieces of legislation opened a wide range of colonial offices to non-Anglicans for the first time, and created the prospect of a non-Anglican colonial secretary being entrusted with extensive patronage over the colonial church. These points are not discussed in the standard historiography (G. I. T. Machin, *The Catholic Question in English Politics, 1820 to 1830* (Oxford, 1964); and W. Hinde, *Catholic Emancipation: a Shake to Men's Minds* (Oxford, 1992)).

<sup>37</sup> Robert Peel, in Hansard, 2, xix (7 July 1828), cols. 1638–40.

<sup>38</sup> See Gambles, *Protection and Politics*; and, for the alternative, B. Semmel, *The Rise of Free Trade Imperialism: Classical Political Economy, the Empire of Free Trade, and Imperialism, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, 1970); and A. Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England, 1846–1946* (Oxford, 1997).

<sup>39</sup> William Huskisson, speech in parliament, 2 May 1828, in *The Speeches of the Right Honourable William Huskisson, With a Biographical Memoir* (3 vols., London, 1831), iii. 287.

retaining it required careful husbandry: as the leading imperial commentator Archibald Alison would later insist, history taught that ‘colonial jealousy and discontent is the rock on which all the great maritime powers of the world have split’.<sup>40</sup>

The means of averting such jealousy lay in the organization of colonial constitutions, and in the behaviour of the imperial government. The long-standing historiographical assumption that Tories ‘had on the whole always believed in controlling the colonies from London’, and that their support for settler self-government in the early 1850s was therefore ‘rather unaccountabl[e]’, is wide of the mark.<sup>41</sup> Some Conservatives did believe that the principles of representative government were largely inapplicable to the colonial empire.<sup>42</sup> But two quite different lines of argument were much more common. The first was that the government should err on the side of abstaining from any extraordinary activity with respect to the colonies. This meant, where possible, leaving established colonial constitutions alone; and, especially, resisting the imposition of parliament’s power over Britain’s dependencies.<sup>43</sup> Informed in part by a reluctance to countenance imperial coercion after the American Revolution, and in part by a desire to protect the West India interest, this became a central plank in the critique of Whig policy in the 1830s.<sup>44</sup> The second main Conservative argument about colonial constitutions was that it was desirable to cultivate in the dependencies variants of those institutions, both civil and ecclesiastical, that had been found most conservative in their tendencies at home.<sup>45</sup> It was by establishing in the colonies versions of the same frame of government found in the parent state that discontent could be headed off, and the integrity of the empire preserved.<sup>46</sup> This had, after all, been Pitt’s policy with regard to Canada in the 1790s.<sup>47</sup>

As this suggests, Conservatives were not committed only to defending self-governing institutions where they existed already. Many of them also expressed a strong, if cautious, sympathy with the promotion of self-rule. This was especially pronounced among the Canningites who would join the Reform ministry. Lord Goderich, its first colonial secretary, insisted that Britain should introduce into all its colonies – as far as circumstances would admit – ‘the principles and practice which prevailed in this

<sup>40</sup> [A. Alison], ‘Colonial government and the Jamaica question’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, xlvii (1839), 75–90, at p. 75. Alison’s role as a prominent and highly reflective Tory commentator on imperial matters is not emphasized in the main accounts of his thinking (M. Milne, ‘Archibald Alison: Conservative controversialist’, *Albion*, xxvii (1995), 419–43; and M. Michie, *An Enlightenment Tory in Victorian Scotland: the Career of Sir Archibald Alison* (East Linton, 1998)).

<sup>41</sup> S. R. Stemberge, *Parliament, the Press, and the Colonies, 1846–1880* (New York, 1982), pp. 34–6.

<sup>42</sup> The most influential being Wellington and Peel’s chancellor of the exchequer, Henry Goulburn (see B. Jenkins, *Henry Goulburn, 1784–1856: a Political Biography* (Liverpool, 1996), esp. pp. 96–7).

<sup>43</sup> On which see, respectively, Sir George Murray, in Hansard, 3, i (13 Dec. 1830), col. 1060; and George Canning, in Hansard, 2, x (16 March 1824), cols. 1105–6. If despotism of this kind *did* have to be resorted to, however, it was better to practise it in earnest and not to resort to half measures (on Peel’s views here, see P. Ghosh, ‘Gladstone and Peel’, in *Politics and Culture in Victorian Britain: Essays in Memory of Colin Matthew*, ed. P. Ghosh and L. Goldman (Oxford, 2006), pp. 45–73, at p. 50).

<sup>44</sup> On the first consideration, see H. T. Manning, *British Colonial Government After the American Revolution, 1782–1820* (New Haven, 1933).

<sup>45</sup> [J. G. Lockhart], ‘Foster’s Notes on the United States’, *Quarterly Review*, lxxviii (1841), 20–57, at p. 38.

<sup>46</sup> [Alison], ‘Colonial government’, p. 82; and [A. Alison], ‘What is our external policy and condition?’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, xxxix (1836), 780–92, at p. 786.

<sup>47</sup> The 1791 Canada Act being, in Pitt’s words, ‘intended to bring the constitution of the province as nearly as the nature and situation of it will admit to the British constitution’ (D. Southgate, *The Passing of the Whigs, 1832–1886* (London, 1962), p. 162). Southgate suggests that the policy fell victim to the French revolution. On Tory veneration for Pitt and his (imputed) principles in this period, see M. Ledger-Lomas, ‘The character of Pitt the Younger and party politics, 1830–1860’, *Historical Journal*, xlvii (2004), 641–61.



country'.<sup>48</sup> His successor, Charles Grant, also maintained that Britain should not have 'one government at home and another abroad'.<sup>49</sup> But this argument was by no means limited to those exiting the Tory party. Sir John Malcolm, a robust opponent of Reform, felt strongly that the predilection of English settlers for the British constitution ought to be accommodated.<sup>50</sup> Even the ardent anti-reformer Sir Charles Wetherell, whose appearance in Bristol sparked the riots of 1831, insisted that Britain should follow the Roman example of extending to the colonies the political privileges of the mother country, and so attach them 'by the ties of a common political constitution'.<sup>51</sup>

The sticking point, however, was when such changes were safe. For most Conservatives the ultimate purpose of government was the security, happiness and improvement of the people under its aegis, not the rapid vindication of the representative principle. Premature change would only 'macadamise the road to tyranny'.<sup>52</sup> Countries without large British populations, moreover, were not so clearly candidates for forms of government that conformed to the 'British' ideal.<sup>53</sup> So along with a reluctance to interfere in the internal affairs of other European nations with a view to accelerating their transition to representative institutions, went a cautiousness about conferring (further) constitutional freedoms on the inhabitants of the colonies. Most Tory commentators on imperial affairs at the end of the 1820s rejected the claim that the frame of Britain's colonial administration as it stood was altogether arbitrary or despotic, often citing the wide existence of free presses and public trials.<sup>54</sup> But they made it equally clear that a range of practical considerations – strategic, political, racial or social – seemed to preclude the immediate introduction of assemblies in colonies which did not yet possess them, or the grant of further powers to those which did.<sup>55</sup> When the prospect of a legislative assembly in New South Wales was raised at the end of the 1820s, for instance, Tories suggested that this would spark a convict insurrection, or at least intensify factional discord and spread demoralization, rendering the idea 'quite ridiculous'.<sup>56</sup> New colonies, they argued, were better administered by an honest and upright governor showing favour to none, than by an immature representative assembly liable to sacrifice the public interest to individual rapacity. There was a need for wisdom and sensitivity in adjusting colonial governing arrangements, which could be earned only by hard experience. Theorists with their neat analogies and paper constitutions simply did not understand what governing an empire

<sup>48</sup> Lord Goderich, in Hansard, 2, xxi (14 May 1829), col. 1327.

<sup>49</sup> Charles Grant, in Hansard, 2, xxiv (25 May 1830), cols. 1107–8. These attitudes mirrored those of Huskisson (*Speeches*, iii. 270).

<sup>50</sup> Sir John Malcolm, in Hansard, 3, iv (5 July 1831), col. 737.

<sup>51</sup> Sir Charles Wetherell, in Hansard, 3, vi (16 Aug. 1831), col. 135.

