Abstract

In this thesis an attempt has been made to show what actuated Melbourne the politician and to consider how far he may have been under-estimated, even, perhaps, under-valued. It would be presumptuous for the writer to claim either to have thoroughly understood a historical figure, or to be able to enhance greatly that person's political stature. But fairly consistent sense can now be made of Melbourne's career; and in the process he seems to emerge as a major, if not a dominant force in the 1830's.

Almost from the start of his political life Melbourne was profoundly preoccupied with the great question of the distribution of political power in the country. From 1815 to 1830 he was against wanton change but he was also sensitive to the ultimate need for change. These thoughtful, flexible attitudes, combined with his strength of character, enabled him to play a considerable part in the passage of the Reform Bill. But thereafter he suffered from an irremovable sense of guilt at having assisted in the destruction of the old system. His determination to control the pace of future change inspired him for the rest of the decade.

A lengthy separate chapter is devoted to Melbourne's time at the Home Office. This is partly because it was there that he earned the reputation which eventually made him prime minister; but principally because of the intrinsic interest of his responsiblities in that office. His handling of the 'Swing' revolt, of political agitation of all kinds both before and after June 1832, and of the apparent menace of the trade unions is examined in some detail. It is suggested that, despite some mistakes in judgement and tactics, Melbourne was a remarkably successful Home Secretary whose previous unfavourable reputation needs some revision.

Melbourne's formation and maintenance of his governments of 1834 and 1835 are to be explained mainly in terms of his passion for political stability. His hostile reactions to Peel and the Tories also, however, need to be emphasised. It is argued that Melbourne was an acute observer of party and public opinion who based his tenure of office upon his observations. Except, possibly, during its last two years, there was no very obvious practicable alternative to his government.

His Irish policy is discussed in two halves. From 1830 to 1834, with many reservations and hesitations, he acted at variance with his known liberal intentions towards Ireland. This was the result of both exceptionally

difficult circumstances inside Ireland and the remarkable influence of Stanley. From early 1834 at the latest Melbourne once more lived up to his declared wish to put Catholic Emancipation into practical effect. Though his liberal policy for Ireland brought him the essential support of O'Connell's phalanx in the House of Commons, it deserves prominence and respect in itself since, as is made clear in chapter three, such a policy did great electoral damage to his government in England; as, indeed, Melbourne himself expected.

Many (though by no means all) of the projects for reform inside England after 1834 attracted Melbourne's sympathy. But he often remained inactive for fear of encouraging an upheaval on the lines of 1830-1832. Moreover, unlike his more ardent colleagues and supporters, he was always sensitive to the hostility or at least indifference of much public opinion towards most of the Radicals' cherished schemes. Nonetheless, he can be credited with a definite share in those reforms which were enacted. Nor were the latter negligible.

An examination of Melbourne's management of his senior colleagues brings out his characteristic strengths and weaknesses. In personal terms he was usually rather successful and often extracted the best from his difficult ministers. His relations with Palmerston provide a well-documented example. But he was too inclined merely to overcome the day-to-day problems with and among his Cabinet, and to forget about its future.

In the concluding chapter Melbourne's personal qualities are lightly sketched where they relate to his public life. Finally, his political importance is summed up. For much of the 1830's he played a crucial, though not superficially impressive part in the peaceful adaptation of his country, so far as that could be brought about by the legislation and administration of the period. The fact that by 1841 he had, so to speak, ensured his own redundancy is perhaps an oblique tribute to him.

The thesis is largely based upon the more important collections of family papers available for the period. This approach has obvious limitations, but not serious ones where the subject is an individual politician. These numerous private letters and diaries have been frequently supplemented by recourse to Melbourne's speeches in the House of Lords. Fairly comprehensive sampling of the press has yielded some worthwhile material but not as much as might have been hoped. A narrative technique has been avoided whenever possible. This method has some drawbacks, principally a degree of overlap in places; but it facilitates analysis.

This thesis is complementary to previous studies of Melbourne's career. Three of these demand mention here. W. M. Torrens' biography of 1878 is uneven in treatment and oddly written; but he shows a sympathetic understanding of Melbourne's political role which has eluded some later historians. He also incorporated much original material which, in places, makes his book almost a primary source. Very different is the beguiling work of Lord David Cecil. This is avowedly more an interpretation of Melbourne's character than a study of him as a serious politician. It has,however, been very influential. Cecil's books also contain some original material not easily found elsewhere.

In recent years there has been an obvious need for a biography which would take into account both newly available manuscript sources and a number of illuminating specialist works on the period. It is a gap which Ziegler has lately attempted to fill with a biography more detailed than Cecil's and easier to read than Torrens'. Despite some concessions to popular taste, his work is useful to the historical student.

It has, however, shortcomings and serious lacunas. Ziegler's range of sources is not as great as it might be. He makes no apparent reference to such important works as J. M. Prest's Lord John Russell or A. D. Macintyre's The Liberator. Surprisingly, he has not explored any of the Home Office files in the P. R. O. Indeed, his whole treatment of Melbourne's Home Secretaryship is meagre and inadequate. (It is somehow characteristic that at a critical point he should confuse Place's National Political Union with the very different National Union of the Working Classes.[1]) His reliance for the most part on a narrative technique hinders analysis of Melbourne's role in any given sphere of politics. (Some narrative would have been helpful for the eventful Home Office years; but here he offers only patchy analysis.[2])

It is Ziegler's interpretation of Melbourne which is most deficient, however. Rightly, he sees that his subject was not the carefree amateur in politics for which he has so often been taken. But he fails to discern any motives or motifs in Melbourne's career and he is reduced to attributing its evolution, in effect, to allegedly unprincipled and cynical ambition. He takes no account of the deeply formative Reform Bill years upon Melbourne.

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1. Melbourne (1976), p. 145
2. ibid., pp. 130-162.

He gives no explanation of why Melbourne formed his governments of 1834 and 1835. He seems to regard Melbourne's premiership as sadly inferior to Grey's: the former's policies for England and Ireland receive only moderate appreciation. By the end Melbourne appears a rather purposeless and insignificant figure.

Ziegler's book was published while work on this thesis was in progress. His thorough treatment of Melbourne's career down to 1830 made possible a drastic curtailment of the equivalent section of the thesis. This meant that a better balance could be obtained within the prescribed length limit. Thus, while the thesis has been substantially affected by Ziegler's work, neither the range of materials used, nor the conclusions and judgements submitted, are those of Ziegler.

The Political Career of William Lamb, 2nd Viscount Melbourne, to 1841.

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Thesis submitted for the degree of D.Phil.
in the University of Oxford



Wadham College

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Preface

Considerable debts to other historians have been incurred in the preparation of this thesis. Without all the recent research on the period, it would have been very difficult to set Melbourne in his context. The standard works of M. G. Brock, N. Gash, A. D. Macintyre, and J.M. Prest must be singled out; as should the important studies of D. H. Close, G. B. A. M. Finlayson, E. Hobsbawm and G. Rudé, and P. Hollis. Mention should also be made of the valuable theses of D. M. Cameron, A. P. Donajgrodzki, and I. D. C. Newbould. The thesis of Dr. Newbould has proved particularly stimulating, even if some of its arguments are questioned in the pages below. Dr. Cameron covers much the same ground as does Newbould and comes to similar conclusions. There has not therefore been occasion to refer explicitly to Cameron's thesis.

Another substantial and interesting work calls for special comment. In his James Mill and the art of revolution J. Hamburger cites many of the Home Office papers which form the basis of chapter two of this thesis. Apart from any other considerations, however, he disregards their chronology to an unusual degree. Accordingly, a more or less new and independent study of those records has been made for the purposes of this thesis.

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Abbreviations

Brock GRA	M. G. Brock, The Great Reform Act (1973)
CC/ME	Melbourne-Palmerston correspondence, Broadlands Papers, National Register of Archives.
Greville diary	C. C. F. Greville, The Greville Memoirs, ed. H. Reeve (1896) 8 vols.
Hansard	Third series unless otherwise identified.
Hatherton diary	Diary of E. J. Littleton, 1st Lord Hatherton, Hatherton Papers, Staffs. County Record Office (pre-1835 entries = Littleton diary)
Hobhouse diary	J. C. Hobhouse, 1st Lord Broughton, Recollections of of a Long Life, with Additional Extracts from His Private Diaries, ed. Lady Dorchester (1909-11) 6 vols.
Holland diary	Diary of 3rd Lord Holland, Holland Papers, British Library Additional Manuscripts 51,867-51,872.
Howick diary	Diary of Viscount Howick, 3rd Earl Grey, Grey Papers, Durham University.
MP	Melbourne Papers, Royal Archives (available on microfilm)
MEL/RU	Melbourne-Russell correspondence, Broadlands Papers, National Register of Archives.
n.d.	no date
Q.V. diary	The Girlhood of Queen Victoria (diaries) ed. Viscount Esher (1912) 2 vols.
Sanders	Lord Melbourne's Papers, ed. L. C. Sanders (1889).
Torrens	W. M. Torrens, Memoirs of Viscount Melbourne (1890)

Footnotes

In order not to curtail the amount of text on a given page, lengthy sets of footnotes have sometimes been placed opposite the relevant page on a separate sheet of paper.

Chapter One

Prologue and Parliamentary Reform, 1806-1832

'William Lamb could do anything if he shook off carelessness, and set about it.' Viscount Castlereagh, n.d. (Lord David Cecil, The Young Melbourne p. 209).

The main events of Melbourne's political career down to 1830 have been adequately recounted by Ziegler.[1] All that needs to be done here is briefly to review the main themes of that career during those years.

William Lamb was elected to the House of Commons in 1806 as a well-connected Foxite Whig of whom great things were expected. He remained an M.P. for most of the next two decades but consistently failed to live up to his early promise. As a Commons debater or man of business he proved third-rate. Worse, he became a maverick over party policy. The new generation of party leaders did not inspire him as Fox had done; and in 1812 he felt slighted by them in his search for a new seat. He supported the government's prosecution of the war against Napoleon and thought Whig criticism of it was factious. Above all, he offended Whig sentiments by his public agreement with the repression of popular movements, whether economic or political. This process began with the Luddites in 1811-12, continued during the scares of 1816-17, and culminated in Lamb's general support for the Six Acts of 1819. He further trampled on the feelings of most Whigs by frequently rejecting any idea of Parliamentary reform. As late as 1826 he could be denounced by a radical Whig for providing

> 'a signal instance of a man of first rate talents, and known integrity, seceding from the line of political conduct which he had formerly selected.'[2]

Lamb himself claimed that it was necessary to combat the country's new discontented spirit, 'a spirit always active, inveterate, and implacable', present especially in the manufacturing districts. During the post-war years, he subordinated everything to what he saw as the underlying political drama of his time. He believed, for instance, that Queen Caroline's trial in 1820 might easily precipitate a serious insurrection and, although highly critical of what George IV and the government were doing, refused to intervene

1. Melbourne (1976) Chapters 3, 5, 6, 8.
2. Hansard, 2nd series, XV. 1030-1.

lest he 'hasten that struggle to which ... everything in this country appears to tend.'[1] Such an interpretation of the events of 1820 or of the previous few years may seem exaggerated, even melodramatic. Lamb's fears were bound to recede greatly during the political doldrums of the mid 1820's. But his clear-cut analysis of post-1815 England gave him a long range vision and sense of purpose in politics. He believed that politicians should make their moves with the care appropriate to the high stakes for which, in fact, they ultimately played. He was therefore sustained in his uncomfortable and rather obscure political independence.

He was, moreover, far from mindless where the tactics of this struggle were concerned. Early in 1817 he sat on the Commons committee which helped to bring about the suspension of Habeas Corpus following the Spa Fields riots in London. Yet a year later he admitted that the dangers had been exaggerated and that this suspension had been excessive.[2] After 'the Peterloo Massacre' in August 1819, he joined in the Whig call for an inquiry into the action of the Manchester magistrates.[3] He subsequently spoke on behalf of Althorp's amendment to the Seditious Meetings bill (one of the two really stringent Acts among the famous Six.)[4] This would have limited its operation to ten 'disturbed' counties. When some of the crowd were killed or wounded by troops during demonstrations at Queen Caroline's funeral in August 1821, Lamb told his brother George that it was the foolishest thing yet done by Liverpool's government.[5] Correctly or not, he also praised Sidmouth (absent in Ireland during the affair) for always managing such businesses without 'a killing of the people'.

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1. Lamb to William Wilberforce, August 1820; Wilberforce Correspondence, ed. R. and S. Wilberforce (1840), II, 435.
2. Hansard, new series, xxxvii. 1001.
3. ibid. xli. 554-5.
4. ibid. xli. 874.
5. 15 August 1821, Panshanger Papers 28.

Lamb was, indeed, a truly independent and rather unusual figure in the Commons. He showed no real sign of joining Liverpool's government even when it became more obviously respectable in liberal eyes after 1822. This was so despite the presence as ministers of Canning, whom he had long been thought to admire, and Huskisson, Lamb's relative and someone whom he certainly admired. The test came in 1824 when Lamb turned down an offer, apparently against Canning's advice.[1] It is significant that he also consulted the Whig Duke of Devonshire on this occasion: he had never lost his entry into most Whig circles in a social sense.[2] Above all, he remained a thorough Foxite in his adherence to the great cause of Catholic Emancipation. By upbringing and conviction, Lamb had no wish to be publicly associated with the Eldons and Westmorelands of Liverpool's party.

Three years later the circumstances of another offer were different. In April 1827 Canning recruited Lamb as one of the replacements for the Tory old guard who had deserted the new prime minister. Lamb had reservations about Canning, thinking him something of a schemer,[3] but he had good reason to seize this opportunity. Aged 48, it was time, as he later reflected,[4] to accept a subordinate office even without a Cabinet seat; a government under Canning could be relied upon to be reasonably liberal; and his post as Irish Secretary offered worthwhile employment. In every way he might well look forward to his new life.

In practical terms, Lamb's work in Dublin did not amount to much. But his liberal gestures were well-received by the Catholic party: as he wrote to his brother Frederick, 'in politics tone and impression are everything.'[5] O'Connell was sufficiently pleased to think of securing Lamb's return as member for Dublin.[6] Moreover, he worked harmoniously with Lansdowne and the other Whigs in the Canning and Goderich administrations; and he proved himself fully capable of holding down an important office.

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1. W. M. Torrens, Memoirs of Viscount Melbourne (1890) p. 121
2. ibid. p.122
3. William Lamb to Frederick Lamb, 3 December 1827 Panshanger 9.
4. Diary of Lord Howick 29 Aug. 1839, Grey Papers.
5. William Lamb to Frederick Lamb 12 January 1828, Panshanger 28.
6. Correspondence of Daniel O'Connell, ed. W. J. Fitzpatrick (1888) I, 149, n.3.

Lamb's position was undermined only by political changes at home. After Canning's death in August 1827, he was left heavily dependent upon Huskisson. In turn, Goderich's resignation in January 1828 left Huskisson vulnerable to what Wellington, as the new prime minister, might do. When Huskisson resigned after his East Retford vote in May 1828, and Wellington made no effort to prevent this resignation, Lamb left the government also. He saw no future for himself in a Tory administration less talented and less liberal than Liverpool's latterly had been. Moreover, Wellington's treatment of Huskisson cut deep. In 1831 Lamb was to say publicly that the affair had first shaken his confidence in the Duke.[1] Later in 1828 he refused an offer from Wellington[2] and in private spoke of him vehemently as an antagonist to be defied.[3]

For the next two years Lamb was prominent amongst those Canningites now led by Huskisson, a small group but possessing, as Brougham termed it, 'a weight beyond its size.'[4] Lamb's elevation to the Lords as 2nd Viscount Melbourne in July 1828 made little difference to his career. His political importance rested on his reputation as a 'clever, able man'[5] and on his acceptability to all but Ultra Tories and extreme Radicals rather than on any expertise in the Commons. When, therefore, political excitement returned in 1830, and Wellington's government came under pressure, Melbourne was in a favourable position.

There is no direct evidence of how he reacted to the re-emergence of demands for Parliamentary reform. In the spring of 1830 the movement for it was by no means overwhelming.[6] But new perspectives were opening up: Wellington did not look capable of handling the situation; and an understanding with the Whigs seemed desirable to someone like Melbourne. Indirect approaches

1. Hansard, 3rd series, vii. 1178.
2. Torrens p. 205.
3. Palmerston to Lady Cowper, 25 Nov. 1829, Broadlands (Hants. Record Office) 12.
4. H. P. Brougham, 'Life and Times' (1871) III, 48-9
5. Diary of J. C. Hobhouse, 25 June 1828; Recollections of a long life, ed. Lady Dorchester (1909), III, 280.
6. M. Brock, The Great Reform Act (1973) p.77. Throughout chapters 1 and 2 my debt to this work is great.

to Grey were made on behalf of the Huskissonites in the early summer. No formal agreement resulted but both parties expected to act together if Wellington did not change his policies and if Reform gained ground.[1] The duke made an offer to Melbourne at the end of June. This he declined, reminding Wellington of May 1828 and telling him he could not accept office without Huskisson and the Whig leaders.[2] Perhaps nobody except Wellington could have expected anything else: Melbourne liked office but he was not avid for it when it meant abandoning his friends and committing himself to a very uncertain future.

If Melbourne found it difficult to gauge the strength of feeling for Reform, the elections in the summer of 1830 must have assisted him.[3] He would have known of the government's persecution of Canningite and Huskissonite candidates, action which made Wellington even more unattractive as a potential leader. Unlike Liverpool in 1826, Wellington had no inhibitions at all about using government influence; the old system was therefore further discredited. Still less could Melbourne have ignored the many elections which told against the government, or indeed some which told against established patrons, whether Tory or Whig. The cry for Reform made a lasting impression on two other Canningites, Robert Grant and Lord Wharncliffe. From his own experiences in Hertfordshire in 1825-6, Melbourne knew how formidable revolts by voters in both county and borough could be.[4] Indeed, the elections altered the state of affairs so much that Melbourne planned an unusual journey north to consult with Huskisson and Brougham, the most voluble Whig advocate both of Reform and of an alliance with Huskisson. Only his health prevented Melbourne from meeting them at Liverpool on the day Huskisson was killed.[5]

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1. A. Mitchell, The Whigs in Opposition, 1815-30 (1967) p.231.
2. Memorandum by Palmerston, n.d. Broadlands Papers GMC/33.
3. Brock, GRA Chapter 3.
4. Torrens pp. 134-9.
5. Melbourne to Brougham 19 Sept., Brougham Papers 43,480.

The removal of Huskisson made his followers even less inclined to join the government 'now that', as Melbourne said, 'we are deprived of him and the weight which he carried with him.'[1] Grey reassured himself of this by sounding Melbourne and Palmerston through Lord Holland, who also reported their willingness to serve under Grey.[2] No formal union was sought at this stage but clearly the Whigs would need the experience and ability of the Huskissonites if a new government was formed[3] and there no longer remained the obstacle of Huskisson himself, whom the Whigs had mistrusted. Melbourne and Palmerston accordingly rejected the overtures which Wellington made intermittently in October. They stipulated that the Whig leaders must be brought into any new arrangement. But, as Melbourne said, Wellington was 'in the most perfect ignorance' of the Whigs' views and 'of the actual state of affairs.'[4] Even so, Melbourne was slow to commit himself to the idea of a Reform government dominated by the Whigs. After Wellington had made his famous declaration against all Reform on 2 November, Dudley remarked, as they left the Lords, that the Duke had thrown away the scabbard, to which Melbourne rejoined: 'No, the sword with which he might have parried attack, and maintained the position for a good while.'[5] At the meeting of Huskissonites at Palmerston's house on 6 November, Melbourne was not prominent in the general support for Brougham's forthcoming motion on Reform.[6]

Once Wellington had resigned, however, Melbourne had no hesitation in acting upon the earlier understanding with Grey: the only question really was which office he was to have. He was obviously interested in one of the 'efficient' offices but it was six days after Wellington's fall on 16 November

1. ibid.
2. Holland to Grey 25 Sept. Grey Papers.
3. Mitchell op. cit., p. 230
4. Melbourne to Palmerston 13 Oct. Broadlands Papers GMC/40.
5. Torrens p. 219.
6. H. Lytton Bulwer, Life of Palmerston (1870) I, 364.

1. E. J. Littleton to R. Wellesley 19 Nov. 1830; A. Aspinall, 'The Last of the Canningites', Eng. Hist. Rev., L (1935), 663.
2. Canning to George IV 24 April 1827; The Letters of George IV ed. A. Aspinall (1938) III, 223.
3. Lord Granville to Huskisson 21 Dec. 1827; The Huskisson Papers ed. L. Melville (1931), p. 265.
4. Lady Cowper to Frederick Lamb 27 April 1827, Broadlands (Hants R.O.) 16
5. Diary of Charles Greville 20 Nov.; The Greville Memoirs, ed. H. Reeve (1896) II, 68.
6. 22, 28 Nov.
7. Hobhouse diary 21 December 1827; III, 229.
8. Lady Cowper to Frederick Lamb 9 May 1826; Letters of Lady Palmerston ed. Tresham Lever (1957) p. 149.
9. Hansard, new series, xxxvi. 791
10. ibid. xxxv. 29-30

before his appointment as Home Secretary was announced. Melbourne seems to have owed the post to Palmerston who, denied the Commons Leadership and the Exchequer, insisted on the Foreign Office for himself and the Home for Melbourne.[1] It is impossible to say whether this was at Melbourne's behest or not. In 1827 Canning[2] and Lord Granville,[3] as well as Melbourne's sister, Lady Cowper, had thought him suitable for the Home Office.[4] But in 1830 he was thought too idle for the duties by Greville,[5] the Times, and the Spectator.[6] For his part, Grey's principal concern was to construct a broad-based government; and here Melbourne would be very useful. Lansdowne had originally been designated Home Secretary but he was not greatly interested in official duties, nor apparently very competent in discharging them;[7] he therefore became Lord President.

By joining Grey's government Melbourne committed himself to some measure of Parliamentary Reform. He thus gave up one of his strongest opinions. In 1826 his speech on the subject in the Commons had been such that Canning told Lady Cowper, 'I could not say anything after Wm. Lamb, for I could not have gone so far.'[8] Some of his objections to Parliamentary reform are obvious enough. Melbourne was not a borough magnate, nor were his closest friends and relatives, but the old unrepresentative distribution of seats and votes was so much part of the whole system of property rights that it was very difficult for someone in his privileged position, with an annual private income of £22,000 gross, to think of altering it. In Pitt's day, Reform meant a safe increase in county seats and votes, but in post-1815 England it looked as though Reform would lead to a dangerous degree of popular control. He had no wish to be ruled by demagogues and he believed that men with such ambitions were already waiting in the wings. In 1817, looking at those boroughs which had thrown off their allegiance and chosen their own members, he concluded that the representation had not thereby gained 'either in talent or in respectability'.[9] Conversely, he believed that nomination boroughs enabled promising young men to enter public life; doubtless he thought of himself as an example.[10]

At a fundamental level he considered that 'change is of itself a great danger, a great evil'[1] and that almost nothing could 'justify a man in unsettling the minds of others, weakening the force of reverence, authority, and example'.[2] Throughout his life Melbourne was very aware that great political changes could be effected only by a process which necessarily aroused unrealistic expectations.

Melbourne never ceased to have doubts and fears about Reform but he was always prepared to consider it in a purely practical way. In 1816 he had contended to Sir Robert Heron that Reform was unnecessary because 'the people did not wish it.' He added, however, that if 'the people should ever become seriously and perseveringly desirous of it, I should think it my duty to support it.'[3] He lived up to this profession on a little-noticed occasion three years later. In the debates after 'Peterloo' he announced his support for a motion of Reform which Lord John Russell was about to propose. He did this, he said, to help 'conciliate and tranquillise the public mind.'[4] In the event, the demand for Reform did not go wide or deep enough in 1819-20; but Melbourne's attitude deserves attention. When he had spoken against Russell's Reform motion of 1826, he had claimed that 'he could not see ... what real benefit could be derived from it.'[5] The pressures he had thought he saw building up in 1819 were simply absent by 1826. No one, however, was more prepared for their eventual return than Melbourne.

He was acutely aware of economic and social change: his own background as well as his intelligence ensured this. He may have lived mainly in London and Hertfordshire but his title and much of the family wealth came from the northern midlands. Melbourne itself he once described as 'a large manufacturing and political village ... twenty-five miles from Leicester, seventeen from

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1. Melbourne to Anglesey 8 April 1833; Anglesey Papers, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, D619/29B p. 159.
2. Melbourne's notebook (undated but pre-1830); Lord Melbourne's Papers, ed. L. C. Sanders (1889) p.95.
3. Sir R. Heron, Notes (1851) p. 225.
4. Hansard, new series, xli. 554-5.
5. Hansard, 2nd series, xv. 712.

Nottingham, eight from Derby - rather an inflammable neighbourhood';[1] he might have added that it was also only twenty miles from Birmingham. Although not in the same league as Lords Londonderry and Durham, he derived a fair income from coal mines; and he was not above investing £1000 in one of the new railway companies.[2] In a different and rather oblique way, Melbourne's attachment to the unaristocratic figure of Huskisson, whom he described as 'the greatest practical statesman he had known',[3] also suggests a considerable respect for the economic forces which, in a sense, Huskisson represented. Likewise, in the abstract, Melbourne could describe Birmingham and Manchester as

> 'great emporiums of commerce, daily increasing in wealth ... full of men of opulence, of spirit, and intelligence ... arrived almost at imperial grandeur, and metropolitan magnificence';[4]

for him this represented an unusual flight of eloquence.

In some ways Melbourne rose above mere expediency in considering Reform. As his statement to Heron shows, he was prepared to acknowledge as a principle the claims of 'the people', even if the latter in his eyes stopped short of the readers of unstamped newspapers. His Foxite heritage also surfaced when he told the House of Lords in April 1832 that he

> 'looked upon a reasonable deference to the will of the people distinctly expressed to be one of the conditions of the government of a free people.'[5]

Faced with a revolt by the Hertford voters in his 1826 election campaign, he had been genuinely at a loss to know how to argue against their desire for more political freedom.[6] To judge from his remarks on the Select Vestries Bill of 1831, he was even opposed to the principle, which long survived the Reform Bill, that property owners might be entitled to more than one vote.[7]

But, however liberal he might be in theory, Melbourne would not assist liberal reforms in practice. It is probable that by the later 1820's his

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1. Melbourne to Lord John Russell 13 October 1841, Melbourne Papers 15/56.
2. The Girlhood of Queen Victoria (diaries, ed. Lord Esher, 1912) I, 302
3. Greville diary 14 Sept. 1830; II, 47.
4. Hansard, 3rd series, vii. 1179.
5. Hansard, 3rd series, xii. 46.
6. Lady Cowper to Frederick Lamb 2 Feb. 1826; Letters of Lady Palmerston p.146
7. Hansard, 3rd series, viii. 829.

views on Reform had softened; but he would not support even the reasonable enfranchisement of two or three great towns, because no reform could be moderate or limited in his opinion. In 1827 he believed that to transfer East Retford's seat to Birmingham was short-sighted and would merely advance the cause of reform by admitting 'the existence of the disease and the propriety of the remedy.'[1] Melbourne had no wish to help unnecessarily those whom he thought would gain most from Reform. As he told Queen Victoria later,

> 'I don't like the Middle Classes ... the higher and lower classes there's some good in, but the middle classes are all affectation and conceit and pretence and concealment.'[2]

He thought that it was a great advantage for the President of the Board of Trade 'in his dealings with merchants and manufacturers to be a person of high rank'.[3] He also believed that manufacturers could not be trusted to be impartial magistrates whereas 'Country Gentlemen have held and still do hold a higher character than master manufacturers.'[4] With all the 'hauteur' of the second generation nobleman he even described Peel as 'a stupid, underbred fellow'.[5] In ordinary circumstances such an attitude held out little hope for people even slightly less propertied, intelligent and respectable than Peel.

In the unquiet times of 1830, however, such prejudices were no longer so easily held. Melbourne was against change but on one crucial proviso:

> 'that which it is proposed to change must be supported by authority, consent, reputation and opinion'.

If that condition were not fulfilled,

> 'it is then our duty to look about us, and to consider the dangerous situation in which we are placed'.[6]

As the pressure for Reform built up in 1830, and especially after the general election and the July Revolution, just such a situation seemed to be coming into existence. To judge from his remark to Dudley,[7] Melbourne thought that

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1. Melbourne to Brougham 7 Nov. 1838; Sanders p.118.
2. Q.V. diary 23 Jan. 1840; II, 305.
3. Howick diary 30 Jan. 1834.
4. Melbourne to Russell 6 Oct. 1835; Broadlands Papers MEL/RU/182.
5. Lady Longford, Victoria R.I. (1964) p. 121.
6. Hansard, 3rd series, vii. 1176-7.
7. See page 7.

a fairly limited Reform bill, if proposed by Wellington, would have answered the situation. But he was clear that in the absence of such a bill, nothing could withstand the 'irresistible influence of the opinion of the people', a phrase he used in April 1832 when he noted how Wellington's government 'fell to the ground without the pressure of much external opposition.'[1]

Once in office, moreover, Melbourne supported more radical proposals for Reform than those with which he thought Wellington could have got away. He did this partly because he knew that the advent of the Whig government in itself greatly heightened expectations. Although he did not share in the drawing up of detailed plans for Reform, he made it clear over the franchise that he was 'for a low figure. Unless we have a large basis to work upon, we shall do nothing.'[2] Melbourne may have made some demur over the abolition of the nomination boroughs but the only piece of evidence which supports this view is very suspect. According to Lord Ellenborough, 'Lord Melbourne told Herries he and his friends could not agree to the Reform proposed by Brougham and Althorp. They would abolish all proprietary boroughs.'[3] In fact Brougham's Reform scheme of November 1830 did not go as far as the final Bill; and even Althorp insisted only on the abolition of 100 borough seats in January 1831. In any case, Herries was hardly one of Melbourne's confidants. Doubtless Melbourne wanted some proprietary boroughs left in existence; but this accorded perfectly well with the rest of the Cabinet's intentions.