<sup>52</sup> [B. Hall], 'Political condition and prospects of France', *Quarterly Review*, xliii (1830), 215–42, at p. 224.

<sup>53</sup> On this theme, see R. Smittenaar, "'Feelings of alarm": Conservative criticism of the principle of nationality in mid-Victorian Britain', *Modern Intellectual History*, xiv (2017), 365–91.

<sup>54</sup> See, e.g., William Huskisson, in Hansard, 2, xix (20 June 1828), col. 1461, talking about New South Wales.

<sup>55</sup> Sir George Murray, in Hansard, 2, xxi (14 May 1829), col. 1333; William Huskisson, in Hansard, 2, xix (20 June 1828), cols. 1459–62; Robert Wilmot Horton, in Hansard, 2, xxiv (24 May 1830), cols. 1007–8; and Sir Robert Peel, in Hansard, 2, xxiv (25 May 1830), cols. 1109–10. For these views among Tory imperial officials, see, e.g., Sir Howard Douglas, Lord High Commissioner of the Ionian Islands, 1835–40: S. W. Fullom, *The Life of General Sir Howard Douglas* (London, 1863), Chapter 34.

<sup>56</sup> 'New South Wales', *Quarterly Review*, xxxvii (1828), 1–32, at p. 23. See also [J. Barrow], 'New colony on Swan River', *Quarterly Review*, xxxix (1829), 315–44, at pp. 341–3. The same arguments continued to hold into the 1830s (see, e.g., [H. Twiss], 'New South Wales', *Quarterly Review*, lxii (1838), 475–505, at p. 491).

took. At the turn of the 1830s, then, Tory pronouncements on colonial government combined ostensibly liberal principles with firm paternalist assumptions.<sup>57</sup>

Having been all but invisible in the debates over Test and Corporation Act repeal and Catholic Emancipation, anxieties about the future of the colonial empire came to feature very prominently in the battery of arguments Tories levelled against the parliamentary reform bills of 1831–2.<sup>58</sup> Declamation about the rights of freeborn Englishmen overseas, scaremongering about the future of the imperial tie, and dissertations on the unparalleled significance of colonial trade and property were all deployed as weapons against Reform. But there were essentially three sets of imperial arguments urged against the bill.

First and most forcefully, Tories argued that the empire would be brought to the brink of collapse by the Whigs' blithe destruction of the system of colonial representation. There had not been much discussion of the significance of parliamentary representation of the colonial interest in the Tory press in the 1820s, but as soon as it was threatened, this became one of the leading arguments against Reform. The elimination of nomination boroughs would make it impossible for men associated with the colonies to enter parliament: and without these representatives, the government would be deprived of the knowledge to legislate effectively for imperial interests, and by its misgovernment hasten the dissolution of the empire. Tories complained that the act had not only 'effectually disfranchised the colonies', but had also filled parliament with voracious manufacturers and self-interested urban voters eager to hasten their separation.<sup>59</sup> Second, beyond the misguided popular enthusiasms it had brought into play, Tory observers also claimed that Reformed government would by its nature lack the strength to hold the colonial empire together. Wellington wrote at the end of 1832 that he expected the colonies would soon separate from Britain 'as the first consequence of the general weakness which must result from what has been done'.<sup>60</sup> Finally, it was argued that while it had always been the policy of the Tories to foster and encourage the colonies, the governments that would be cemented in place by Reform wanted to depress them.<sup>61</sup> It was charged in 1832 that the ministry's principles of colonial government 'involve the destruction of the capital and trade of every colony'.<sup>62</sup> The spectres of the decline of Spain, Portugal and Athens after

<sup>57</sup> All this meant that no great rhetorical about-turns were required for Conservatives to approve the forms of 'responsible government' conferred on several settler colonies at the turn of the 1850s. That there was considerable ambiguity at home about how that system actually operated in practice made the process even easier.

<sup>58</sup> The best general summary of these arguments is given in Parry, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 45–9.

<sup>59</sup> [A. Alison], 'Ireland. No. II', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, xxxiii (1833), 223–42, at pp. 230–1. On this point, see also [J. Fullarton], 'Reform in parliament', *Quarterly Review*, xlv (1831), 252–339, at pp. 332–3; and [J. W. Croker], 'The present and last parliaments', *Quarterly Review*, xlix (1833), 255–81, at p. 271. Versions of this argument continued to be pursued through the 1830s (see, e.g., Sir Henry Hardinge, in Hansard, 3, xxix (3 July 1835), col. 231). On the wider arguments over colonial representation, see Miles Taylor, 'Empire and parliamentary reform'; and G. Martin, 'Empire federalism and imperial parliamentary union', *Historical Journal*, xvi (1973), 65–92.

<sup>60</sup> Duke of Wellington to Rev. Foster, 4 Dec. 1832, in *Notes of Conversations With the Duke of Wellington, 1831–1851*, ed. P. Henry, 5th Earl Stanhope (London, 1889), pp. 33–4. This was a common argument: see also, e.g., [A. Alison], 'Foreign policy of the Whigs. No. II. Portugal', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, xxx (1831), 912–19, at p. 919.

<sup>61</sup> [A. Alison], 'Remote causes of the reform passion', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, xxxi (1832), 1–18, at p. 17; and 'Are we to have peers or not?', *Fraser's Magazine*, v (1832), 248–52, at p. 250.

<sup>62</sup> 'An independent Pittite', 'Hints to electors', *Fraser's Magazine*, vi (1832), 325–8, at p. 326. See also [T. de Quincey], 'The prospects of Britain', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, xxxi (1832), 571–93, at pp. 588–90; and [I. Butt], 'Martin's British colonies. – No. I. Asia', *Dublin University Magazine*, iii (1834), 647–62, at p. 661.

they had lost their respective possessions were ominously recalled.<sup>63</sup> There was a patriotic imperative to resist Grey's mission 'to destroy the British Empire'.<sup>64</sup>

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As the decade of Reformed rule unfolded after the passage of the Great Reform Act, Conservatives claimed to find many of their worst fears confirmed, as well as detecting a number of new threats to the integrity of the empire. This was not, under the circumstances, a particularly demanding set of rhetorical manoeuvres. Canada remained a running sore for the government, culminating in the rebellions of 1837–8; the abolition of slavery and the introduction of the 'apprenticeship' system in the West Indies created a series of policy difficulties; and a seemingly endless series of smaller-scale crises prompted more fleeting debates about colonial possessions from Malta, to South Australia, to Nova Scotia.

Empire, however, was a subject that carried considerable baggage for Conservatives. The charges that had been levelled at Wellington's colonial policy at the end of the 1820s continued to be pursued by Radicals and supporters of the government for the next decade and more, as a means of deflecting criticism. The Tories, it was claimed, remained a coalition of selfish class interests, whose desire to preserve the colonial empire in something like its current shape was motivated by the place and patronage it furnished;<sup>65</sup> admitted failings in British colonial policy were attributed to past Tory mismanagement, and in some cases to Tory officials who remained in office;<sup>66</sup> and Conservative partisans were accused of a relentless eagerness to restrict liberty wherever possible, in the colonies as at home. In framing their critiques of Reformed colonial government, Conservatives were alive to the need to represent themselves as disinterested, clean-handed and open to moderate reforms.

What they did not do was offer an alternative programme. Conservative politics in the years after 1830 was about trying to find practical bonds of unity, after the severing of a half-century-long official connection that had papered over a considerable number of cracks. Conservative political argument in the 1830s, as a result, centred more than anything on attacking the failings of Whig administration and the incoherence of 'liberal' principles. The ministries of both Lord Grey (1830–4) and Lord Melbourne (1834, 1835–41) were, of course, properly speaking, coalitions between self-described Whigs, Reformers and a growing quorum of Liberals.<sup>67</sup> But the Tory press frequently

<sup>63</sup> 'The colonies', *Fraser's Magazine*, vi (1832), 437–45, at p. 437; and [J. Williams], 'Subversion of ancient governments', *Quarterly Review*, xlv (1831), 450–71, at p. 454.