Everything suggests that Melbourne was prepared to go to great lengths for the sake of settling Reform, the greatest of all political issues, for at least the rest of his lifetime. He was more aware than many, including Grey, that Reform would be followed by other great changes;[4] but these seemed less hazardous than resisting a comprehensive Reform bill in 1831. Melbourne knew

1. Hansard, 3rd series, xii. 46.
2. D. Le Marchant, Memoir of Viscount Althorp (1876) p.95.
3. Diary of Lord Ellenborough, 8 Jan. 1831; Three Early Nineteenth Century Diaries, ed. A. Aspinall (1952) p.38.
4. Hansard, 3rd series, vii. 1184.
   Melbourne to Russell 24 Oct. 1837, MEL/RU/415.

enough about the inevitable recurrence of depressions in the new industrial economy to dread any future one, which might be worse than that persisting in 1830-1, unless by then there was some likelihood of political stability. Since

> 'on every occasion of public calamity and distress ... the people call for an alteration in the Representation',[1]

he believed

> 'there must come a time when both the legislative and executive powers must yield to the popular voice or be annihilated.'[2]

When the clamour did return the sense of injustice would be deeper. Melbourne's thinking here was greatly influenced by what had happened in Ireland where the delay in catholic emancipation had made matters so much worse and had given O'Connell his opportunity. Melbourne told the Lords in October 1831:

> 'the power of that man is the creature of your lordships' hands; your obstinacy gave him influence.'[3]

An English equivalent to O'Connell, with a larger audience to excite, was a frightening prospect. With the current crisis over Belgium before his eyes in 1830 and 1831, Melbourne could also envisage the return of a Reform agitation at a time when the government

> 'is immersed in other dangers and has no arms to resist a discontented people.'[4]

These were Melbourne's fundamental views from November 1830 until May 1832. They made him a consistent and firm supporter of the Reform Bill. He could not influence its course through the Commons, nor even really in the Lords, but in the Cabinet it was a different story. As the minister responsible for public order his views were bound to command attention; coming from a noted independent and former opponent of Reform, they carried added weight. He did not have the reputation of an elderly valetudinarian from which Grey suffered; he was more experienced than, for instance, Russell; and he was not suspect as a radical in the way that Durham or Althorp might be. All of this made Melbourne a steadying influence in a body which was subject to unusual strains and was by no means harmonious.

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1. Hansard, 3rd series, vii. 1179
2. ibid.
3. ibid. 1185
4. ibid. 1180.

From the middle of March 1831 it seemed likely that Grey's government might be defeated on the Reform bill in the Commons and thus forced to consider a dissolution. Their slender victory on the second reading of the Bill on 23 March and their defeat on Gascoyne's motion on 20 April made a decision imperative. The main argument against dissolution was that an election would greatly increase disorder in Ireland.[1] The cabinet meeting shortly after the defeat on 20 April was therefore torn between this consideration and the need to continue with Reform. According to Stanley, at the end of the meeting the previously silent Melbourne asked 'Can we dissolve?' The answer was 'Yes' 'Dissolve then', he replied.[2] This brief, resolute intervention seems to have dispelled the doubts of other ministers. Melbourne was more consistent than some of his colleagues in deciding to carry through the original bill; and more realistic, given the increased support for it in March and April, as evidenced by numerous county petitions and the conversion of many MPs who kept a weather eye on their constituencies.[3] He could already see the immense risks involved in withdrawing a great concession once offered, although he did not make this view explicit until later in 1831.[4]

The elections showed that the decision to press ahead with the Reform Bill had been correct. Melbourne wrote to Stanley that they had

> 'passed off upon the whole with less tumult than I had apprehended, but ... this is owing to the popular party having for the most part had their own way. The excitement undoubtedly is tremendous.'[5]

Most of the contests were indeed one-sided and the government obtained a majority of 130-140. Holding elections had given a great boost to the Reformers: as he surveyed the increased agitation, Melbourne told Grey of his feeling that affairs were 'in a very perplexing and alarming state.' But,

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1. Brock, GRA p. 188.
2. A. Aspinall,'The Cabinet Council', 1783-1835, Proceedings of the British Academy, xxxviii (1952) p. 193 n.2.
3. Brock, GRA p.169.
4. see page 16
5. 17 May 1831, Derby Papers 17/7.

1. Melbourne to Grey 11 June 1831, Grey Papers.
2. Diary of Lord Holland 5 Sept., Holland Papers, Add. Mss. 51,867 f.126 (As this thesis was being prepared Holland's diary was published: The Holland House Diaries, 1831-1840 ed. A. D. Kriegel (1977).
3. ibid.
4. Hansard, 3rd series, vii. 1179.
5. See chapter 2.
6. Brougham, Life and Times, III, 133.
7. Holland diary 8, 10 Oct., Add. Mss. 51,867 f. 175, f.178.
8. 10 Oct. Broadlands Papers GC/ME/12.
9. Holland diary 15 Oct., Add. Mss. 51,867 f.186.

given this massive demonstration of popular demands for Reform, he concluded:

> 'I do not the least repent the course we have taken. On the contrary [I] feel much confirmed in it.'[1]

The next crucial stage came in the autumn of 1831 as the second Reform Bill passed the Commons and approached a hostile House of Lords. The cabinet debated the possibility of a creation of peers, in the event of defeat in the Lords. On 5 September they agreed to postpone any such creation; such a step was alien to their aristocratic outlook and might, moreover, alienate existing supporters in the Lords. Melbourne had little need to voice his opposition to such a step. When, however, specific names were discussed with a view to a creation and a certain diplomat, Sir Charles Bagot, was mentioned, Melbourne broke an hour-long silence to exclaim, 'I am all against him';[2] as he told Holland afterwards, 'Damme, he should have been plagued to death about his brother Frederick if Bagot had got a peerage.'[3] It seems that at this stage he was not unduly worried by the possibility of further delays to the Bill. His arguments to the Lords on 4 October suggest that his fears were not for the immediate future.[4] On the other hand, he may have been avoiding direct intimidation of his fellow peers, which would have been both indelicate and counter-productive.

The majority of 41 against the Bill on its second reading in the Lords on 8 October altered Melbourne's complacent state, if it had been that. Serious riots followed.[5] Although he agreed with Brougham that he would not submit to dictation 'by the mob, or the Radicals', he was alarmed.[6] Even worse, perhaps, he foresaw a possible split in the government as a result of Palmerston standing out for considerable modifications in the Bill.[7] Just before Ebrington's motion supporting both the ministry and the Bill on 10 October, Melbourne wrote to Palmerston to ask him to

> 'suppress the expression of any difference of opinion in to-night's debate. ... the breaking up of the Government would, I verily believe be followed by a general convulsion, which their keeping together will undoubtedly prevent at present.'[8]

This had its effect because Palmerston did not speak at all in the debate, though he continued to make trouble by protesting against any Cabinet pledge of the entire, unaltered Bill.[9]

At this point Melbourne hoped that the recess of Parliament would allow passions to cool;[1] as late as 28 October he was 'quite opposed to the assembling of Parliament before Christmas.'[2] But over the next three weeks this conviction changed. He came to decide that preserving Cabinet unity was no longer sufficient to keep the Reform movement quiet and that an early recall of Parliament was essential so as to reassure the political unions the government stood by the Bill in its entirety. There had been suspicions since the second reading defeat in the Lords that the government planned to negotiate the passage of a modified Bill;[3] by early November these seemed to be leading to highly dangerous plans by the unions for possible military action. The projected re-organisation of the Birmingham Union would turn it into something not far short of an armed, disciplined body and it was likely that this would be copied by the 'low' unions, and perhaps by anti-reform groups. The risk of an armed clash was thus greatly increased and the horrible nature of such violence had clearly been revealed by the Bristol riots of 29-31 October. Melbourne had already written:

> 'It is a very dangerous way of dealing with a nation to attempt to retract that which you have once offered to concede.'[4]

After the first week in November these words assumed a new significance. Other ministers also became worried at this time, fearing especially that news of the secret negotiations with the 'waverers' would become public and provoke an outburst from the unions.[5] Nonetheless, at the crucial Cabinet of 19 November it took five hours to decide on the recall of Parliament for 6 December. With Grey himself against this early date the question seems to have been evenly balanced until Melbourne's 'report of the state of the public mind and his somewhat reluctant but decided opinion that it would be aggravated very materially by a postponement of the meeting.'[6] The importance of his

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1. Melbourne to Palmerston 10 Oct. GC/BM/12
2. Diary of E. J. Littleton 28 Oct.; Aspinall, Three Diaries p.152-3
3. Brock, GRA p. 248.
4. Melbourne to Sir Herbert Taylor 25 Oct., Sanders p.135.
5. Brock, GRA p.261
6. Holland diary 19 Nov., Add. Mss. 51,868 f.215.

intervention may be gauged from the fact that Palmerston had not expected him to take this line and had, indeed, confidently predicted a January date.[1] Subsequently, both Palmerston and Frederick Lamb rounded on Melbourne for supposedly shutting the door on further talks with the waverers.[2]

This decision enabled the government to issue a proclamation on 22 November against any military organisation by 'Attwood and the Birmingham fellows', as Melbourne called them.[3] On the same day the Council of the Birmingham Union, satisfied with the early recall of Parliament, abandoned their new plan voluntarily. The reduction in tension also made it safe for Melbourne to join with Palmerston in trying to modify the Bill in a conservative way at one important point. Of twenty three additional seats which became available when the Cabinet decided not to reduce the total numbers of the Commons, Palmerston wanted only six to go to towns in Schedule D and five to go to selected counties.[4] But only Melbourne and Richmond supported him and the Cabinet assigned ten seats to Schedule D and none to the counties. Melbourne and Palmerston protested to Grey in person and proposed 'leaving the 23 members deficient rather than give ten more to the manufacturing towns.'[5] Their efforts, however, failed. It is significant that this was Melbourne's only known attempt to alter the details of the Bill. It reveals his belief that not everything, even now, need be conceded to Attwood and his kind; he judged that the government still had room for manoeuvre.

His action might, however, be seen as the start of a revulsion against the Bill as a whole. Such an interpretation, originating with Greville, depends upon Melbourne's opposition to a creation of peers and his part in the negotiations with the 'waverers' in early 1832. On several occasions from January to March 1832 Holland recorded Melbourne's strong opposition to such a creation when it was discussed by the Cabinet.[6] But it seems likely

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1. Palmerston to Lady Cowper 16 Nov., Broadlands Papers (Hants. R.O.) 16.
2. Palmerston to Melbourne 20 Nov., MP 11/3.
   Frederick Lamb to Melbourne n.d. [20 Nov.] MP 106/10.
3. Greville diary 21 Nov.; III, 220
   (Attwood had been warned off unofficially just prior to 22 Nov.: see below p. 76)
4. Palmerston to Lady Cowper 28 Nov., Broadlands Papers (Hants. R.O.) 12.
5. Palmerston to Lady Cowper 29 Nov., Broadlands 12.
6. Holland diary Add. Mss. 51,868 f.283, f.346.

that his motive was primarily loyalty to his order. Of course, Melbourne could not fail to be impressed by the waverers' resolute threat to lead a revolt in the Lords if any new peers were created. Yet he was not going to embrace cordially men who were putting a pistol to ministerial heads. Nor was it absolutely certain that Wharncliffe could turn moderate peers against the Bill at this late stage, even if he tried.

For his part, Melbourne knew how disastrous the consequences of a second defeat in the Lords were likely to be. He wrote to Grey on 27 January 1832:

> 'it is certain that there are in Manchester as in London and most other large places a body of Individuals, who only want opportunity, and perhaps courage, to proceed to the worst extremities.'[1]

It was therefore well worthwhile to encourage the waverers by holding talks with Haddington, just as other ministers did with Wharncliffe or Harrowby. Melbourne was also happy to make use of information supplied by Greville, the waverers' self-appointed emissary.[2]

But Melbourne was sceptical of their chances of success and even of their sincerity. He warned Greville on 29 January 1832 and again on 5 February that the government were much annoyed at the recent low majorities in the Commons and Lords (on the Russian loan and the Belgian questions respectively) and that with such exhibitions of weakness it became more difficult not to make peers.[3] Melbourne also wanted a declaration from the waverer leaders as soon as possible. He reminded Greville that although these leaders might need time, the government also needed it if it proved necessary to call up peers (because of the issuing of invitations and patents).[4] On 12 February Haddington reproached Melbourne for insisting on pledges of support and virtually refused to go so far.[5] When Greville called on Melbourne two days later, to reinforce Haddington's pleas, he found him 'in his lazy, listening silent humour, disposed to hear everything and to say very little.'[6]

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1. Grey Papers.
2. Greville diary 13 Jan. 1832; II, 237-8.
3. Greville diary; II, 246, 249-50.
4. ibid. 7 Feb.; II, 252-3
5. Haddington to Melbourne 12 Feb. 1832, MP 26/124.
6. Greville diary 14 Feb.; II, 259.

After this Melbourne's contact with the waverers seems to have ended.

It is clear that he was not a waverer 'manqué'. He never gave any sign that he wished to see modifications imposed at the committee stage in the Lords, whereas that was their ultimate object. On the contrary, it is possible to envisage Melbourne, after what he told Greville, agreeing very reluctantly to a creation of peers in March had not the waverers gathered sufficient support by then to make a successful second reading probable. At the very least, by early March the risk of the waverers failing to produce a majority seemed to Grey and Melbourne much less than the risk of a creation alienating so many moderates that it failed to produce a majority unless the number to be created were to exceed what the King would stand. A final decision by the Cabinet was not taken until 10 March and it would have been quite consistent with his behaviour in November 1831 for Melbourne to have favoured the radical side at the last minute. It is true that on 11 March he made his most extreme statement ever on a creation of peers before the second reading, when he avowed 'that he should have some scruple in annexing the signet to the warrant ...'.[1] But this appears to have been simply an attempt to crush Durham, who had made the proposal and whom Melbourne much disliked. By this date a majority on the second reading looked likely and Grey had won over all except Durham to this point of view,[2] so that the question of a creation had already been ruled out. Had it proved necessary there is no evidence that Melbourne would not have acquiesced in it, as he was prepared to do in May 1832.

It was Greville who wished to portray Melbourne as a 'waverer' and it is from him that there comes the remaining evidence for Melbourne's general doubts about Reform in these months. On 7 January 1832, after talking to Lady Cowper at Panshanger, he concluded that Palmerston and Melbourne, but especially the latter, were 'heartily ashamed' of their support for Reform,

1. Holland diary 11 March 1832, Add. Mss. 51,868 f.402.
2. Brock, GRA p.278.

detested the Bill and were thinking of resigning.[1] Melbourne had never liked the Reform Bill and it is probable that the difficulties of the past year made him even less pleased with the situation in which he was placed but he never showed any sign of resigning. Such a course would have been illogical and discreditable.

Greville thought he had even better evidence when, during a society ball at the end of March 1832, Melbourne told him

> 'he really believed there was no strong feeling in the country for the measure' and as for the rotten boroughs, he did not see 'how the Government is to be carried on without them.'[2]

Greville was deeply shocked by these words. He may well have misinterpreted them, however. Melbourne's views about Reform naturally fluctuated but his first statement to Greville on this occasion is not corroborated by anything else he said or did in these months. Given the circumstances in which it was made, and the unequal positions of the two men, it looks like a deliberately provocative remark. As Greville himself noted on a later occasion, Melbourne loved dashing opinions.[3] This particular example runs completely counter to what Melbourne told the Lords on 9 April when, with every reason to weigh his words, he said that it was impossible to continue the government 'in the present state of public feeling' without the Reform Bill. The second remark can be taken more seriously. But Melbourne may be forgiven for failing to see that a government could still obtain reliable majorities under the new system if the Commons were divided into two parties; and if he was thinking that newly-appointed office-holders would face greatly increased difficulties when submitting to re-election, he was entirely right. In any case, the remark is perfectly consistent with the view that government under extremely difficult conditions after a Reform Act was better than the end of all government as he had known it if the Bill did not pass. If anyone looked like deserting the Bill at this stage, it was Palmerston.

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1. Greville diary; II, 235-6.
2. ibid., 1 April 1832; II, 283-4.
3. ibid., 13 Sept. 1834; III, 136.
4. Hansard, 3rd series, xii. 46.