<sup>64</sup> Charles Arbuthnot to Charles Arbuthnot Jr., 25 June 1832, [169], in *The Correspondence of Charles Arbuthnot*, ed. A. Aspinall (London, 1941), p. 161.

<sup>65</sup> See, e.g., *Morning Chronicle*, 10 Jan. 1833; *Morning Chronicle*, 17 Jan. 1838; and [W. E. Hickson], 'The dissolution', *Westminster Review*, xxxvi (1841), 167–232, at p. 171. Unquestionably, there was something in this, insofar as substantially more Tory M.P.s had imperial interests and connections than did those belonging to other parties. See Michael Taylor, 'The British West India interest and its allies, 1823–1833', *English Historical Review*, cxxxiii (2018), 1478–511; and I. Gross, 'Commons and empire, 1833–1841: a study of the treatment of colonial questions in the House of Commons' (unpublished University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1975). More accessibly, see I. Gross, 'The abolition of negro slavery and British parliamentary politics, 1832–1833', *Historical Journal*, xxiii (1980), 63–85; and I. Gross, 'Parliament and the abolition of negro apprenticeship, 1835–38', *English Historical Review*, xcvi (1981), 560–76.

<sup>66</sup> Whig partisans eager to deflect blame for the Canadian rebellions of 1837, e.g., could assert that the disturbances were underpinned by 'years of Tory neglect and misgovernment' (R. Peel, *What Is to Be Done? Or, Past, Present, and Future* (London, 1844), p. 25).

<sup>67</sup> J. Coohill, 'Parliamentary guides, political identity and the presentation of modern politics, 1832–1846', *Parliamentary History*, xxii (2003), 263–84. See also A. D. Kriegel, 'The politics of the Whigs in opposition, 1834–1835', *Journal of British Studies*, vii (1968), 65–91.

preferred to overlook these distinctions and to talk about Whiggism as if it were a unified governing philosophy, on the basis that both premiers were avowed Whigs, and that the critiques of Whiggery elaborated over previous decades were already firmly embedded in the political culture.<sup>68</sup> This helped to gloss over the fact that a number of the colonial secretaries of the 1830s did not look like traditional Whigs: Thomas Spring Rice (1834) did, but only served for a few months; Lord Stanley (1833–4) was of excellent Whig stock, but soon crossed the floor; while Lords Goderich (1830–3) and Glenelg (1835–9) were both Canningites. In the crucible years at the turn of the 1840s, however, the colonial office was converted into a Whig fiefdom, under the leading Whig aristocrats Lord Normanby (1839) and Lord John Russell (1839–41), which helped press the language of Whiggism more strongly to the fore. The concept of ‘L/liberalism’ was much newer, having become a feature of Conservative political discourse and demonology only in the 1820s, before gaining rapidly in significance over the course of the 1830s. Tories sometimes treated it as synonymous with Whiggism, and sometimes as a distinct political force or philosophy: this terminological confusion would persist for some time.<sup>69</sup> In Tory writing and speaking on colonial government during the 1830s, however, it was more common for Whigs and Whiggism to be presented as the primary menace.<sup>70</sup>

Conservatives liked to insist on the existential seriousness of the threat posed by Whig government. The detection of this danger rested on several basic Tory critiques of Whig politics, not all of which were easy to square with one another. For some, Whiggism rested upon no principle but expediency, and lust for place and patronage; for others, it prioritized theory over common sense, and was overly willing to engage in needless and dangerous political experimentation; for most, it was too prone to attempting to mollify ‘public opinion’, which should have only limited standing in the formation of policy. With the Whigs at last in power, however, what had for so long been a notional danger had become frighteningly real. Much of the Conservative press maintained that the Grey and Melbourne administrations were engaged in a concerted plot against the country, seeking the destruction of all the established institutions, natural influences and legitimate authorities upon which Britain’s security depended, and attacking ‘every possible division of every possible subject connected with our social system’.<sup>71</sup> The politics of the 1830s, in this reading, was a pitched battle between stability and innovation, Protestantism and Popery, monarchy and democracy, constitutions and revolutions.<sup>72</sup> And the risk was not only to Britain itself: the Whigs’ colonial measures showed that they meant ‘to shake the very globe itself to its centre’.<sup>73</sup>

All these circumstances help explain why Conservatives were so ready to read post-Reform colonial government as an extended demonstration of the faults inherent in Whig politics. As noted earlier, reflections on systemic deficiencies in the machinery of

<sup>68</sup> L. Mitchell, *The Whig World, 1760–1837* (London, 2005), ch. 9.

<sup>69</sup> D. Craig, ‘The origins of “liberalism” in Britain: the case of *The Liberal*’, *Historical Research*, lxxxv (2012), 469–87; D. Craig, ‘Tories and the language of liberalism in the 1820s’, *English Historical Review*, forthcoming; and on the background, D. Craig, ‘The language of liberality in Britain, c.1760–c.1815’, *Modern Intellectual History*, xvi (2019), 771–801.

<sup>70</sup> For an example of an analysis that privileged the dangers of ‘liberalism’ in colonial policy, see [M. Wyllie], ‘Colonial misgovernment’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, xlv (1838), 624–37.

<sup>71</sup> [J. W. Croker], ‘Political affairs’, *Quarterly Review*, lxiii (1839), 223–77, at p. 271. On this theme, see also Disraeli, *Vindication of the English Constitution*, pp. 181–2; ‘The new parliament’, *Fraser’s Magazine*, iii (1831), 637–47, at p. 644; and Charles Arbuthnot to Charles Arbuthnot Jr., 11 June 1833, [181], in *Correspondence of Charles Arbuthnot*, p. 170.

<sup>72</sup> [J. W. Croker], ‘The new reign – present and future parliaments’, *Quarterly Review*, lix (1837), 240–73, at p. 273.

<sup>73</sup> T. Raikes, Journal, 25 March 1833, in *A Portion of the Journal Kept by Thomas Raikes, esq. From 1832 to 1847* (4 vols., London, 1856), i. 172–3.

colonial rule barely featured in Conservative discourse during this period: they would, after all, have blunted the assault on ministerial infatuation, and it was all too easy to turn them back on the Tories.<sup>74</sup> Conservative claims about colonial administration in the 1830s can best be understood, then, as part of an anti-Whig ‘political language’, which aimed to unite the party’s followers by appealing to their prejudices and preconceptions, and by portraying the Conservatives as more competent and less irresponsible than their opponents.<sup>75</sup>

It was a premise of Conservative writing on the empire throughout this period – and would be until the 1850s – that the 1832 Reform Act had overturned the old, stable system of British colonial polity, and that it was therefore all the more imperative that the colonies be handled with wisdom, decision and sensitivity. That the Whigs were instead applying all their customary brands of foolishness to the management of colonial government, endangering one of the pillars on which Britain’s prosperity and global status rested, was a major cause for alarm. Their activities over the 1830s proved that they were unable to offer either elementary administrative competence, or a proper sense of constitutional responsibility.

The first problem was corruption. This was a crucial element in the Conservative case for the prosecution, because it revealed the hypocrisy of Whig governments that claimed to offer superior patriotism and purity to their Tory predecessors. Conservatives detected the curse of ‘Whig-jobbing’ at work in every branch of policy.<sup>76</sup> They grasped eagerly at every example of ‘the hungry tribe of Whig-radicals’ fattening ‘on the hard-won money of the poor’ to prove the rank hypocrisy of similar attacks on previous administrations.<sup>77</sup> It was only by corruption, indeed, that the Whigs maintained their majorities.<sup>78</sup> So, particularly later in the decade, the Tories readily identified a talent for ‘ingenious Colonial jobbing’ in the Whig governments. Their numerous colonial commissions were the clearest examples of this rank self-interest, while their ordinary appointments were little better. Rarely did the Whigs ship out one man when several would do; nor did they appoint qualified officials when incompetents would suffice.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, the men they chose to give effect to their purposes in the colonies were distinguished for their ‘slavering subserviency’.<sup>80</sup> It was not uncommon for violent agitators and perpetrators of treason to be given lucrative offices.<sup>81</sup> In other instances, which ‘completely illustrated every part of the policy of her Majesty’s government’, the Whigs allowed vigorous

<sup>74</sup> There were scattered hints in Conservative writing that ‘the misrule, corruptions, and imbecility of our colonies’ were in fact systemic problems as well as a political ones (‘India and England’, *Fraser’s Magazine*, viii (1833), 593–603, at p. 599). On the problems raised by frequent changes of colonial secretary, see [S. O’Sullivan], ‘Canada – Lord Durham’s report’, *Dublin University Magazine*, xiii (1839), 355–68, at pp. 366–7.

<sup>75</sup> For this concept of a ‘political language’, see J. P. Parry, *Democracy and Religion: Gladstone and the Liberal Party, 1867–1875* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 14–15.

<sup>76</sup> Marquis of Londonderry, in Hansard, 3, xii (10 Apr. 1832), col. 118.

<sup>77</sup> [M. Wylie], ‘Whig-radical corruption’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, xlv (1838), 345–58, at p. 345. See also [M. Wylie], ‘The “no patronage” government’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, xlii (1837), 605–20, at p. 605 and *passim*; and [A. Alison], ‘Whither are we tending?’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, xxxviii (1835), 388–400, at p. 398.

<sup>78</sup> [A. Alison], ‘The Whig dissolution’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, l (1841), 1–31, at p. 1 and *passim*; and [W. Macpherson], ‘Political parallels’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, xliii (1838), 360–70, at pp. 365–6.

<sup>79</sup> ‘O.Y.’, ‘Notes written on the last day of thirty-three’, *Fraser’s Magazine*, ix (1834), 117–26, at p. 123; and [Wylie], ‘Colonial misgovernment’, p. 635. See also [Wylie], ‘Whig-radical corruption’, pp. 349–50; and [A. Mallalieu], ‘The Canada question’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, xxxvii (1835), 909–27, at p. 926.

<sup>80</sup> [A. Mallalieu], ‘Ministerial policy in the Canadas’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, xliii (1838), 228–47, at p. 228.

<sup>81</sup> Sir John Pakington, in Hansard, 3, li (29 Jan. 1840), cols. 755–6.



and loyal colonial officials to be removed from their posts simply on account of their Conservative views and their attachment to the Protestant constitution.<sup>82</sup>

Second, Tories characterized Whig government as blundering, maladroitness, weak and prone to drift, and maintained that ministers conceded indefensible measures for the sake of ephemeral popularity.<sup>83</sup> Their colonial administration was especially distinguished for its incompetence. During the Canadian crisis Tory critics constantly stressed the ministry's want of foresight and energy in failing to prevent the rebellions.<sup>84</sup> Canada proved the government's 'incapacity and cowardice', and underlined its unpatriotic surrender of British interests to a knot of anti-colonial parliamentary Radicals.<sup>85</sup> Whig colonial policy was driven not by any concern for Britain's imperial interests or international standing, but rather by 'a morbid anxiety to propitiate sectarian parties at home'.<sup>86</sup> Their 'new brilliant system of concession' was responsible both for exalting popery in Ireland and for tempting Canada into rebellion.<sup>87</sup> Peel contrasted his 'plain, direct, straightforward' conduct on Canada, shunning 'truckling compromise', with the 'ambiguity, dilatoriness, and irresolution' of the government.<sup>88</sup> Part of this irresolution could be traced to the fact that Lord Glenelg, colonial secretary between 1835 and 1839, was (allegedly) rarely awake. Disraeli imagined 'the guardian of our colonial empire, stretched on an easy couch in luxurious listlessness, with all the prim voluptuousness of a puritanical Sardanapalus'.<sup>89</sup> The listlessness and lack of direction of the Whig government was an urgent threat to imperial integrity: Disraeli claimed that 'we might as well tear out the living heart from the human form, and bid the heaving corpse still survive, as suppose that a great empire can endure without some concentration of power and vitality'.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>82</sup> John Colquhoun, in Hansard, 3, li (28 Jan. 1840), cols. 713–14, on Chief Justice Boulton of Newfoundland. See also Sir John Pakington, in Hansard, 3, li (29 Jan. 1840), col. 755, on the same and Attorney General Hagerman of Upper Canada. Thomas Raikes commented on the return of the Melbourne ministry to power in 1835 that the new government's annulments of the appointments of Lord Heytesbury to India, Lord Amherst to Canada and Sir Howard Douglas to the Ionian Islands (the last an incorrect assumption) were part of a strategy by which 'not a Tory shall be left in place' (Raikes, Journal, 7 May 1835, in *Journal Kept by Thomas Raikes*, ii. 104).

<sup>83</sup> See, e.g., [G. Croly and G. Moir], 'What have the ministry done?', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, xliii (1838), 113–36, at p. 129; and Sir Robert Peel, in Hansard, 3, xli (7 March 1838), col. 647.

<sup>84</sup> See, e.g., Viscount Sandon, in Hansard, 3, xli (6 March 1838), cols. 529, 534; Lord Stanley, in Hansard, 3, xli (6 March 1838) cols. 548, 550, 564; and William Gladstone, in Hansard, 3, xli (7 March 1838), cols. 630, 632.

<sup>85</sup> [J. W. Croker], 'Canada', *Quarterly Review*, lxi (1838), 249–72, esp. pp. 249–53, quotation at p. 252. See also [S. O'Sullivan], 'Canada', *Dublin University Magazine*, xi (1838), 326–53, at p. 326; [O'Sullivan], 'Canada – Lord Durham's report', p. 366; and [S. O'Sullivan], 'State of parties in the British empire. The government a faction – the faction a government', *Dublin University Magazine*, xiv (1839), 379–93, at p. 379.

<sup>86</sup> Of the Durham report: [J. W. Croker], 'Colonial government – Head's Narrative and Lord Durham's Report', *Quarterly Review*, lxiii (1839), 457–525, at p. 522. See also [O'Sullivan], 'Canada', p. 326.

<sup>87</sup> [W. Macpherson], 'Political parallels', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, xliii (1838), 360–70, at pp. 365–6.

<sup>88</sup> Sir Robert Peel, in Hansard, 3, xli (7 March 1838), col. 647.

<sup>89</sup> [B. Disraeli], *The Letters of Runnymede* (London, 1836), pp. 116–22, 133–5, 167. On the influence of these letters, see W. F. Money Penny and G. E. Buckle, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield* (2 vols., London, 1929), i. 324. The theme was one Disraeli enjoyed: 'The joke is, the Queen sent for Glenelg and offered him the Premiership; and he said he would sleep upon it' (Benjamin Disraeli to Marchioness of Londonderry, 9 May 1839, in *Letters From Benjamin Disraeli to Frances Anne, Marchioness of Londonderry, 1837–1861*, ed. Marchioness of Londonderry (London, 1938), p. 9). For Lord Stanley's participation in this critique, see J. Hobhouse, Diary, 11 Feb. 1839, in Lord Broughton, *Recollections of a Long Life*, ed. Lady Dorchester (6 vols., London, 1909–11), v. 176. For an attempted (partial) rehabilitation of Glenelg, see G. Martin, 'Two cheers for Lord Glenelg', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, xi (1982), 33–57.

<sup>90</sup> [Disraeli], *Letters of Runnymede*, p. 152. This sentiment was widely echoed among Tory commentators: 'When the heart of the British oak shows this decay, how inevitable must be the fate of its branches!' ([F. B. Head], 'British policy', *Quarterly Review*, lxiv (1839), 462–512, at p. 492 (emphasis is in the source)).