At the Cabinet on 3 April, he showed great readiness to compromise whilst Melbourne merely enjoyed himself by reading through the list of potential peers 'with some lively and blunt remarks on the character and pretensions of each.'[1]

Whatever his fears for the future, Melbourne continued to support the Bill throughout its final stages. Its second reading in the Lords on 14 April vindicated the Cabinet's decision not to ask for new peers, but, as Melbourne commented on leaving the chamber that morning, it was not all over yet.[2] He could do little but wait for the expected onslaught from Lyndhurst at the committee stage. He took no part in fresh talks with the waverers. But, after learning from Ellice what the terms might be, he wrote a perceptive letter to Palmerston on 28 April, the day that the latter and Grey were to meet Wharncliffe. In this he showed willingness to accept amendments under duress: unlike, say, Durham, he had not actually fathered the Bill and he saw that the Political Unions would find it hard to fight over shifts of emphasis - such as a move to a £10 rating qualification - provided that Schedules A and B were absolutely secure.[3]

In the event, the Tories made a mistake in tactics and failed to exploit the possibilities which amendments offered. Instead, on 7 May, Lyndhurst got the disfranchisement clauses postponed. This looked like the wreck of the whole Bill. Melbourne reacted with typical decisiveness. He was one of the five ministers who met in the Chancellor's private room immediately after the division and decided on resignation or a creation of 50-60 peers.[4] Once this was endorsed by nearly all the Cabinet the following day and once William IV accepted their resignations rather than a creation, there was little for any minister to do but await the confrontation between Wellington and the Reform movement. The strength of the agitation between

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1. Holland diary 3 April, Add. Mss. 51869 f.444, f.447.
2. Torrens p.260.
3. Melbourne to Palmerston GC/ME/13.
4. Torrens p.262.

9 May and 15 May, when Wellington gave up any attempt to form a government, and for the following three days, until the King agreed to an unconditional creation of peers if needed, perhaps served as a grim confirmation of the essential prudence of the course followed over the past eighteen months. If so, any satisfaction Melbourne felt was short lived.

Few of the Cabinet were pleased with their achievement when the Reform Act received the royal assent on 7 June. Melbourne, however, was probably the one most sensitive to the enormity of what he had done. He had been the most outspoken opponent of Reform before 1830 yet over the next two years he had felt obliged to give it more consistent and, arguably, more decisive support than the other natural conservatives in the Cabinet. Palmerston and Richmond[1] had given more vent to their feelings than he had done; Lansdowne drew more comfort from the increased rural representation; Stanley was not so committed over Parliamentary Reform, being primarily a defender of the Church; and Grey was, in a sense, fulfilling his aims of the 1790's as well as being happily unaware of the far-reaching consequences of Reform.

Events had not turned out as Melbourne had hoped. He had supported the Bill as a safeguard for stability in politics; instead it had apparently led to heightened agitation in the short term, possibly to the verge of revolution in November 1831 and May 1832, and, for the longer term, it had created an appetite for change which would not be easily appeased. In April 1832 he strongly hinted at his fear that the Bill was no longer adequate to its purposes when he said that

> 'he would be far from holding out to the people exaggerated expectations of any advantages which it would confer upon them.'

Faced with what looked like an indefinite period of radical agitation, something which he had foreseen better than most politicians but which turned

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1. Brock, GRA p.291
2. Hansard, 3rd series, xii. 45.

out worse in reality, Melbourne showed considerable bitterness for some years. About the time the Bill became law, Attwood confessed to Melbourne that

> 'if the people do not get their bellyful after this, I shall be torn to pieces.' 'And so much the better. You deserve it',

replied Melbourne.[1] When a manufacturer in the Potteries wrote to the Home Office complaining about trades unions, Melbourne coldly reminded him that his kind now had more M.P.s than ever before, suggested that he apply to them if he thought a new law was required, and concluded acidly:

> 'I feel no doubt that these Representatives will not be wanting in that intelligence, firmness and resolution which was so confidently anticipated from them.'[2]

Melbourne alternately disliked the middle classes for their radical ideas and despised them for their timidity in the face of working class demands. He told Palmerston later that

> 'I should have some fear, if difficult times were to arise, for the conduct of our boasted middle class.'[3]

Not only had Reform failed to bring permanent benefits, it also came in retrospect to seem to have been unnecessary in the first place. As the immediate dangers of 1830-1832 disappeared Melbourne sometimes deluded himself that the demands for Reform could have been resisted. In 1834 he wrote to Holland, regarding a piece of patronage,

> 'I do not much like the fact alleged in support of the liberal opinions of the candidate viz. that at the time of the reform bill, he urged the making of fifty peers. This only raises in my mind a presumption that he was terrified out of his senses.'[4]

In writing this Melbourne appears to have been forgetting the circumstances of at least May 1832. These had, after all, obliged him to sign a Cabinet minute proposing just such a creation and, subsequently, to overbear the King's objections to such a step. His anxiety that he had acted wantonly and mistakenly in 1830-32 - misplaced though the feeling was - made him insist to Russell in 1835 that the Reform Act

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1. B. R. Haydon, Autobiography and Memoirs (1853) II, 310.
2. Melbourne to R. Bourne 5 Nov. 1833; P.R.O., Home Office Papers, Series 41, vol. 11, ff. 460-2.
3. Melbourne to Palmerston 11 Oct. 1836 GC/ME/133.
4. Melbourne to Holland 15 Sept. 1834, Add. Mss. 51,558 f.67.

> 'ought never to be mentioned without the word necessary. If it was not absolutely necessary it was the foolishest thing ever done.' [1]

This sense of doubt and regret was likely to grow more acute when the only people in whom he confided, his brother Frederick Lamb and his sister Emily, Lady Cowper, were both very hostile to Reform. Lady Cowper commented sarcastically on disorder and intimidation by the Birmingham Political Union at the Walsall election in June, 1832, 'and this after the bill's passing which was sure to give us peace and quiet.'[2] For his part Frederick told Brougham as late as 1848 that 'had justice been done, you would every one of you have been hanged.'[3]

Melbourne's sense of guilt developed over the years but within a few months of the Bill passing he was planning to prevent further advances down the same road. In September 1832 Greville found him 'uneasy about the state of the country - about the desire for change and the general restlessness that prevails.' Melbourne criticised a speech by Russell which looked like 'an invitation to the advocates of the Ballot to agitate for it.'[4] A month later he wrote to Frederick Lamb of his fear that Grey's government might prove too conservative and unpopular in the face of Radical competition. He was particularly suspicious of Ellice, 'a cunning designing knave' in all probability, who was preparing

> 'to join the party which he conceives will be uppermost, namely Durham and the Masses. I am inclined to believe with him that a contest of the nature you describe will take place and that very shortly. Whether the masses will have it so hollow as he supposes is another theory, but they may.' 5

Clearly, Melbourne intended to thwart the plans of Durham who was, allegedly,

> 'much puffed up and inflated ... full of scheme and intrigue, violent with respect to domestic politics.'

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1. Melbourne to Russell n.d. [early 1835] MEL/RU/135.
2. Lady Cowper to Frederick Lamb 19-22 June 1832, Broadlands Papers (Hants R.O.) 15.
3. 8 Oct. 1848 Brougham Papers 31,377.
4. Greville diary 28 Sept. 1832; II, 329.
5. Melbourne to Frederick Lamb 26 Oct., Panshanger 28.

Meanwhile, he was dedicated, as he told his brother,

> 'to keep the government together until the general election takes place. If it were to break up before and upon a popular question the elections would go worse and more wildly, than they are now likely to do.'1

Melbourne's expectations may have been exaggerated but his determination to falsify them, and thus to atone for his recent role, gave him a new impetus from this time.

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1. ibid.

Chapter Two

The Home Office, November 1830 - July 1834.

'The situation is one of great importance to the Government ... It requires prudence, discretion, freedom from all wild notions; conciliation, and, above all, a disregard of popularity.'

Melbourne to Sir George Grey, n.d. [?1846]; M. Creighton, Memoir of Sir George Grey (1884) p. 101.

The Home Office (1): Introduction and the agricultural labourers' revolt

As Home Secretary, Melbourne held one of the most onerous posts in the government. The office had always been recognised as an 'efficient' one but during the post-1815 period its traditional business increased in volume whilst new functions were loaded onto it.[1] Melbourne did not, however, develop Peel's work on legislative and administrative reform.[2] Partly from personal inclination, partly because of the exigencies of the times, Melbourne concentrated on his responsibilities for the preservation of law and order. It is his policy in this area which will be examined below, rather than his secondary interests such as prison discipline or reform of the poor Law.

Even when viewed in this restricted way, the position which Melbourne held for three and a half years from November 1830 was a most important one. As has been recently noted,[3] there was little check, either in practice or in theory, upon the way he exercised his considerable powers as head of the judicial and military forces in the country. The Home Office had a simple bureaucratic procedure, although the permanent Under Secretary, S. M. Phillipps, was an experienced and able official whose advice must have been very useful to Melbourne. At the political level, Melbourne sometimes consulted the prime minister or the law officers, and doubtless discussed developments in private with friends such as Holland, but he rarely brought issues before the Cabinet as a whole. He was, of course, subject to the ultimate sanction of public opinion, probably more so than most of his colleagues, from the very nature of his work which, as Torrens put it, gave the Home Office walls of glass.[4] But this was an uncertain form of control and usually operated only after vital decisions had been taken.[5] Melbourne was therefore uniquely answerable for the consequences of his actions, whether successful or not, popular or not.

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1. A. P. Donajgrodzki, 'The Home Office 1822-1848' (Oxford Univ. D.Phil. thesis 1974), pp. 27, 32.
2. ibid. p.69
3. ibid. p.72.
4. Torrens p. 223.
5. See below pp. 101, 138.

It will be argued that, within his chosen sphere, Melbourne was as good a Home Secretary as could have been found amongst the governing class of his day. Despite the extreme strain of his office, he manifested throughout the same characteristics: steady, shrewd judgement; a refusal to be deceived by exaggerated or hysterical reports; and considerable moderation of action. At the same time it must be stressed that his general attitudes towards the submerged of every kind were entirely within the conventions of the upper classes of his day. He was not particularly troubled by humane feelings; and whereas he could reflect deeply on a subject like Parliamentary Reform which divided his own class, he was incapable of doing the same for the conditions or aspirations of those outside the elite. To give one example of this lack of imagination: he subscribed completely to the prevailing idea that heavy sentences acted as an effective deterrent; better understanding of penology has made later generations doubt this assumption. Melbourne's views of society simply represented the most intelligent version of current orthodoxy.

Melbourne's appointment as Home Secretary was largely the result of political bargaining, but, in retrospect, it could also be said to be justified by his own qualities. With some reason, he was confident of his own abilities; his political and private experiences had made him a somewhat solitary, self-reliant person; and mentally he had long been prepared for a defence of the old order so far as it was wise and practicable.[1] He was therefore not ill-suited to 'a position of somewhat lonely independence and power',[2] in which he had to face what was arguably the most difficult and sustained outburst of political and economic agitation of the century. In fact, he responded immediately to the challenge of his office and confounded those who had thought him idle.[3] He wrote to Holland on 25 November

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1. See above p. 2-3
2. Donajgrodzki op. cit. p.66.
3. See above p. 8

1. Add. Mss. 51,558 ff. 45-6.
2. Greville diary 12 Dec. 1831; II, 92.
3. E. J. Hobsbawm and G. Rudé, Captain Swing (1969), chapters 2 and 4. Their work has proved invaluable to this section; but it must be noted that most of their folio references to the Home Office papers have been invalidated by the re-organisation of the relevant letters.
4. Hobsbawm and Rudé op.cit, pp. 170, 196.
5. ibid. p.113.
6. ibid. p. 129-31
7. ibid. p. 173.

> 'With the number of people to see and the number of letters I have to write I have not a moment. I have been for two mornings together up at six, a thing which I hoped never to do again.'1

By 12 December, Greville admitted that Melbourne had

> 'surprised all those about him by a sudden display of activity and vigour, rapid and diligent transaction of business'.2

The occasion for most of Melbourne's industry was the revolt of agricultural labourers throughout the southern half of England. This had its origins in the long-term worsening of conditions for rural workers; but it was the economic crisis of 1828-30 which made their lives intolerable with a rise in unemployment and a final turn of the screw on wages and poor relief.[3] Beginning sporadically in north west Kent in June 1830, the revolt took the form of acts of arson against farmers' property, the wrecking of agricultural machinery, especially the new threshing machines, and demands for increased wages. The outbreaks were given a sinister aspect by the sending of anonymous threatening letters, often signed 'Captain Swing.' The disturbances continued at a low level throughout the summer, spreading only into parts of Surrey. Then, from late October, they began to be reported from the Sussex Weald at the same time as they affected the whole of Kent. By the time Melbourne was given the Home Office, the disturbances had reached Hampshire, Berkshire, and Wiltshire, and had attained their greatest intensity.[4] From the end of the third week of November the 'Swing' riots became a generalised movement in the southern, western and Home counties, soon to be followed by similar outbreaks in the Midlands and East Anglia.'[5]

There proved to be important limits to the revolt. It lost its momentum as it spread further west so that while it ultimately reached Herefordshire and Cornwall, it did so only in a very attenuated form.[6] Because of a different agricultural economy the northern counties were hardly touched by disturbance.[7] Nor did the labourers resort to undue violence, much to the surprise of observers. Much menacing language and personal intimidation were employed, but what one of the army officers employed by the Home Office reported

from Suffolk could well be applied to all the counties:

> '... considering how much substantial grievance these poor creatures have to complain of, in this particular district, it is to me astonishing that they have kept within such bounds.'[1]

At the time that Grey's government was formed there was, however, a great deal of alarm in the minds of the propertied classes which was none the less real for being exaggerated. From Avington in Hampshire the Duke of Buckingham wrote to the Home Office, on 22 November, that 'this part of the country is wholly in the hands of the rebels.'[2] After serious riots in Andover it was reported that 'the Peasantry' had 'established a system of pillage' and until a body of troops arrived the town was full of 'dread and anxiety' lest large mobs, armed with iron bars, repeated their attacks on agricultural machinery.[3] As the disturbances moved near any county boundary, Melbourne was subject to panicky requests for help from the as yet unaffected area. After attacks on paper mills in Buckinghamshire, paper manufacturers in Hertfordshire begged for troops whilst a local postmaster wrote that they expected an attack by 'above a Thousand Desparadoes.'[4] Such fears were given at least a degree of colour by the language used by the rioters. The cry 'Bread or Blood', used, for instance, by those who broke into Heythrop, Oxfordshire, may have been traditional rhetoric but it meant something to Lord Granville Somerset who saw his property invaded by 70-80 men.[5] Rioters from Kintbury, on the Berkshire-Wiltshire border, intimidated the magistrates at Hungerford with hammers and bludgeons whilst one of their leaders declared:

> 'You and the gentlemen have been living upon all the good things for the last ten years. We have suffered enough, and now is our time, and we will now have it.'[6]

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1. Col. Brotherton to H.O. 13 Dec. 1830 H.O. 40/27 ff. 184-5.
2. Torrens p.248.
3. C. W. Foster to H.O. 26 Nov. H.O. 52/7.
4. 29 Nov. H.O. 40/25 f. 302 (Rickmansworth).
   29 Nov. H.O. 52/7 (Hemel Hempstead).
5. Lord Granville Somerset to H.O. 27 Nov. H.O. 52/9.
6. Hobsbawm and Rudé, op.cit., p.138

In the fearful atmosphere created by such incidents local magistrates spent their time blindly searching for leading agitators and incendiaries. This usually led merely to the interrogation of people as innocent as the anonymous travelling artist who complained to the Home Office that he had been dragged before the magistrates at Newport Pagnell, Bucks., merely because he was a stranger wearing a shabby coat.[1]

London itself was in no way immune to this alarmist mood. Greville noted that 'the accounts from the country were so bad on the 23rd [November] that a Cabinet sat all morning, and concerted a proclamation offering large rewards for the discovery of offenders, rioters, or burners.'[2] A few days later, and with 'Swing' principally in mind, he noted that 'the alarm is still very great, and the general agitation which pervades men's minds unlike what I have ever seen.'[3] Demands for Parliamentary reform and news of industrial disturbances in the north undoubtedly played their part, but it was the 'Swing' riots which shocked and scared the upper classes in the short run. The riots were not totally unprecedented[4] but their scale and duration were entirely novel. According to contemporary Home Office tradition, the labourers' revolt, along with these other pressures, had reduced Peel to a thoroughly demoralized state by the time he thankfully left office. It was said that by the end he hardly had resolution to open any letter which looked at all suspicious in origin.[5] This picture certainly accords with what is known of Peel's reaction to the general political crisis of these months.[6] His combined fears were exploited in at least one letter in which he was threatened (presumably by an urban Radical) with 'Parliamentary reform or Death. Swing.'[7]

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1. 1 Dec. 1830 H.O. 52/9.
   See Hobsbawm and Rudé, op.cit., pp 215-16 for other instances.
2. Greville diary 25 November; II, 75.
3. ibid. 28 November; II, 77.
4. Hobsbawm and Rude, op.cit., p.84.
5. Le Marchant, Memoir of Althorp, p.208
6. Torrens p.218.
   Brock, GRA p.129.
7. H.O. 40/25 f.175.

Melbourne was not as easily rattled as his predecessor but even he came to treat the labourers' revolt as more serious than he had done at first. His changing opinions are revealed in letters he wrote to Lady Branden, his reputed mistress. On 12 November he decried the exaggerated reports of the disturbances 'which have been in fact nothing and are now quite over.' After taking office he modified his reassurances in a letter of 30 November:

> 'You cannot think how we have to do ... but do not be alarmed, all is subsiding.'

On 13 December he still felt obliged to write:

> 'I dare say you have horrid accounts of the state we are in. It is not pleasant but do not be afraid. We shall get through it.'[1]

By the time of this last letter the peak of the revolt had been passed and it remained important only in Suffolk, Lincolnshire, and Sussex, disappearing even there by the end of the year.

There was good reason for Melbourne's increasing concern. Quite apart from the sufficiently disturbing spectacle of thousands of normally docile agricultural labourers destroying property and extorting increases in wages, there were ominous undertones to the revolt. The rioters put forward no demands of a strictly political nature but their movement was not devoid of political significance. They did not read newspapers or attend Cobbett's lectures themselves but they had information and ideas disseminated amongst them by village artisans and urban Radicals.[2] The extent of this influence varied greatly from county to country: it was much less in Berkshire than in Kent, for example.[3] Even in Kent and Sussex, where Maidstone, Horsham, Rye and Battle were notable centres of Radicalism,[4] the riots originated in spontaneous local initiatives which owed nothing to outside leadership. But news of continental revolution and of political crisis at home, however vague, produced 'an atmosphere of expectation, of tension, of hope and

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1. Panshanger Papers 18.
2. Hobsbawm and Rudé, op.cit, p.89.
3. ibid. p.93 n.38.
4. 3 Nov. H.O. 52/10 f. 386 (Battle).
   25 Nov. H.O. 52/10 f.601 (Horsham).
   8 Nov. H.O. 40/27 ff. 62-3 (Maidstone).

1. op.cit. p.91
2. ibid. pp. 143, 169, 219.
3. J. Mills to H.O. 26 November H.O. 52/7.
4. n.d. December 1830 H.O. 52/10 ff. 117, 119-20.
5. 12 November H.O. 40/27 ff. 66-7.
6. 28 November, H.O. 52/11.
7. Capt. Hovenden to H.O. 3rd December 1830 H.O. 40/27 f.404.
8. See below p. 48
9. See below p. 104

potential action', as Hobsbawm puts it.[1] Once the disturbances began local Radicals made common cause with the labourers or were inspired by the revolt to make their own protest, often against tithes. Instances of such action could be found in Banbury, Ipswich, Micheldever, and Carlisle, as well as the Kent and Sussex towns mentioned above.[2] There were also cases of Radicals who actually led or incited the rioters in the countryside. One such was James Cooper, a prominent figure in the Wiltshire rising, who claimed to be a friend of Henry Hunt and to have constantly attended the Rotunda.[3] Another was Joseph (or John) Saville, a prosperous Bedfordshire merchant, who was arrested in Suffolk for distributing inflammatory 'Swing' notices in the eastern counties.[4]

On the other hand, Melbourne could read reports which put these semi-political characteristics strictly in perspective. Even in the days of Wellington's ministry, George Maule, legal adviser to the Home Office, wrote from Sussex that he could find 'no bad feeling among the peasantry against the Government.'[5] Somewhat later Colonel Brotherton summed up his findings in Wiltshire:

> 'the insurrectionary movement seems to be directed by no plan or system, but merely actuated by the spontaneous feeling of the peasants, and quite at random.'6

Another army officer informed Melbourne that Henry Hunt's presence in several places succesively affected by 'Swing' riots was a simple coincidence since he was really in the west country on his commercial business as a paint manufacturer.[7] Melbourne also knew from spy reports on the working class radicals in London that they had no connection with 'Swing.'[8] He was sufficiently impressed by the alleged links between political agitation and the labourers to prosecute Cobbett and Carlile for inciting the riots[9] but he went no further than that. Melbourne was certainly incredulous of the wilder conspiratorial theories which circulated freely in November and December 1830. A Home Office memorandum to the County Fire Office asserted that

> 'the stories about strangers in gigs, and about fireballs, have in no instance been realised'

and

> 'in many instances they have been invented by persons living near the spot, who are themselves the incendiaries.'[1]

The other obvious danger of the labourers' revolt was that it might be imitated in urban areas, especially industrial ones. There was a certain amount of evidence that attacks on threshing machines in the countryside could easily extend to attacks on industrial machinery and buildings, especially if discontented factory workers joined in the riots.[2] The most vulnerable targets were iron foundries and workshops where agricultural machinery was made. These were attacked at several places in Hampshire and Berkshire. Saw mills at Southampton and Norwich and paper mills in the High Wycombe area were also destroyed as indirect results of the labourers' revolt. But only the Buckinghamshire paper workers acted in concert with their rural counterparts and other industrial disturbances in 'Swing' counties, notably riots by weavers at Norwich and Loughborough, were at most merely encouraged by events outside the towns. These instances, moreover, make up an unimpressive list, as must have become apparent to Melbourne by mid-December 1830. Not even the Wiltshire woollen towns were affected by the riots,[3] still less the industrial northern counties where 'Swing' hardly penetrated.

It was not easy, however, to perceive the limitations of the revolt during the first weeks of Melbourne's tenure of the Home Office. The sheer number of incidents per day was disconcerting in itself: for the southern, south-western and midland counties the figure for the last week in November was never less than 25 per day, with a peak of 45; for the eastern counties the comparable figures for the first week in December were 10-12.[4] Not all these incidents necessarily reached the Home Office but that did not greatly diminish Melbourne's problem in deciding how to repress the disorders. The obvious

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1. 24 Dec. H.O. 40/25 f.432
2. See Hobsbawm and Rudé, op.cit., p.198
3. ibid. p.126
4. ibid. p.196

1. 29 Nov. H.O. 40/25 f. 294 (Worcestershire).
   1 Dec. H.O. 40/25 f.306 (Yeovil and Crewkerne).
   7 Dec. H.O. 41/8 f.415 (Suffolk).
2. Hobsbawm and Rudé, op.cit. p.254
3. Col. Brotherton to H.O. 28 Nov. H.O. 52/11
4. Melbourne to Sir Thomas Gooch, H.O. 41/9 f.9.
5. Mr. Sharpe to H.O. 9 Nov. H.O. 52/10 f.417.
6. J. Pearse to H.O. 22 Nov. H.O. 52/6 (Berkshire).
   Mr. Craven to H.O. 22 Nov. H.O. 52/11 (Wiltshire).
   Earl of Westmoreland to H.O. 1 Dec. H.O. 52/9 (Northants).
7. 29 Nov. H.O. 52/11.

remedy, which was frequently proposed by anxious magistrates, was to send troops into the disaffected areas, as Peel had done for parts of Kent and Sussex in November. One of the notable features of Melbourne's policy was the very limited extent to which he relied on such means. Troops were used only in cases of serious riots in towns such as those at Andover; and Melbourne spent much time telling magistrates that they could not be supplied with soldiers.[1] One compelling reason for such refusals was the shortage of troops, particularly cavalry, over the country as a whole.[2] It was also sound strategy to retain troops in important towns and not to scatter them in small bodies over the countryside.[3] There was also, however, something distasteful about the employment of troops given the peaceful and disorganised nature of the revolt. Melbourne made both points plainly in a letter to a Suffolk magistrate on December 13th:

> '... you must be aware that it is impossible, and if possible would be highly objectionable to post Troops in every town the neighbourhood of which may be threatened with riot.'4

Melbourne may also have learnt that the arrival of troops at Battle in Sussex earlier in November had provoked an explosion of mass meetings and other forms of action in 24 parishes in East Sussex.[5] It was therefore imprudent as well as inconvenient and inappropriate to resort to the army.

In the eyes of many of the landed classes the next best instrument to the army was a corps of Yeomanry. Many of these corps had been disbanded since 1815 but the 'Swing' rising resulted in a strong disposition on the part of property owners to revive the institution.[6] The great disadvantage of the Yeomanry, however, was that being drawn from the gentry and farmers, they tended to inflame the feelings of the labourers. Lord Radnor entreated Melbourne not to establish the Yeomanry in Hampshire and Dorset because he could see from the activities of the Wiltshire Yeomanry that 'the county will be deprived of tranquillity and peace for years and years to come.'[7] It was certainly true that use of the Wiltshire Yeomanry had resulted in violent clashes

1. H.O. 40/27 ff. 398-9
   26 Nov. H.O. 52/11 (Salisbury).
   See also Hobsbawm and Rudé, op.cit., p.126.

2. ibid. p.145.

3. See Melbourne to Wellington 25 November 1830;
   Torrens p.226.

4. 'The Times' 13 November (Rochester).
   Nov. 18 H.O. 52/10 f.587 (Horsham).
   Nov. 19 H.O. 52/10 f.309 (Arundel).
   Nov. 27 H.O. 52/9 (Holt, Norfolk).
   Nov. 28 H.O. 52/7 (Lechlade, Glos.).
   Nov. 28 H.O. 52/7 (Sherborne, Dorset).
   Dec. 3 H.O. 52/11 (Somerset).
   Dec. 7 H.O. 52/9 (Attleborough, Norfolk).
   Dec. 10 H.O. 52/10 ff. 96-8 (Blything, Suffolk).

5. 23 Dec. H.O. 41/9 ff. 162-4.

6. This system was devised by the Duke of Richmond so as to provide mobile units, organised by districts, which could be sent to disaffected villages in turn.
   See Hobsbawm and Rudé, op.cit., p.256.

7. Reports of 28, 29 Nov. 1830 H.O. 52/11 (Wilts.);
   13 Dec. 1830 H.O. 40/27 ff. 184-5 (Suffolk);
   15,29 Dec. 1830 H.O. 40/27 ff. 403, 467 (Hants);
   13 Jan. 1831 H.O. 40/27 f.505 (Bucks.).

with rioters, most notably at Tisbury on 25 November where ill-armed labourers suffered casualties of one killed and several wounded.[1] Melbourne seems to have taken the same view as Radnor for only in rare cases, such as the Buckinghamshire paper mill riots,[2] were Yeomanry employed to put down the disturbances.[3]

Melbourne's preferred policy was, therefore, one of reliance upon the exertions of local magistrates and gentry, aided by such civilian forces as they could muster. This was much hampered, however, by the ineffective response of magistrates in many areas and by the widespread refusal of farmers (and Radical shopkeepers and artisans in some towns) to be sworn in as special constables.[4] Magistrates might be sympathetic to the labourers, overawed by them, or simply inactive and inefficient as Melbourne later lamented to General Bouverie.[5] Farmers and urban Radicals wished to make their own protest, against the level of tithes and rents in the former case, and against an unreformed system of government in the latter. In some areas, notably East Anglia and the Kent and Sussex Weald, there was active collusion between farmers and labourers. These attitudes were well-known even before Melbourne reached the Home Office. It was thus a defiant move on his part to issue to magistrates his circular of November 25 which urged them to swear in special constables and adopt the 'Sussex Plan' of organising them.[6] Melbourne was taking a calculated risk here because he had no legal power to compel magistrates to take such action; he was therefore relying upon their good sense and the accuracy of his estimate of the revolt's seriousness. The most he could do was to send out half-pay army officers to stimulate and superintend the efforts of local magistrates. Thus Colonel Brotherton in Wiltshire and Suffolk or Colonel Mair in Hampshire and Buckinghamshire had some success in persuading the authorities to implement Melbourne's circular, though in many cases the action was belated.[7]

The informed and sober reports of these officers confirmed that Melbourne's policy met the needs of the situation. Colonel Brotherton assured the

1. 28 Nov. 1830 H.O. 52/11 (Warminster).
2. 29 Nov. 1830 H.O. 52/11.
3. J. Mills to H.O. 1 Dec. H.O. 52/7.
4. 27 Nov. H.O. 52/9
5. Hobsbawm and Rudé, op. cit., p.255
6. e.g. H.O. to Mayor of Henley-on-Thames 2 Dec. H.O. 41/8 ff. 304-5.
   H.O. to Duke of Rutland 13 Dec. H.O. 41/8 f. 489.
   H.O. to Marquess of Bath 11 Dec. H.O. 41/8 ff. 475-6.
7. H.O. to Ordnance Board 13 Dec. H.O. 41/9 f.12.
8. H.O. to Mr. Dare (Ilford, Essex) 16 Dec. H.O. 41/9 f.73.
9. 29 Dec. H.O. 41/9 f.217.

Home Secretary that even in Wiltshire, one of the most turbulent areas, the rioters could be easily dispersed by small forces. He noted that their weapons 'are but the fragments of the machines they have broken' and that 'nothing but the numbers seem formidable and even those are much exaggerated.'[1] In a subsequent report from Devizes he commented scathingly,

> 'Gentlemen should defend their own houses against such despicable mobs. Every house is a strong post capable of repulsing them if defended with common firmness.'2

In fact the more resolute magistrates did not need Melbourne's circular to tell them what to do. The one who arrested the important Hampshire leader James Cooper, assured Melbourne that he would be responsible for the peace of his district without one soldier.[3] 'Ad hoc' bodies of gentry and loyal tenants and labourers were used to scatter and arrest the rioters. Lord Suffield in Norfolk described his private army as 'actuated by a sort of feudal attachment.'[4] Similar bodies operated in Hampshire under Wellington and the Duke of Buckingham.[5] The more discerning and active magistrates and gentry therefore vindicated Melbourne's decisions.