Third, Tory critics charged that the Whigs were too prone to yield to ill-founded demands for constitutional liberty.<sup>91</sup> Virtually the only principle that seemed to be expressed in the conduct of the vacillating colonial office was concession to clamour that ought to have been resisted.<sup>92</sup> To this tendency, and to the Whig principles of their colonial governors, could be ascribed virtually all the most intractable problems faced by the colonies. Lord Nugent's vain pandering to the popular cause at Corfu when Ionian lord high commissioner, for instance, had led by the mid 1830s to a series of constitutional and financial crises that 'reflected in miniature an exact image of the state of Lord Grey's Government at home'.<sup>93</sup> The dangerous and disloyal principles urged under the banner of 'Durham and Reform' by the Canadian opposition later on were carbon copies of those articulated by ministers.<sup>94</sup> The Whigs' failure to grapple robustly with the sedition represented by Papineau was a sign of their downward progress from one stage of radicalism to the next.<sup>95</sup> Richard Bourke, appointed to govern New South Wales by the Whigs, was similarly criticized as acting 'too much in the spirit of his patrons' in the wilful promotion of popular causes: there was widespread Conservative horror at the idea that the 'revolutionary demand' for a representative government in that colony might be conceded, despite the fact that the state of society there required extensive purification before it would be able to support such an institution.<sup>96</sup> Wellington crystallized this argument in claiming that the government's habit of holding out the prospect of so-called but misunderstood 'popular rights' in the colonies perpetuated 'a system of agitation which ends in insurrection and rebellion'.<sup>97</sup>

The fourth accusation was that the Whigs, where not injudiciously extending constitutional rights, were too ready to infringe upon them where they were firmly established. Tory attacks on the Whigs' assumption of 'arbitrary and dictatorial power' over the government of Canada after the rebellions of 1837–8 were just as noisy as those of Radical critics.<sup>98</sup> But the most concerted deployment of this argument came in the Jamaica debates of 1839.<sup>99</sup> The Tory onslaught on the Whigs' Jamaica bill of 1839, which sought to suspend the country's constitution, was seen by their opponents, and has been portrayed by several historians since, as a piece of blatant party opportunism.<sup>100</sup> There was, however, nothing necessarily inconsistent about it. The Liberal M.P. Charles Buller insisted that there was a fundamental contradiction in the Tories fighting for

<sup>91</sup> This point lined up with attacks on the Whigs for using British foreign policy to promote constitutional reform in other states (Sir Robert Peel, in Hansard, 3, xxxi (26 Feb. 1836), cols. 1008–13). See R. Bullen, 'Party politics and foreign policy: Whigs, Tories, and Iberian affairs, 1830–6', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, li (1978), 37–59.

<sup>92</sup> [O'Sullivan], 'Canada – Lord Durham's report', pp. 366–7.

<sup>93</sup> *Morning Post*, 9 June 1834, p. 6. For Nugent's defence, see *Morning Chronicle*, 11 Apr. 1835, p. [3].

<sup>94</sup> [Head], 'British policy', p. 484.

<sup>95</sup> 'Parliamentary doings', *Dublin University Magazine*, ix (1837), 379–92, at pp. 385–6.

<sup>96</sup> [Twiss], 'New South Wales', at pp. 478, 491–5.

<sup>97</sup> Duke of Wellington, in Hansard, 3, xl (18 Jan. 1838), col. 226.

<sup>98</sup> Lord Ellenborough, in Hansard, 3, xliii (5 July 1838), col. 1263.

<sup>99</sup> The fullest exploration of the government position on the Jamaica question was [J. Spedding], 'The Jamaica question', *Edinburgh Review*, lxxix (1839), 527–56.

<sup>100</sup> Lord John Russell charged that the spirit of liberty had flared up 'rather newly' among his opponents, and that many of them had changed their minds on the issue simply 'for the interest of party' (Lord John Russell, in Hansard, 3, xlvii (6 May 1839), cols. 954, 966–7); see also Lord Holland, Diary, Apr. 1839, in *The Holland House Diaries, 1831–1840: the Diary of Henry Richard Vassall Fox, Third Lord Holland, With Extracts From the Diary of Dr John Allen*, ed. A. D. Krieger (London, 1977), p. 397; and Charles Greville, Diary, 5 May 1839, in *The Greville Memoirs*, ed. H. Reeve (8 vols., London, 1896), iv. 203–5. For a more recent endorsement of this view, see Newbould, 'Peel and the Conservative party', p. 545. See also the satire in B. Disraeli, *Sybil, or the Two Nations* (London, 1853), p. 244.

the integrity of the Jamaican constitution, while complaining about the consequences of the recent grant of a representative assembly to Newfoundland.<sup>101</sup> But this made perfect sense on Tory premises: the former was centuries old and rooted in the soil of the country, while the latter was a recent product of fevered Whig imaginations. Tories argued, moreover, that the crisis had been provoked by the government's impolicy and overflowing party spirit, and that allowances ought to have been made for the behaviour of the local assembly.<sup>102</sup> Popular assemblies always underwent ebullitions of enthusiasm; to suppress those was but a short step from suppressing the constitutional principle entirely, perhaps at home as well as abroad.<sup>103</sup> Lord Ellenborough argued that 'all suspensions of constitutions ... altered the tone of men's thoughts and feelings, and were in their results highly injurious to general liberty'.<sup>104</sup> Even those like Henry Goulburn, who questioned the general wisdom of systems of representative government in a colonial empire, argued that the abstract expediency of creating such bodies was a very different issue to whether they should suddenly be withdrawn.<sup>105</sup> A Tory tradition of imperial non-interference was invented by summoning the memory of George Canning as a die-hard opponent of abrogating colonial constitutions, and contrasted with the Whigs' 'almost Russian despotism'.<sup>106</sup> The vigour with which these arguments were pursued doubtless owed much to the imperative to defend the West India interest, the significance of which Michael Taylor has recently stressed, but they also made sense within the wider framework of Conservative arguments about Whig rule.<sup>107</sup> Conservatives, then, made significant efforts throughout the 1830s to portray themselves as more competent and principled stewards of the empire, and as defenders of rational imperial constitutionalism.

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These political threats were serious enough. But for many Conservatives, they paled in comparison to the religious dangers posed by the Whigs' colonial rule. The single most powerful Tory criticism of the governments of the 1830s was that they menaced the integrity of the established church.<sup>108</sup> The Whigs' ill-conceived assaults on the

<sup>101</sup> Charles Buller, in Hansard, 3, xlvii (3 May 1839), cols. 831–2.

<sup>102</sup> E.g. [Alison], 'Colonial government', pp. 85–90.

<sup>103</sup> To suppress the privileges of Jamaica, in fact, was but a short step to infringing those of the Commons (Sir Robert Peel, in Hansard, 3, xlvii (3 May 1839), cols. 793–5). So the suspension of the Jamaican constitution would send a dangerous message to other colonies and set a bad precedent (Henry Goulburn, in Hansard, 3, xlvii (9 Apr. 1839), col. 1266).

<sup>104</sup> Lord Ellenborough, in Hansard, 3, xlviii (1 July 1839), cols. 1057–8. See also Duke of Wellington, in Hansard, 3, xlviii (1 July 1839), cols. 1051–2.

<sup>105</sup> Henry Goulburn, in Hansard, 3, xlvii (9 Apr. 1839), col. 1262. Peel agreed that a very high standard of necessity ought to be required in order 'to wrest its long-enjoyed constitution from an old and valuable colony' (Sir Robert Peel, in Hansard, 3, xlvii (3 May 1839), col. 793).

<sup>106</sup> Sir Robert Peel, in Hansard, 3, xlvii (3 May 1839), cols. 767–8; and Donald Maclean, in Hansard, 3, xlvii (6 May 1839), col. 885. See also M. Gore, *Reflections on the Present Crisis* (London, 1839), pp. 6–7. On the privileged status of Canning in Conservative political argument during this period, see E. McNeilly, 'The Conservatives and the politics of foreign policy, 1827–1846' (unpublished University of Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 2011).

<sup>107</sup> Michael Taylor, *The Interest*.

<sup>108</sup> This was a criticism to which the Whigs were particularly sensitive (Lord John Russell, *Letter to the Electors of Stroud on the Principles of the Reform Act* (London, 1839), pp. 30–1; and [T. Spring Rice], 'Ministerial plan of education – Church and Tory misrepresentations', *Edinburgh Review*, lxx (1839), 149–80). The literature on religious issues in 1830s politics is sprawling, see R. Brent, *Liberal Anglican Politics: Whiggery, Religion, and Reform, 1830–1841* (Oxford, 1987), esp. p. 104; J. Wolfe, *The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain, 1829–1860* (Oxford, 1991); J. Wolfe, 'Anti-Catholicism and the British empire', in *Empires of Religion*, ed. H. M. Carey (Basingstoke, 2008), pp. 43–63; D. G. Paz, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England* (Stanford, 1992); W. Ralls, 'The papal aggression of 1850: a study in Victorian anti-Catholicism', *Church History*, xlii (1974), 242–56; and J. R. Roszman, "'Ireland as a weapon of warfare': Whigs, Tories, and the problem of Irish outrages, 1835 to 1839", *Historical Journal*, lx (2017), 971–95.

temporalities of the Church of Ireland, adoption of the appropriation principle and irreligious educational prescriptions seriously endangered the privileges and unity of the Anglican establishment.<sup>109</sup> Their seeming partiality to Irish Catholicism, demonstrated by their willingness to allow anti-tithe meetings to go ahead while prohibiting Orange marches, or by their privileging of the Catholic Church in the Irish national education scheme, indicated how far beyond the pale they had gone.<sup>110</sup> The unswerving, often histrionic, pursuit of this theme contributed vitally to the electoral revival of the Conservative party after 1832, and to its eventual victory in 1841.

Tory commentators did not just paint the Whig ministries as abettors of irreligion within the British Isles. They argued also that Whig colonial policy favoured the extension throughout the empire of Catholicism and heresy, at the expense of the sound Protestant belief on which the most virtuous political communities were based.<sup>111</sup> This was morally debilitating for the colonies, and underlined the directions in which the Whigs wanted to move at home. Clearly this line of attack was calculated to energize enthusiastic Anglicans, concerned about the condition of ‘true’ religion in the empire and dissatisfied with the rate of its progress, but in its assertive anti-Catholicism it also reached out beyond the ordinary Tory constituency to restive Dissenters and anti-clerical liberals.<sup>112</sup> It should be stressed that not all Conservatives adopted these arguments: more thoughtful and informed inquirers into colonial affairs, like Lord Ellenborough, argued that the maintenance of exclusive church establishments was a practical impossibility in various parts of the empire.<sup>113</sup> Most partisan Conservative attacks on the governments of the 1830s, however, blew past such trivial material considerations.

In the first place, Tory commentators argued that the Whigs’ failure to devise a comprehensive and efficient system to provide for the maintenance of the church in the colonies – preferring instead to rely mainly on voluntary efforts and tolerating pluralism – had undermined the moral character of Britain’s dependencies. Instead of fostering their spiritual and moral development by promoting the principles of the Anglican establishment, Whig government had managed to ‘raise up pandemoniums in regions which God placed beneath our power that we might plant in them his Faith and his Church’.<sup>114</sup> It reflected abysmally upon Britain in the eyes of the world, moreover, that its government had abdicated all responsibility for promoting religious truth in the colonies.<sup>115</sup> The ‘indiscriminate propagation of acknowledged falsehoods’ was no principle upon which the greatest power in the world ought to address its responsibilities.<sup>116</sup> Few Tories thought that the Church of England was in the best of states in the 1830s, but this was no reason to deny distant subjects its undoubted blessings.

<sup>109</sup> These arguments were pursued especially after 1834 and the debates over appropriation. See, e.g., [J. W. Croker], ‘Liturgical reform’, *Quarterly Review*, 1 (1834), 509–61, at p. 509.

<sup>110</sup> H. Chung, ‘The Church defence problem in Conservative politics, 1841–1847’ (unpublished University of Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 2002), p. 14.

<sup>111</sup> Sometimes a small, carefully handled endowment for Catholic clergy was thought acceptable ([J. Barrow], ‘Political importance of our American colonies’, *Quarterly Review*, xxxiii (1826), 410–29, at pp. 425–6).

<sup>112</sup> For Dissenting anxiety about the encroachments of Catholicism in the empire, see, e.g., [J. Conder], ‘Bickersteth’s *Remarks on the progress of popery*’, *Eclectic Review*, xvi (1836), 57–61, at p. 61. For the relevant passages in the pre-millenarian evangelical work under review, see E. Bickersteth, *Remarks on the Progress of Popery* (London, 1836), pp. 71–2.

<sup>113</sup> Lord Ellenborough, in Hansard, 3, liii (7 Apr. 1840) cols. 656–7.

<sup>114</sup> Paraphrase of Thomas Carlyle, in [W. Sewell], ‘Carlyle’s *Works*’, *Quarterly Review*, lxvi (1840), 446–503, at p. 467.

<sup>115</sup> [W. Sewell], ‘Gladstone on Church and State’, *Quarterly Review*, lxv (1839), 97–153, at pp. 146–7. See also [Sewell], ‘Carlyle’s *Works*’, p. 503.

<sup>116</sup> [Sewell], ‘Gladstone on Church and State’, pp. 152–3.

The Whigs were not simply permitting a state of spiritual and moral anarchy, however. Much worse, they were showing themselves partisans of the Catholic Church throughout the colonies. Anti-Catholicism re-emerged as a pivotal issue in British politics at the general election of 1835, after a hiatus following Catholic Emancipation, primarily as a result of anxieties about the Whigs' Irish policies on one hand, and about the influence and tendencies of the Oxford movement on the other.<sup>117</sup> For the rest of the 1830s the character of Catholicism as a focused, global conspiracy, which aimed at undermining all forms of Protestantism and even Protestant thrones, was vigorously asserted.<sup>118</sup>

Accounts of the increasing confidence and number of Catholics in the empire, which proliferated in the later 1830s, were therefore cause for alarm, as were the increasingly self-confident and explicit Catholic claims for 'the immense importance of the Roman Catholics in the Colonies'.<sup>119</sup> Inquiry revealed that virtually every British colony provided support, mainly by land grants, to the Roman church. The provision for Roman Catholic clergy in Australia, in particular, was represented as 'an Avatar of Maynooth at the Antipodes'.<sup>120</sup> The *Quarterly Review* maintained that bands of Catholic priests educated at that contentious seminary were disgorged yearly into the colonies, where they worked for the dismemberment of the empire.<sup>121</sup> Historically, it was admitted, Tory governments were just as responsible – if not more responsible – for this predicament as the Whigs.<sup>122</sup> But it was the Whigs alone who were actively promoting the establishment of Roman predominance. In Canada, Nova Scotia, New South Wales and the Cape, Whig ministers had disregarded the Protestant and abetted the Catholic interest. Catholic clerical and educational establishments were everywhere the predominant recipients of favour; Britain's duty to provide the means of Anglican instruction to every being under its sway had been betrayed and abandoned.<sup>123</sup> Troops stationed in the Mediterranean were even

<sup>117</sup> Wolfe, *Protestant Crusade*, pp. 83–4, ch. 3; E. R. Norman, *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England* (London, 1968); and D. A. Kerr, *Peel, Priests and Politics: Sir Robert Peel's Administration and the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, 1841–1846* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 233–6.

<sup>118</sup> [M. Wylie], 'The liberalism of popery', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, xlv (1838), 730–40; [Lord Ashley, A. M'Caul and Baron Bunsen], 'Papal conspiracy – Archbishop of Cologne, &c.', *Quarterly Review*, lxiii (1839), 88–120; and [A. M'Caul and Baron Bunsen], 'Popish persecution in the Tyrol: the exiles of Zillertal', *Quarterly Review*, lxiv (1839), 120–45. Because Catholicism was global, conclusions about its tendencies could be drawn from any part of the earth: an 'authentic illustration of the real principles' of popery, e.g., was culled from a proclamation by the Bishop of Malta urging his flock not to frequent the houses of Methodist preachers ('Popery in Malta', *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, xxi (1842), 63–4). See also *The Times*, 10 May 1838, p. 4.

<sup>119</sup> The quotation is from the short-lived *British Catholic Colonial Quarterly Intelligencer*, which lasted for only four issues (*British Catholic Colonial Quarterly Intelligencer*, i (1838), p. 6). For a compilation of some these accounts of Catholic numbers, see [J. Cumming], 'Statistics of popery in Great Britain and the colonies. I. Roman Catholic statements', *Fraser's Magazine*, xix (1839), 262–80; and [J. Cumming], 'Statistics of popery in Great Britain and the colonies. II. Protestant statements', *Fraser's Magazine*, xix (1839), 387–407. Both articles were also published as pamphlets. See also [M. Wylie], 'The progress of popery', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, xlv (1838), 494–507.