The same moderation was evident in Melbourne's rules for the issue of arms. When nervous authorities asked to be supplied with firearms for use against the rioters, Melbourne informed them that the issue of such arms would be too risky.[6] The implication was that in untrained or irresponsible hands they would lead to unnecessary bloodshed. He was prepared to issue sabres but only if there was a genuine need;[7] at least one would-be leader of an armed force was told, quite accurately, that his neighbourhood was too peaceful to warrant even sabres.[8] The Duke of Beaufort, Lord Lieutenant of Monmouth, was advised by Melbourne not to equip his constabulary force with pistols and to see that only part of it was even mounted.[9]

It is arguable, therefore, that Melbourne's restraint helped the riots to die away as quickly and as peacefully as could have been expected under the circumstances. But there was another very important factor contributing to the same end. Brotherton believed that 'the spirit of insurrection' had been

1. 28 Nov. H.O. 52/11.
2. Hobsbawm and Rudé, op.cit., pp. 129, 137, 156, 235.
3. ibid. pp. 257-8.
   See also Melbourne to Lord Suffield 5 Dec. H.O. 41/8 f.365-7.
4. Melbourne to J. Wodehouse 17 Dec. H.O. 41/9 f. 89-92.
5. B. Copping to H.O. 10 Dec. H.O. 40/27 f.351.
   See also W. Withers to H.O. 2 Dec. H.O. 52/9, quoted Hobsbawm and Rudé, op.cit., p.257.
6. The Times 11 December
   See also letter of 10 Dec., H.O. 40/27 f.357.
7. Melbourne to Lord Ebrington 18 Dec. H.O. 41/9 ff.97-8.
8. Grafton to H.O. 15 Dec. H.O. 52/10 ff. 113-14.

checked not only by the energetic efforts of a few of the magistrates but also by a widespread compliance with the labourers' demands.[1] Hobsbawm and Rude make it clear that many farmers and landlords arranged for the destruction of their threshing machines and promised an increase in wages with some degree of spontaneity. Moreover, some magistrates publicly recommended a rise in wages and the destruction of the hated machines, or at least associated themselves with these developments. The most striking example of such an initiative occurred at North Walsham in Norfolk on 24 November but similar, if vaguer assurances were given in Gloucestershire and Berkshire.[2]

Such concessions aroused Melbourne's strong disapproval and he issued a circular on 8 December which sharply condemned such weakness and upheld all existing property rights.[3] This led to serious controversy with the Norfolk magistrates and those who thought like them. The leading magistrate at North Walsham told Melbourne that some were thinking of resigning.[4] Another Norfolk landowner defended these magistrates, sympathised with the labourers ('a body of poor ignorant illiterate wretches'), and argued that had Melbourne directed magistrates in his first circular of 25 November to inquire into agricultural distress, it would have prevented outbreaks in many counties unaffected at that date.[5] The 'Times' published a letter from 'A County Magistrate,' which also attacked the circular of 8 December.[6] Melbourne might reasonably claim that he did not mean to interfere with private agreements between landlord, tenant and labourer and that he had acted only against magistrates' public notices.[7] Indeed, he refused to do anything about at least one farmer in Suffolk who had persuaded the rector to halve his tithes by appearing before him 'backed by an assembly of people' as the outraged Duke of Grafton described it.[8] He seems, however, to have underestimated the feelings which the labourers' condition had elicited. A Dorset magistrate proposed that those who refused to destroy their threshing machines should receive only half the insured value of their corn in the event

1. P. Marling to H.O. 8 Dec. H.O. 40/25 f.338.
2. Mair to H.O. 8 Dec. H.O. 40/27 f.428.
3. 800 were acquitted. This and the other statistics given here are from Hobsbawm and Rudé, op.cit., pp. 262, 308-9.
4. Melbourne to Mr. Justice Bosanquet (Maidstone) H.O. 41/9 f.101.
5. Melbourne to Grey 20 Dec. 1830 Grey Papers.
6. Hobsbawm and Rudé, op.cit., p.261
   See also letter of 19 Jan. 1831 H.O. 40/29 f.181-2.
7. The Times 30 Dec. 1830.
   The Spectator 8 Jan. 1831.
   The Examiner 9 Jan. 1831.
8. A further eight executions resulted from ordinary court cases in 1831.
9. Vol. 44 no. LXXXVIII p.598.
10. Lord Lowther to Lord Lonsdale 22 Jan. 1831, Lowther Papers.

of arson.[1] After inspecting rural areas in the West Country, Colonel Mair almost took it for granted that relief must be afforded to the labourers when their wages were so low.[2] By contrast, sitting as he did in London, Melbourne's sympathies were strictly limited. He was probably misled as to the effectiveness of timely recognition of the labourers' plight as a means of restoring order.

Melbourne was also disposed to let the law take its course when it came to the trials of the 1976 prisoners taken during the revolt.[3] He sanctioned Special Commissions for those of the worst affected counties where judicial proceedings had not started by December 1830. It was these Commissions which produced the great majority of the 252 death sentences and the 505 sentences of transportation passed upon the rioters. Melbourne seems to have approved of a harsh judicial policy. On 18 December he agreed with a judge's decision to bring forward the execution of three rioters by one week 'as it may have the effect of making the example more striking.'[4] It is significant that, as the Special Commissions began their work, Melbourne wrote to Grey:

> 'Nothing can be done at present but to take all the means in our power to prevent violence and outrage.'5

A considerable public campaign was, however, mounted against the Commissions' sentences, particularly against the final sentences of execution (now reduced to eleven). Numerous, respectable petitions for mercy came from the recently disturbed counties, as well as Radical ones from other parts of England.[6] There was also a sustained campaign for clemency in the press, led by the Times.[7] As a result the lives of eight men were spared, though only a further handful were reprieved from transportation.[8] Melbourne's precise role in this shift of ground is obscure; he was, however, blamed by the Quarterly Review for yielding to the public clamour.[9] The same source also hinted strongly at the judges' dissatisfaction with the government's alleged weakness, a story which receives some confirmation from the Tory Lord Lowther.[10]

The punishment of the agricultural labourers was still extremely severe, especially with respect to the number transported. It was not only the judges,

however, who wanted an uncompromising line taken: the Tory Lord Kenyon had not been pleased at the light sentences passed on the first prisoners in Kent, and Peel's friend J. W. Croker was contemptuous of the January reprieves.[1] Such pieces of evidence raise the question of how far Melbourne felt obliged to deal rigorously with the 'Swing' rioters because of general political consideration. Grey's government was not likely to be overturned on the issue but at the same time it might be thought desirable to affirm ministers' conservative principles when they were about to introduce a highly contentious reform bill. In December 1830 Greville had noted that Melbourne's efficiency at the Home Office would prove

> 'a great mortification to Peel and his friends, who were in hopes he would do nothing and let the country be burnt and plundered without interruption.'2

An intelligent man like Melbourne could not have been unmindful of such expectations. He also had to take account of the effect which a lenient treatment of the revolt was likely to have on the nascent political and trade unions. In these circumstances Melbourne may have felt that he had less room for manoeuvre than had been the case during the suppression of the revolt.

In the months after the revolt ended, as the labourers sank back into their depressed condition, there was no sign that Melbourne felt it ncessary to attempt to tackle the causes of the rising. He thought the Poor Law needed reform because it afforded relief 'to those who cannot obtain employment at all, or at wages insufficient for the support of themselves and their families.'[3] It is not clear, however, that he thought changes here would necessarily improve the lives of the labourers. When Tories in the Lords, led by Winchilsea, wanted legislation to provide employment for agricultural labourers, Melbourne and other Whig ministers successfully headed off any proposals.[4]

Reminders of the revolt recurred throughout Melbourne's time at the Home

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1. Hon. Marianne Kenyon to Hon. Lloyd Kenyon 29 Nov. 1830, Kenyon Papers. J. W. Croker to Lord Hertford 19 Jan. 1831 Letter Book no. 25.
2. Greville diary 12 Dec.; II, 92.
3. Melbourne to Revd. J. Bouverie 25 Nov. 1831, MP 20/12, copy; See also; Melbourne to T. Sanctuary 6 Jan. 1831, MP 89/22, copy.
4. Hansard, 3rd series, iv.263, 939-40 (June, July 1831). See J. L. and B. Hammond, The Village Labourer (1911) p. 322-4

Office but it is not necessary to follow Swing's subsequent history beyond the end of 1831. During the harvest of 1831 attempts to raise wages and to destroy machinery were again reported from Kent. To prevent any accumulation of disorder, Melbourne spontaneously sent troops to the disturbed areas.[1] He was sufficiently impressed by these signs and by the continuance of crimes of arson, which were difficult to detect and punish, to introduce a bill to legalize the use of spring-guns and man-traps in defence of agricultural property. These devices were made subject to a magistrate's licence but Melbourne felt it necessary to express his regrets for such an extreme measure.[2] The bill was described by the Poor Man's Guardian as 'outrageous' and 'atrocious;' the paper also told Melbourne that he had 'the heart of a cold-blooded and deliberate murderer.'[3] The bill failed, but even had it passed, it could not have prevented embittered labourers from firing farmers' property. The fires in the winter of 1831 were almost as bad as those of the previous year and provoked heart-felt complaints to the Home Office from the leading fire insurers.[4] After 1831 the protests of the rural poor, despite a new element of 'embittered despair ... hatred and vengeance',[5] ceased to be a major problem for the Home Office.[6]

Melbourne's handling of the agricultural labourers' revolt was controversial at the time and, understandably, has not found many defenders since. It is necessary, however, to distinguish between his actions during the revolt and his enforcement of heavy sentences afterwards. On Melbourne's death in 1848, at least one self-styled 'Old Whig' gratefully recalled the Home Secretary's policy of November - December 1830. He reminded readers of The Times that

> 'at the close of each night's sitting a string of motions was made in the House of Commons for leave of absence for country (sic) by borough members in consequence of the disturbed state of the provinces. I well remember, when driving in the mail to Brighton or Dover, seeing the horizon illuminated by incendiary fires.'

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1. 5, 8, 18 Aug. H.O. 41/10 ff. 177-8, 181-2, 193-4 (Sittingbourne, Deal, New Romney).
2. Hansard, 3rd series, vii 86-88 (16 Sept. 1831).
3. 21 September, 8 October 1831.
4. H.O. to County Fire Office, 21 December 1831 H.O. 43/41 p.193.
5. Hobsbawm and Rudé, op.cit., p.285.
6. The Tolpuddle affair of 1834 is discussed below, p. 133

He thought it an achievement to quell such a dangerous situation

> 'without any appeal to Parliament for new powers, without any reliance on military force, by a wise but vigorous use of the ordinary law of the land...'[1]

1. The Times 7 December 1848.

The Home Office (2): Political Agitation

(a) 1830 - May 1832

At the same time as he was engaged in suppressing the labourers' revolt, Melbourne began what was to be a protracted encounter with political agitation and the disorder which might result from it. To help him assess the problem he drew on many sources of information. The most important of these were the reports which were sent to the Home Office by magistrates and army commanders from all over the country. They in turn relied on the evidence of their own eyes or on diverse, usually anonymous, local informants. Some magistrates, notably J. F. Foster in Manchester, proved invaluable in this respect; others tended to be vague or alarmist in what they wrote, characteristics which were found even more frequently in the unsolicited letters from well-intentioned private citizens. Army officers, particularly Major-General Bouverie of the Northern District, could be relied upon for accurate and sober assessments of the situation. For daily news and a general impression of public opinion there was, of course, the London press. Precisely which papers Melbourne read cannot be discovered, but, judging by his careful reading of even the Irish papers,[1] he is not likely to have missed many items of consequence. The more sensational passages in the working class unstamped papers seem to have been brought to his attention by the police or Home Office assistants. The London police also provided reports on the activities of the working class radicals in the metropolis, the most useful of which were sent in by paid informers who had infiltrated the radicals' organisations.[2] Theoretically, in the same category might be placed the information which Melbourne obtained from his somewhat shady private secretary, Thomas Young. Melbourne regarded him as a weather gauge and reportedly said,

> 'through him I am able to look down below; which for me is more important than all I can learn from all the fine gentlemen clerks about me.'[3]

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1. Melbourne to Stanley 29 September 1832, Derby Papers 117/7.
2. See Appendix p. 115
3. Torrens p.237.

In fact, it is difficult to say what Young's services amounted to. His only recorded missions were to Francis Place.[1] The latter seems simply to have used him to convey slanted Radical prognoses back to his master, who received them with some scepticism.[2] This may, however, underestimate Young's importance.

With these channels of information at his disposal, Melbourne came to know more about the state of political feeling throughout the country than any other single individual. That did not mean, of course, that there were not alarming gaps in his knowledge which often forced him to rely on intuition or simply left him hoping for the best. These deficiencies were less important, however, when he took office than they were to be a year later.

By mid-November 1830 it was clear that the country was in a state of great political excitement but that there was no immediate danger of the initiative being wrested from the new Whig government. National organisation of political unions was both illegal and impracticable.[3] Local political unions had certainly sprung up in the course of 1830, to a total of 27 on one count, but they were mainly small and insignificant even in large towns such as Nottingham or Leeds.[4] Attwood's Birmingham Union was the only one to look at all formidable, with a membership of 7000 by October.[5] Political unions in London had not lasted long: the Metropolitan Political Union, founded by Hunt on the Birmingham model, had failed to unite middle and working class reformers; the moderate Parliamentary Reform Association had fared little better; and the working class Radical Reform Association was shortly to collapse in December 1830.[6]

It was, however, impossible for many representatives of the established order not to sense a deeply disquieting spirit around them. The agricultural

1. ibid. pp. 227, 247-8.
2. See below p.58
3. Brock, GRA, p.62.
4. ibid. p.78.
5. ibid. pp. 78, 347 n.92.
6. ibid. p. 78. D. Large, 'William Lovett', in Pressure from Without, ed. P. Hollis (1974) pp. 118, 122.

labourers' movement was welcomed by Radicals in the large towns; press comments revealed 'the alienation of the middle class from the aristocracy and gentry.'[1] In the North, trade union militancy, which was alarming enough in itself, seemed all the more sinister for its apparent political overtones. Doherty's spinners' union in Lancashire seemed to be spreading to other industries and areas. Some, at least, of its alleged 80,000 members had adopted tricolour flags and watched with interest events in France and Poland.[2] Aggressive working class views were freely expounded in the unstamped papers of Hetherington, Carpenter, and Carlile, and at the Rotunda meetings in Blackfriars, London. Against this background, with Reform in the air, it seemed to sensible aristocrats to be playing with fire for extreme Tories like Lord Exeter and the Duke of Newcastle to eject tenants who had disobeyed their wishes in the 1830 election.[3] Lady Stuart Wortley told a correspondent on 11 September:

> 'You have no idea how the wise and unwise of all parties croak, and no wonder; for the spirit of the lower classes at this moment is of a most alarming description.'4

By mid October even Wellington admitted (to Mrs. Arbuthnot) that he feared the upper classes were frightened in good earnest.[5]

Impressions such as these had left their mark on Wellington and Peel. Anxious about the possibility of a riot, they had cancelled the Guildhall dinner in London which the King and ministers had been due to attend on 9 November. In fact, there was a riotous gathering at the Rotunda. A crowd of over 2000, brought out indirectly by the Radical Reform Association and encouraged to carry arms by Hetherington's 'Penny Papers', seemed likely to invade the City.[6] One of the self-appointed leaders certainly envisaged

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1. Brock, GRA, pp. 111-12
2. Col. Shaw (Manchester) to General Bouverie 23 Oct. H.O. 40/26 f.93.
   Col. Shaw to Lord Fitzroy Somerset 30 Oct. H.O. 40/26 f.106.
   Bouverie to Somerset 6 Nov. H.O. 40/26 f.119.
3. Brock, GRA, pp. 110-11
4. ibid, p.106
5. ibid. p.109
6. P. Hollis, The Pauper Press (1970), p.32
   Large, 'William Lovett', Pressure from Without, p.122.