<sup>120</sup> [Spring Rice], 'Ministerial plan of education', p. 151. Spring Rice argued instead that supporting Catholicism, and other religions, in the colonies rested 'on common justice, on Christian charity, on constitutional law' (Hansard, 3, xlvi (20 June 1839) cols. 637–40). On the error of supporting Catholicism in Australia, see also 'Metropolis churches fund, and additional curates society', *British Critic*, xxiii (1838), 179–99, at p. 184.

<sup>121</sup> [W. Sewell], 'Romanism in Ireland', *Quarterly Review*, lxvii (1840), 117–71, at p. 151. It was argued in response that Catholic priests had been ostentatiously loyal during the Lower Canadian rebellion (M. J. O'Connell, in Hansard, 3, lvi (2 March 1841), cols. 1246–7).

<sup>122</sup> See, e.g., 'Great Britain and its foreign relations', *Dublin University Magazine*, xvi (1840), 591–601, at p. 601.

<sup>123</sup> [G. Croly], 'Oxford and Dr Hampden', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, xxxix (1836), 425–34, at p. 433; [M. Wylie], 'Justice to Ireland', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, xlii (1837), 828–42, at p. 829; [M. Wylie], 'Whig practices and Whig professions', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, xliii (1838), 791–804, at p. 802; [Wylie], 'Colonial misgovernment', pp. 628–32, 634; [S. O'Sullivan], 'Prospects of the British empire', *Dublin University Magazine*, xiii (1839), 3–25, at pp. 10–11; 'Our present position', *Fraser's Magazine*, xiii (1836), 755–9, at pp. 758–9; and 'Fox's book of martyrs', *Fraser's Magazine*, xv (1837), 215–313, at p. 215.



forced to take a direct part in Catholic religious ceremonies.<sup>124</sup> The best that emigrants could hope to find in their new homes was indifference between religions. The parallels between the Whigs' Irish and Canadian policies were, on this point, particularly telling: in both countries craven, unpatriotic exaltation of popery was the order of the day.<sup>125</sup>

Most devastatingly of all, the Whigs were guilty in several important instances of conceding Catholics political ascendancy. Newfoundland was the most egregious example here. There had been little Tory opposition to the concession of a legislative assembly to that colony at the beginning of the 1830s, but Conservatives were only too eager to discuss its consequences, the worst of which was that it had been filled with slaves to priestcraft by the machinations of the Catholic clergy. The new assembly had gone on to act unjustly towards the enemies of Catholicism, proceedings in which the Whig-radical government at home had meekly acquiesced.<sup>126</sup> There were some suggestions that the government had even connived at these proceedings to propitiate Daniel O'Connell.<sup>127</sup> Unsurprisingly, the Protestant church in the colony had been left quite without aid. The Whigs, it followed, had failed utterly to resist the specious alliance between popery and democracy that seemed to be disorganizing half the world, from Belgium, to Prussia, to Ireland, to Canada.<sup>128</sup> Their pusillanimity encouraged colonial assemblies and governors, who shaped their measures to the tone of the colonial office, to press ahead with their assaults on Protestantism.<sup>129</sup> For those who believed that Britain had been raised to its great imperial heights with a view to the diffusion of religious truth, the exaltation of popery overseas, a natural result of the 'spurious, soul-deadening utilitarianism' dominant in domestic politics, rendered the empire dangerously insecure.<sup>130</sup> It was asked whether the mother country had 'determined to renounce her own flesh and blood, and give their food to an army of foreign locusts', thus severing 'the only tie' by which the colonies could durably be connected to the British Crown.<sup>131</sup> It would be the duty of a future Conservative ministry to 'raise up afflicted truth' in the colonies, and to confer liberty the more secure for being based on the foundation of religion.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>124</sup> 'On popery and the Oxford heresy', *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, xx (1841), 1003–10, at pp. 1004–6. Again, this was not a new problem: for the earlier, celebrated case of Captain Thomas Atchison and Lieutenant Dawson at Malta, see Captain Atchison, letter in *The Times*, 29 Jan. 1830, p. 4; and T. Atchison, *The Idolatrous Ceremonies of the Roman Catholic and Greek Churches at Malta, Corfu, and Zante* (London, 1830).

<sup>125</sup> [M. Wylie], 'Canada and Ireland', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, xliii (1838), 385–95; 'The rehearsal', *Fraser's Magazine*, xvii (1838), 255–8; and [Wylie], 'Justice to Ireland', p. 829. Men of opposite political persuasions, of course, also saw close connections between the political and social situations in Ireland and Canada. See, e.g., John Leader, Daniel O'Connell, William Molesworth and J. A. Roebuck, in Hansard, 3, xxxvi (6 March 1837), cols. 1314, 1324, 1331, 1335; and 'The Canadian question', *Dublin Review*, iii (1837), 79–113, at pp. 79–80.

<sup>126</sup> Lord Aberdeen, in Hansard, 3, xlvii (26 Apr. 1839), cols. 552–6; [Ashley, M'Caul and Bunsen], 'Papal conspiracy', p. 113; City of Lincoln's loyal address to the Queen, *The Times*, 24 May 1839, p. 4; *The Times*, 3 May 1839, pp. 4–5; and *The Times*, 22 March 1841, p. 4, in which the newspaper commented that the state of Newfoundland was an argument against lowering the Irish franchise. For a refutation of these charges, see [P. Morris], 'A member of the house of assembly of Newfoundland', in *A Short Reply to the Speech of the Earl of Aberdeen on the State of Newfoundland* (Liverpool, 1839), which made extensive claims about the sovereignty of the house of assembly (p. 6) and argued that the people of Newfoundland were engaged in 'the universal resistance to local oppression and irresponsible government' (p. 8). Not all Tories blamed the Whigs for the state of affairs in the colony (see, e.g., Sir John Pakington, in Hansard, 3, lviii (31 March 1841), col. 706).

<sup>127</sup> *The Times*, 8 May 1841, p. 13. Joseph Hume and Daniel O'Connell supported petitions from the Catholics of the colony claiming, conversely, that they were unfairly oppressed (Hansard, 3, xxxix (12 Dec. 1837), cols. 978–9).

<sup>128</sup> [Wylie], 'Colonial misgovernment', pp. 625–8; [Wylie], 'Canada and Ireland', p. 386; [Wylie], 'The liberalism of popery', pp. 738–9; and John Colquhoun, speech at Kilmarnock, quoted in [O'Sullivan], 'Prospects of the British empire', p. 22.

<sup>129</sup> [Wylie], 'Colonial misgovernment', pp. 632–3.

<sup>130</sup> [O'Sullivan], 'Prospects of the British empire', pp. 11–12.

<sup>131</sup> [Ashley, M'Caul and Bunsen], 'Papal conspiracy', p. 118.

<sup>132</sup> [Wylie], 'Canada and Ireland', p. 395.