Parisian-style barricades and violence, until he was arrested.[1] The crowd dispersed the following day, after giving the Home Office and the police commissioners some anxious hours. The whole affair contributed to Peel's dispirited condition at this time and his alleged belief that the country was 'ripe for revolution.'[2]

One of Melbourne's first actions provided a contrast to these attitudes. After consulting the London magistrates and police commissioners, he allowed a deputation of tradesmen to present a loyal address to the King. This turned into rather a large public assembly but it passed off peacefully. In the Lords, however, Wellington declared it illegal and extremely dangerous to the public peace. Melbourne merely said he felt pleased with his decision.[3] It could be said to have set the tone for at least the first few months of his time at the Home Office.

Melbourne's instinctive moderation was confirmed by the news he received of the proceedings at the Rotunda which was, by the end of November, the only flourishing Radical centre in London. On 27 November the spy Abel Hall[4] reported the results of his conversations with various working class leaders, of whom Lovett and Watson became the best known. It was, he wrote, 'their firm opinion that nothing but a Revolution will do any good for the people and they think that if some person such as La Fayette in France would come forward as a leader or Carlile, the people would rally round him and fight. I find them full of such conversation, but in no way moving in themselves or connected with any others who are.'[5] He noted that a few had swords but no other arms. Similarly, Hall was sure that they had no connection with 'Swing,' though they welcomed his activities and Watson (a native of Huddersfield)

1. H.O. 40/25 ff. 139-46.
2. Le Marchant, Memoir of Viscount Althorp, p.255.
3. Hansard, 3rd series, i. 821-3 (8 Dec. 1830)
4. For Hall see Appendix p.115
5. H.O. 64/11.

1. ibid.
2. 29 November H.O. 64/11.
3. Mr. Meymoth to H.O. 18 Dec. H.O. 44/23.
   anon. to H.O. 8 Dec. H.O. 44/23.
   Hollis op.cit. p.32.
4. Foster to H.O. 12 December H.O. 40/26 f.194.
   H.O. to Foster 9 December H.O. 40/26 f.181.
   Bouverie to H.O. 16 December H.O. 40/26 f.221.
   See also: Bouverie to H.O. 6 January 1831 H.O. 40/29 ff. 5-6.
5. Bouverie to H.O. 14 January 1831 H.O. 40/29 f.21.
6. Foster to H.O. 1, 5 January 1831 H.O. 52/13.

hoped that the Lincolnshire rising would spread to Yorkshire

> 'as he is sure there is plenty there who are ready for anything in the way of Revolutionary movements.'1

In another typical report, Hall quoted the Rotunda leaders, particularly Watson and Cleave, as saying that the fires were

> 'going on very well and they hope they will continue until they rouse the people in London to join them in a general resistance to the Government.'2

This reliance upon the vague idea of a spontaneous resolution clearly reduced the likelihood of serious trouble in London, especially as at this stage the Rotunda leaders had little contact with their provincial counterparts. Moreover, because of the diversity of its economic structure, London was less hard hit than the industrial regions by the trade recession. Melbourne may not have been fully aware of this last point, but he could see in general terms that the political crisis was not yet deep enough to embolden and to afford an opportunity to the London working class radicals. Unlike Peel, therefore, he resisted pressure to take action against the meetings at the Rotunda.[3] His forebearance was rewarded: for the first four months of 1831 proceedings at the Rotunda were so uninteresting that Hall sent in very few reports, and none of any importance.

During the winter of 1830-31 Melbourne had more cause to be concerned about disturbances in the northern industrial areas than in London. In December, the more militant unemployed cotton spinners in the Manchester area held meetings with tricoloured flags, paraded openly with pistols, daggers and bludgeons, and attacked factories.[4] In Bouverie's opinion, the workers were overawed only by the presence of troops.[5] Melbourne's instructions were to use troops if necessary and to try to prosecute the leading rioters. By January, however, it was apparent that political feeling was not at the back of these manifestations. Hunt's meeting at St. Peter's Field attracted 5000 at the most, Foster reported; and even these applauded but faintly his fairly violent language about the 1819 'Massacre' and Parliamentary reform.[6] Subsequently, at a unique meeting, the moderate reformers in Manchester declared

that the state of the town had been libellously called disturbed by the authorities.[1] Even the economic outlook brightened: by mid February it was reported that all the factories in Manchester were back at work.[2]

Nonetheless the trade union movement in Lancashire had shown a capacity for organisation and an inclination towards violence which Melbourne thought novel and disturbing.[3] It might yet develop political ambitions, or, at least, return to complicate greatly the handling of a separate challenge to the government from the political unions. Even as Doherty's Lancashire union subsided, Melbourne was informed that its delegates were forming in the Potteries what was described as a Political union. The Lord Lieutenant of Staffordshire, Earl Talbot, told him that the delegates talked about affairs in Poland and held up the French and Belgian revolutions for imitation.[4] Moreover, in Talbot's opinion, the local miners and potters were informed, thinking men who would be formidable as an organised body. (The Potteries were indeed to be prominent among the provincial associates of the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union in 1834.[5]) Melbourne asked for the delegates and the union to be watched, which was as much as could be done.[6]

Despite these portents, there was something of a lull from Melbourne's point of view whilst the Reform Bill was prepared early in 1831. Its introduction in the Commons on 1 March, however, at once intensified political feeling throughout the country. Led by the Birmingham Political Union, the middle class Radicals and their allies welcomed the Bill. Some, notably Place and the Westminster reformers, wanted to include secret ballot as well. But in general the Whigs' proposals aroused the greatest enthusiasm.[7]

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1. A. Prentice to H.O. 10 January H.O. 40/29 f.168.
2. Bouverie to H.O. 18 February 1831 H.O. 40/29 f.30.
3. The threat of branches of Doherty's union in Leicester and Nottingham did not, in the event, materialize:
   Col. Custance to H.O. 23, 28 December 1830 H.O. 40/27 ff. 40,42.
4. Talbot to H.O. 10 February 1831 H.O. 40/28 f.572.
5. W. H. Oliver, 'The Consolidated Trades Union of 1834', Econ. Hist. Rev., xvii 1 (Aug. 1964) p. 87.
6. Melbourne to Talbot 11 February H.O. 41/9 f.413.
7. Brock, GRA, pp. 165, 169.

Working class opinion was divided. Those who agreed with Hetherington rejected the bill as useless and talked more than ever of extreme measures. Others, however, gave the bill their qualified approval, as reflected in O'Brien's 'Midland Representative' or Doherty's 'Voice of the People.'[1] At the very least, working class interest in politics was greatly stimulated. It is probably no coincidence that the Metropolitan Trades Union was formed in March and reconstituted in May 1831 as the National Union of the Working Classes, the most enduring and powerful of all such organisations. The excitement and equivocal attitude of many working class people is, perhaps, well conveyed by the remark reported of Julian Hibbert at a Rotunda meeting in the spring of 1831, that

> 'it would be best now to wait and see what was to be done and ... as all other nations were fast obtaining their liberty this Country must soon follow.'2

Melbourne acknowledged the popular support for Reform, and the increased political expectations created by the Bill, in his decisive support for the dissolution of Parliament after the government's defeat on Gascoyne's motion.[3] His immediate difficulties were not greatly increased, however. The dissolution inspired an illumination in London on 27 April out of which some rioting developed. The crowds were, however, more festive than revolutionary and the really disorderly elements were controlled by the police.[4] Melbourne was criticised in the Lords by Londonderry and Wharncliffe, the latter alleging that he had displayed 'the greatest imbecility' on this occasion.[5] Melbourne did not see the riots in the same light. He argued that they had always followed an illumination and that he did not recollect Londonderry having displayed sensibility about Cobbett's windows being smashed when he refused to illuminate after the peace of Amiens.[6]

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1. ibid. p.168.
2. Hall's report n.d. [March/April 1831] H.O. 64/11.
3. see above p. 14
4. J. Hamburger, James Mill and the Art of Revolution (1963), pp. 141-2.
5. Hansard, 3rd series, iv. 128 (21 June 1831)
6. ibid.

1. see above p. 14.

2. Melbourne to Mayors of Banbury, Boston, 30 April, 14 May 1831, H.O. 41/10 ff. 40-1, 51-2.

3. Col. Shaw to H.O., 25 May, 13 June, H.O. 52/13.
Melbourne to Mayor of Wigan, 26 May, 3 June, H.O. 41/10 ff. 71-2, 83-4.
Melbourne to Shaw, 3 June, H.O. 41/10 f. 84

4. Lords Skelmerdale and Balcarres.

5. Bouverie to H.O., 20 Sept. 1831, H.O. 40/29 f. 128

6. The following account is based on G. A. Williams, 'The Insurrection at Merthyr Tydfil in 1831', Trans. Hon. Soc. Cymmrodorion, 1965, pt. 2, pp. 222-44.

7. ibid. p.223

8. E. Thomas (magistrate) to H.O., 18 June, H.O. 52/11

9. G. A. Williams, op. cit., pp. 225, 240.

The subsequent elections were not abnormally violent or tumultuous, though, as Melbourne noted, the reformers had a near monopoly of intimidatory tactics.[1] On the whole Melbourne was able to make magistrates rely on their ordinary powers and to decline sending military assistance.[2] Wigan was, however, one place where serious riots occurred. On 4 May representatives of the anti-Reform interest were attacked and one received fatal injuries. Three weeks later a prisoner arrested for theft on 4 May was rescued by a mob which paraded him through the streets of Wigan and attacked buildings. Two companies of infantry were required to restore order. The Mayor was sharply criticised by Melbourne for his incompetence but the fault lay as much in the town's antiquated charter which authorised too few magistrates.[3] Subsequently 24 arrests were made and four companies of infantry remained in Wigan till the autumn. General Bouverie hoped the troops would reassure the worried local nobility[4] that no further cause for alarm existed 'than there must necessarily be where the Union of the Working Classes is so compleat.'[5]

Indirectly, moreover, the excitement of the general election led to a much more serious set of events in South Wales.[6] The large mining population in and around Merthyr Tydfil was seized by what Professor Williams has called 'something akin to political conversion.'[7] After intervening in the Brecon election and attacking the houses of the Merthyr Tories, hundreds of working men began to hold mass meetings which made the whole of May a month of continuous tumult. When their leaders were arrested, the crowds forcibly freed them from the magistrates. In spite of the economic depression, wages were not the main concern of the rioters.[8] There were violent demonstrations against the local ironmasters, the 'truck' system, and the Court of Requests, which collected small debts. But it was 'a kind of political vision', 'a millenarian zeal' which inspired the miners and made them demand 'Reform' in a vague but all-embracing way.[9]

The disorders reached a climax on 1 June when a huge crowd was harangued under 'Reform' banners and proceeded to destroy the houses of hated officials in Merthyr. There were even demands for a march on Cardiff, Swansea or London. On 2 June the helpless magistrates were reinforced by part of a Highland regiment from Brecon. The Riot Act was read and a bitter altercation between miners, masters and magistrates ensued. The workers' leader, Lewis Lewis, then ordered the crowd to disarm the soldiers. Some muskets were seized before the soldiers finally fired back, killing at least 16 and wounding up to 100.[1] After this the uprising spread and the magistrates had to abandon Merthyr itself. On 3 June the miners routed a detachment of cavalry, beat off 100 local Yeomanry, and actually disarmed a troop of West Glamorgan Yeomanry. Several hundred troops were required to confront and check a large body of sympathisers coming over from Monmouthshire, and over 800 were needed before the Merthyr rebels eventually dispersed on 4 June.[2]

The rising was over before Melbourne received news of its seriousness. On 4 June he was still setting forth his usual policy to the Marquess of Bute, the local Lord Lieutenant:

> 'Your Lordship will of course have taken care to give directions that the military might not be employed unnecessarily.'[3]

He was clearly not prepared for the dimensions of what actually happened at Merthyr. But there can be little doubt that Melbourne approved of the actions of the magistrates and military authorities. He had made his position clear back in December 1830, in connection with the violence around Manchester, when he wrote: 'to force nothing but force can be successfully opposed.'[4] Merthyr therefore remained under virtual military occupation for two years. Subsequent judicial measures were also severe: Lewis Lewis was transported for life, and another alleged leader known as 'Dic Penderyn' was executed in

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1. ibid. p.227
2. ibid. p.228
3. H.O. 41/10 f.86-7.
4. Melbourne to W. Hulton 30 Dec. 1830, M.P. 87/54, copy.

August 1831. Since the latter may well have been simply an innocent victim of a local vendetta, Melbourne appears to have been deliberately relentless in his case.[1] It is probably going too far, however, to assert that Melbourne had been 'looking for a scapegoat to shock the whole nation into submission.'[2] Melbourne could hardly have welcomed the news from Merthyr; there were too many risks involved for that. It would have suited him much better to have had no uprising and no 'scapegoat'. After the event it seemed wiser to act in an exemplary fashion than not, although Melbourne was too intelligent to expect political unions elsewhere to 'submit' and to discontinue agitation.

The Merthyr rising left a scar on Melbourne's mind. After the Chartist equivalent at Newport in 1839, Melbourne wrote to the Home Secretary of the day:

> 'It is the worst and most formidable district in the Kingdom. The affair we had there in 1831 was the most like a fight of anything that took place.'3

Not surprisingly, perhaps, he conducted a campaign against the Merthyr trade unions in the summer and autumn of 1831.[4] He felt that he could not allow industrial militancy and political radicalism to march together: there were too many other potential Merthyrs in the north and Midlands. The combination of a continued economic depression and an unprecedented, if patchy, outbreak of trade union activity meant that Melbourne was faced with frequent disorder in the industrial regions. After the Manchester cotton spinners returned to work, troops were still called out at St. Helens, where 1400 colliers were on strike in March, or at Burnley where a manufacturer and his new workmen were threatened by a mob.[5] More serious was a protracted strike by colliers in Northumberland and Durham which began in early April. The coal miners, who were in a determined mood, frequently attacked those whom the mine owners called 'the well disposed' workmen.[6] In such circumstances, the local civil

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1. Williams op.cit. p.230
2. D. Fraser, 'The Agitation for Parliamentary Reform', in Popular Movements c. 1830-1850 ed. J. T. Ward (1970) p.39.
3. 5 November 1839, Mulgrave MM/242.
4. See below p.126
5. Bouverie to H.O., 7 March, 24 April H.O. 40/29 ff.32, 51-2.
6. Lord Durham to Melbourne 19 April H.O. 52/12.