Nearly all the points that have been outlined, both political and religious, were put again with even greater force during the sequence of parliamentary confidence debates in 1840 and 1841. A long line of Tory M.P.s offered sharp criticism of the government's policy in Canada and Jamaica.<sup>133</sup> Sounding similar notes for once, Disraeli charged that a general assault on colonial constitutions had been a central element in the policy of the Whig ministry, while Peel boasted of having prevented the Whigs from disturbing the foundations of every colony possessing a representative system by winning the battle over the Jamaican constitution.<sup>134</sup> The Conservatives, then, made their pitch for office as the defenders of constitutions and of Protestantism in the colonies as much as at home. Expectations of a revised approach to colonial affairs, as the Conservatives moved back towards power, were appropriately enthusiastic. The Tory reviews confidently predicted a triumphant return to strong government after a decade of Whig flaccidity and evasion, and assumed that a more principled and vigorous imperial policy would form an integral part of this change. Peel's government would maintain the integrity of the empire, where the Whigs had nearly let it fall apart: the editor of the *Quarterly Review*, J. G. Lockhart, insisted as the Conservatives stood on the brink of office that a 'great colonial minister is wanted, above all other wants, for the honour, nay, safety of our national existence'.<sup>135</sup> Another reviewer in *Fraser's Magazine* neatly summed up a decade of imperial political argument by making the case that in the colonies, 'nothing need be done but to undo all the work of the Whigs, which will be quite enough to content the loyal, and strike terror into the disaffected'.<sup>136</sup>

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Things did not work out in exactly the way these commentators had hoped. In the first place, the government of 1841–6 did not offer much to celebrate. It pursued a 'deliberately low-key and low-cost' strategy in imperial and foreign affairs, the aim of which was to downplay external issues in favour of the fiscal and commercial readjustments that lay at the heart of Peelite Toryism.<sup>137</sup> As a result, for most of this period, colonial issues were much less prominent in public politics than they had been during the 1830s. Peel's lieutenant Lord Stanley, whose appointment as colonial secretary in 1841 had clearly signalled the perceived importance of the office, wrote to the prime minister in 1844 that he was 'thrown away' at the colonial office, and that in the Commons 'Colonial affairs seldom come on, and when they do, they are to be discussed before an audience who know nothing about them, and take no interest in them'.<sup>138</sup> This did, at least, mean that there was less for the opposition to attack.<sup>139</sup>

<sup>133</sup> See, e.g., Henry Gally Knight, in Hansard, 3, li (29 Jan. 1840), col. 751; Viscount Powerscourt, in Hansard, 3, li (30 Jan. 1840), col. 841; Charles Cumming Bruce, in Hansard, 3, lviii (3 June 1841), col. 1092; and Alderman Thompson, in Hansard, 3, li (28 Jan. 1840), col. 644. Thompson was connected with the North American colonies in a commercial capacity. See also M. Gore, *Reflections on the Present Crisis* (London, 1839), pp. 2, 6–7.

<sup>134</sup> Benjamin Disraeli, in Hansard, 3, lviii (27 May 1841), col. 859; and Sir Robert Peel, in Hansard, 3, lviii (18 May 1841), col. 638.

<sup>135</sup> [Lockhart], 'Foster's Notes on the United States', p. 38.

<sup>136</sup> 'O.Y.', 'Preface to our second decade', *Fraser's Magazine*, xxi (1840), 1–31, at p. 31.

<sup>137</sup> Parry, *Rise and Fall*, p. 157.

<sup>138</sup> Lord Stanley to Sir Robert Peel, 27 July 1844, and Peel to Stanley, 30 July 1844, in *Sir Robert Peel, From His Private Papers*, ed. C. S. Parker (3 vols., London, 1891–9), iii, 155.

<sup>139</sup> It also meant that colonial policy was not a major source of discontent within the parliamentary party, beyond the question of the sugar duties (D. Fisher, 'The opposition to Sir Robert Peel in the Conservative party, 1841–1846' (unpublished University of Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 1970); and R. Huzzey, 'Free trade, free labour, and slave sugar in Victorian Britain', *Historical Journal*, liii (2010), 359–79).

At the same time, however, colonial government became a subject of increasingly sharp disagreement in the Tory press. It had been easy and useful to agree on what the Whigs were doing wrong in the 1830s. With the Conservatives back in office, however, it was much less straightforward to find consensus about what the ministry ought to be doing differently. Suddenly, a Conservative government was responsible for all the systemic shortcomings, and susceptible to all the external pressures, that for a decade it had been possible to blame on the failings of Whiggism and 'liberalism'. Significantly for a party that would take a major step towards splitting in the battle over the Maynooth grant in 1845, the question of how to handle religion in the colonies proved especially divisive.<sup>140</sup> Tory paternalists argued that the empire could be made to cohere only through 'the binding power of one Church'; Conservatives of a more liberal stamp argued instead that the imposition of an exclusive Anglicanism was misguided in colonial contexts, and that the state ought rather to provide clergymen of a denomination acceptable to the main body of colonists.<sup>141</sup> By 1846, assessments of whether the government had done well or badly in its colonial policy divided sharply down pro- and anti-Peel lines.<sup>142</sup> Thereafter, with the separation of Peelites from Protectionists, further cleavages began to emerge on the shape of settler self-government, the regulation of colonial trade and the question of responsibility for defence spending.<sup>143</sup> Colonial government had ceased to be an issue on which Conservatives could project strength and unity, but continued to reflect wider political and principled divisions in different ways.

This article has sought to show that questions of colonial government occupied a more prominent place in the Conservatives' politics of opposition during the 1830s than historians have allotted them. Across the 'decade of reform', Conservative commentators and politicians styled themselves as robust defenders of imperial integrity, colonial constitutions and the colonial church, against the incoherent centralizing and liberalizing innovations of the Whigs. Most of them shared certain basic assumptions about how colonial government ought to be conducted, but for the most part the arguments they made in public political debate were not systematic, well informed or terribly consistent. Their claims rested primarily on connecting developments in the empire to wider and more influential political narratives, about the failings of Whig principles, Whig administration and that new and pernicious force, 'liberalism'. Conservative arguments about colonial government, in other words, were more often than not a grindstone on which to sharpen positions already hammered out in other contexts. What they do show, nonetheless, is that empire was more than just a social and economic question for Tory politicians and commentators.<sup>144</sup> If a Conservative was, at root, a 'constitutional defender', then that applied not just to Britain's own constitution, but also (rhetorically at least) to those of the British colonies.<sup>145</sup> Exploring

<sup>140</sup> On the role of Maynooth in the Conservative split, see S. Skinner, 'Religion', in *Languages of Politics*, ed. Craig and Thompson, pp. 93–117, at, pp. 103–5.

<sup>141</sup> W. Sewell, *Christian Politics* (London, 1844), pp. 340–6; cf. 'Colonisation. Mr. Charles Buller's speech', *Fraser's Magazine*, xxvii (1843), 735–50, at pp. 748–9.

<sup>142</sup> For the pros, see, e.g., [J. W. Croker], 'Close of Sir Robert Peel's administration', *Quarterly Review*, lxxviii (1846), 535–80, at p. 553; and, for the antis, [S. O'Sullivan], 'Political prospects. The late and present administrations', *Dublin University Magazine*, xxviii (1846), 237–52, at pp. 247–8.

<sup>143</sup> S. H. Farnsworth, *The Evolution of British Imperial Policy During the Mid-Nineteenth Century: a Study of the Peelite Contribution, 1846–1874* (London, 1992).

<sup>144</sup> This bears upon long-running debates about the identity of the party in the early nineteenth century (see N. Gash, *Reaction and Reconstruction in English Politics, 1832–1852* (Oxford, 1965), p. 131).

<sup>145</sup> Ghosh, 'Gladstone and Peel', p. 72.

these imperial arguments helps to fill in the outlines of a wider domestic ‘politics of empire’ developing over the second quarter of the nineteenth century, in which claims and counterclaims about a cascade of new colonial challenges, political experiments and schemes of reform helped shape post-Reform politics.

All this fed in to the much better-known imperial Conservatism of the later nineteenth century. In his celebrated 1872 address to the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations at the Crystal Palace, Disraeli declared that one of the defining objects of the ‘great Constitutional party’ he led was ‘to maintain the Empire of England’. He asserted that ‘since the advent of Liberalism, 40 years ago, you will find that there has been no effort so continuous, so subtle, supported by so much energy, and carried on with so much ability and acumen, as the attempts of Liberalism to effect the disintegration of the Empire’.<sup>146</sup> We know that he was not saying anything here that he had not himself thought for decades.<sup>147</sup> But it is worth emphasizing that, on this question at least, Disraeli was not a lone genius doling out extraordinary insight. He was, in fact, channelling a broad tradition of Conservative imperial argument, which went back precisely to the dawn of Liberalism as he dated it, and which privileged exactly the same constitutional and oppositional themes.<sup>148</sup>

<sup>146</sup> *The Times*, 25 June 1872, pp. 7–8.

<sup>147</sup> Parry, ‘Disraeli and England’.

<sup>148</sup> On later-Victorian constitutional argument, see E. Jones, ‘Constructive constitutionalism in Conservative and Unionist political thought, c. 1885–1914’, *English Historical Review*, cxxxiv (2019), 334–57.