1. ibid.
2. ibid; Bouverie to H.O. 17 May H.O. 40/29 f.69.
3. Bouverie to H.O. 22, 24, 25 May H.O. 40/29 ff. 71, 73, 75.
4. Col. Shaw to H.O. 9, 13 June H.O. 52/13 (Newcastle under Lyne; Oldham).
5. Bouverie to H.O. 10 June, H.O. 40/29 f.87.
   Melbourne to Grey 11 June, Grey Papers.
6. ibid.
7. ibid.
8. Hall's reports 7, 14 June 1831 H.O. 64/11.
9. Melbourne to Grey 17 June 1831 Grey Papers.
10. Grey Papers.
11. H.O. to Foster 24 June H.O. 79/4 f.205.

forces proved useless. Further, Lord Durham told Melbourne that the miners planned to refuse coal to industries dependent on them and thus 'produce a riotous disposition among all the labourers in them.[1] Large numbers of troops were moved into the Tyne and Wear area whilst the mine owners slowly negotiated new contracts with the men during May and June.[2] At the same time, Bouverie found it necessary to supply troops to the Potteries and to the Lancashire coal-fields.[3] At Oldham, the military commander believed that the miners would have attacked the troops if the latter had not been reinforced to an overwhelming extent.[4]

Melbourne accepted that political feelings were not present in these disputes,[5] but, equally, they had been invisible in the Merthyr region until very recently. Even in the absence of political motives, Melbourne told Grey on 11 June that he expected serious riots 'wherever there are real or imaginary grievances, and that is everywhere.'[6] The strain of trying to assess the exact significance of these disorders appears in Melbourne's admission to Grey that he felt 'as if internal affairs were in a very perplexing and alarming state.'[7]

The schemes of the National Union of the Working Classes in London during the summer of 1831 did nothing to diminish Melbourne's unease. He was unconvinced by reports in June of quarrels among the leaders, low attendances at meetings, and the Rotunda's financial difficulties.[8] As he told Grey, 'it has so often appeared to be nearly at its last gasp.'[9] Hibbert, Cleave, Osborne, and Hetherington continued to make speeches recommending force to obtain popular rights. In Melbourne's view the danger was 'not diminished by the absurd and ridiculous character of their proceedings,' as he informed Grey on 18 June.[10] As if to confirm this, Melbourne shortly received reports from Foster in Manchester of links between the N.U.W.C. and the northern working class radicals.[11] He had these investigated immediately in London. The spy found, however, that although northern delegates, especially from Manchester, had come to London, they had no real connection with the N.U.W.C. The northerners

were there to support Henry Hunt's campaign in Parliament now that the Reform bill debates were again in progress. Their attempts to enlist the N.U.W.C. under Hunt's banner failed and merely caused dissension.[1] Melbourne ordered the Post Office to open letters to the delegates' correspondents in Manchester but took no further action.[2]

The N.U.W.C. held a meeting on 1 August at Copenhagen Fields to celebrate the 'July Revolution' in France, but, despite exhortations from the leaders that the people should procure arms for self-defence, it passed off uneventfully.[3] More serious was a plan for a national convention, to be sponsored by the N.U.W.C., which was proposed by the militant leaders, Benbow, Petrie, Preston and Lee. It was opposed, however, by other leaders, including Lovett, and remained merely an idea.[4] With some reason, therefore, the spy, who was by now a member of the N.U.W.C. committee, assured his superiors on 26 August that there was no need to expect 'much mischief.'[5]

One important N.U.W.C. venture, however, produced results. Towards the end of July, Hetherington departed on a tour of the North to follow up the overtures made by the Manchester delegates earlier that month.[6] Although he also had his interests as a newspaper publisher at heart, there is no doubt that he was one of the most capable and extreme of the N.U.W.C. leaders. Hetherington's success in the North was erratic but he certainly helped to create an understanding with the leaders of the 'low' union in Manchester.[7] On his return in September he gave a triumphant account of his tour to a N.U.W.C. meeting, including a statement that more 'low' unions were being formed. It was further reported that, after using 'very inflaming language' Hetherington then 'escaped by a side door'.[8] On receiving this account, Melbourne thought it worthwhile to take advantage of the fact that Hetherington was already under

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1. Hall's reports 30 June; 1, 2, 4 July H.O. 64/11.
2. H.O. 79/4 f.205.
3. Hall's report, n.d. [1 August] H.O. 64/11.
4. Large, 'Lovett', op.cit., p.115.
   'Poor Man's Guardian' 3 September.
   'Republican' 17 September.
5. H.O. 64/11.
6. Hall's report 26 July H.O. 64/11.
7. Large, 'Lovett', op.cit., p.125.
8. Hall's report 16 September H.O. 64/11.

conviction for publishing unstamped papers and to order his arrest.[1] This created a considerable flurry in N.U.W.C. circles a little later, although not serving as a permanent dampener.[2] Whatever the limitations of the N.U.W.C's provincial contacts, they were a novel and promising development from their sponsors' point of view. It is at least understandable that Melbourne wished to discourage such a tendency.

Apart from this new cause for concern, Melbourne was sufficiently untroubled by political agitation in September to be able to take stock of the situation as a whole, in a calm and dispassionate way. Just after the Reform Bill passed the Commons on a third reading by 345-236 on 22 September, he informed the King's secretary, Sir Herbert Taylor, of the results of his reflections.[3] He admitted that his knowledge was imperfect. It also seems that he did not always distinguish clearly between 'high' and 'low' political unions, although this may have been a deliberate concession to the king's limited powers of analysis.[4] These two letters offer, nonetheless, the best indication of Melbourne's thinking at this vital stage when the Lords were about to vote on the Reform Bill.

He thought that the political unions were 'extending themselves, increasing their numbers, and completing their arrangements' and that 'much communication and co-operation takes place by means of delegates.'[5] At the same time, he thought them much less impressive in themselves than the trade unions, 'from which' he added, 'they are as yet separate and distinct.'[6] Correctly, he believed that the Birmingham Political Union's counterparts in Lancashire and Yorkshire 'have not prevailed to the same degree' and, more boldly, that its London equivalent was 'not as yet formidable.'[7] Melbourne seems,

1. ibid., Melbourne's endorsement.
2. Hall's reports 1, 3 October H.O. 64/11.
3. 24, 26 September 1831, Sanders pp. 129-34.
4. 24 September.
5. ibid.
6. 26 September
(Melbourne referred, presumably, to the N.U.W.C.)
7. ibid.

however, to have credited the political unions with a powerful body of fellow-travellers. He thought that government legislation against the unions' 'would perhaps constitute them the acknowledged organs of public feeling, of which at present they are only the symptoms.'[1] Such action would be to 'commence an imprudent contest in which we are by no means sure of success, and which to be foiled in might be attended with the greatest danger.'[2]

This cautious, level-headed approach also characterises Melbourne's analysis of the practical power wielded by the political unions. Doubtless with Francis Place particularly in mind, Melbourne noted that prophecies of 'serious consequences' if the Reform Bill was rejected 'must be received with some allowance' as coming from 'eager advocates of that measure'.[3] He had an interest in convincing the king of the need to speak at the last minute to peers and, still more, to the bishops about the dangers of rejecting the Bill. They might then allow a second reading. Even so, Melbourne's reactions can largely be taken at face value. He expected riots as the least result of a defeat in the Lords. He was even more worried by the prospect of any extensive refusal to pay taxes, although to be effective this would need the participation of 'a large proportion of the middle and even of the better classes of society.'[4] In Melbourne's opinion this

> 'would be a blow levelled at the very existence of all our institutions, and must, in the complicated and artificial state of our society, be attended with the most disastrous consequences.'[5]

Melbourne was not the only person to envisage such an eventuality. In March 1831 the Tory Ellenborough had recorded in his diary:

> '... through <u>mere agitation</u> the most opulent bankers and merchants in France are become bankrupts. The operatives are unemployed and the taxes have fallen off at the rate of 4 millions a year. If such have been the consequences of agitation in France what would they be here, in a country the state of which is so delicate and artificial, where <u>confidence</u> is as necessary to the working of the whole system as water to the working of the steam engine.'[6]

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1. <u>ibid</u>.
2. <u>ibid</u>.
3. 24 September.
4. 24, 26 September.
5. 24 September.
6. quoted Brock, GRA p.209

In August 1831 the Ultra Tory 'Blackwood's Magazine' positively looked forward to 'the horrible stagnation... of internal trade' and 'a bit of a dust at Manchester or elsewhere ... [which] will be laid in blood.'[1]

By the end of September 1831 Melbourne would have spurned Blackwood's attitude as stupid and dangerous. If political deadlock should have economic repercussions, whether deliberate or not, he knew that these would not terminate simply in 'a bit of a dust at Manchester'. In the event of a widespread cessation of trade, serious industrial and urban disorder was inevitable. Militants in both political and trade unions might well join forces and find that they had been presented with an opportunity which they could never have created for themselves. E. J. Littleton, drawing on detailed knowledge of Midlands industry, wrote to a correspondent in June 1831:

> 'I am not afraid of squabbles or even fights about wages to any extent provided they do not occur simultaneously with political organisations such as Attwood's Political Unions (sic) - their co-existence now is a source of great danger.'2

The break down of order which Littleton or Melbourne could envisage might be halted short of revolution but that could not be guaranteed; and even a series of Peterloos or Merthyrs was hardly to be desired. It is, in fact, misleading to judge the magnitude of the danger simply by an examination of those disturbances which actually accompanied the passage of the Reform Bill, as has been done by Professor Hamburger.[3] It is not entirely convincing to play down even these disturbances by setting them against a 'tradition of rioting.'[4] Such an argument seems to undervalue the unprecedented nature of the 1830-32 crisis, certainly as seen by those who lived through it. Political awareness and passions were greater than even in the post-Waterloo years; and the economic balance had finally, if narrowly, tilted in favour of an urban, industrial society since the same period.

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1. ibid. p.240.
2. C. R. Fay, Huskisson and his Age (1951) p.328.
3. Hamburger, The Art of Revolution, chapter 4.
4. ibid. pp. 199-201.

1. ibid. p.212.

2. ibid. p.213 n.26. This figure was given by his successor in 1839 but it is confirmed by the Horse Guards list for 29 September 1831 in Melbourne Papers 6/10a.

3. A troop of 40 seems to have been the acceptable minimum to commanding officers.

4. Melbourne to Duke of Northumberland, Mayor of Newcastle, 20, 23 April 1831, H.O. 41/10 ff. 17, 22.

5. Bouverie to H.O. 7, 8 December 1830 H.O. 40/26 ff. 170-3, 176. See also Melbourne to Fenton, 12 January 1833 H.O. 41/11 ff. 356-7; and Hamburger op.cit. pp. 158, 209n.17.

6. Bouverie to H.O. 21 July 1834 H.O. 40/32 ff. 106-11.

7. Brock, GRA, p.301

8. spy reports 24 December 1832 H.O. 64/12,
   26 April 1834 H.O. 64/15.
   police report 2 June 1833 H.O. 61/8.
   Bouverie to H.O. 22 March 1833 H.O. 40/31 ff. 11-17.
   Hollis The Pauper Press pp. 48-9.
   Hamburger op.cit. pp. 214-229.

9. They were unevenly distributed, with a heavy concentration in the Midlands: F.C. Mather, 'Public Order in the Age of the Chartists' (1966), p.145.

10. See above p.36

11. Bouverie to H.O. 16 December 1830 H.O. 40/26 f.221 [endorsement]

12. Melbourne to Sir H. Taylor 25 Oct. 1831, Sanders pp. 134-5.

13. Sanders p.134-5.
    Hamburger op.cit. p.230.

'Blackwood's' also ignored the other side of the equation, namely, the civil and military forces at Melbourne's disposal. The regular army was fairly small: 28,700 in Great Britain (excluding Ireland) by January 1832, after an additional 7000 troops had been authorised in 1831.[1] In the all-important Northern District, General Bouverie had only 5,700 troops in 1831-2[2] Given the need to maintain a presence in garrison towns, and the prudence of keeping troops in reasonably large bodies,[3] it had not been easy to provide military assistance for disturbed areas at any time since Melbourne took office.[4] Provided their numbers were sufficiently imposing, troops had little difficulty in quelling most riots. Their initial failure at Merthyr, however, was a warning against over-confidence in this respect. Bouverie, moreover, did not relish the prospect of street-fighting in some of the cramped northern towns.[5] Later, he was to caution against undue reliance on the military's aura of invincibility, and refused to station less than 4 companies of infantry (440 men) in the particularly turbulent district of Oldham.[6] Apart from the exceptional circumstances of the days of May in 1832,[7] there was at least no real reason to suspect the allegiance of the private soldiers. There were other occasional scares that they might not do their duty, but these rested on meagre evidence and for the most part occurred after the Reform Bill was passed.[8] But no amount of loyalty could compensate for the smallness of an army whose numbers could not be indefinitely increased because of calls for 'economy' and fears of militarism.

Yeomanry corps were the most obvious auxiliary to the army.[9] They were, however, no less likely to inflame feelings in towns than they were in rural areas.[10] Melbourne was well aware of this, but, in principle, would still have used them in an emergency, even in Manchester with its 'Peterloo' memories.[11] By the autumn of 1831, however, Melbourne had lost confidence in the Yeomanry because 'the spirit of party' had caused divisions in some corps.[12] Dissension over the Reform bill resulted in resignations in the Yorkshire and Kent Yeomanry and made the Dorset corps doubtful.[13] Further cases in the Hertfordshire and Staffordshire

1. J. R. M. Butler The Passing of the Great Reform Bill (1914), p.422.

2. Large op.cit. p.116.
Hollis op.cit. p.49.
Earl of Airlie to H.O. 31 March 1831 H.O. 102/41 ff. 18-19.

3. Mather, Public Order, pp. 75-80.

4. Proposals of Duke of Richmond July 1831, MP 89/1
Melbourne to Earl of Warwick 12 December 1831 H.O. 43/41 pp. 158-9.
Report on Bristol (circulated) 15 December 1831 H.O. 40/28 f.143.
Melbourne to Althorp 30 December 1832 Spencer Papers.
Holland diary 19 May 1833, Add. Mss. 51,869 ff. 583-4.

5. Melbourne to Grey 21 December 1831, 10 July 1832, Grey Papers.
Melbourne to Howick 10 November 1832, Grey Papers.
Donajgrodzki op.cit. pp. 320-22.

6. Melbourne to Lord Hood 5 August 1833 MP 87/49, copy.

7. Melbourne to Earl of Digby 23 October 1831 H.O. 41/10 ff. 279-81.

8. 31 October 1831, Brougham 20,386.
also Melbourne to Grey 31 October Grey Papers.

corps in May 1832 suggest that this tendency could have spread widely.[1] Melbourne probably exaggerated the unreliability of the Yeomanry, which, being drawn from the propertied, had a vested interest in social order. But their usefulness was clearly limited.

In theory, the local militia could also be called out. This had, however, lapsed since the Napoleonic wars and was not resuscitated when it became clear that many Radicals would refuse to serve. Lovett and other London working class leaders made a protest in this way and there were signs that this idea was spreading.[2] The demise of the militia would not have mattered if the ordinary police system had been adequate, but, in every populous region or large town except for London, police forces were of the most archaic and derisory kind.[3] Melbourne and other ministers frequently considered ways of reforming these forces on the Metropolitan Police model but never brought in legislation.[4] The overriding problems were the lack of money to pay for the new police, when local ratepayers and the government were equally reluctant to bear the burden, and local dislike of administrative centralisation.[5]

This left special constables as the only effective civil force available to Melbourne. As noted earlier, he had no power to compel magistrates to swear in citizens as 'specials'[6], though magistrates themselves could, under 1 and 2 W.IV c.41, enrol 'specials' from a wider area than before, and fine those who would not serve.[7] Magistrates invariably were backward in enrolling special constables, not least because they had to be paid out of the rates. What was even more disquieting, however, was the disinclination of private individuals to serve as special constables. At the time of the Bristol riots, Melbourne explained his difficulties to Brougham:

> 'Such desperate political and personal animosities have been engendered by these elections, that hardly anybody will lend a hand to save his neighbourhood property, but on the contrary rejoices in its destruction to such a degree, that he hardly cares tho' the same ruin involve his own. The difficulty of inducing Persons to be sworn in Special Constables is ten times as great as it was last year.'8

It became easier to obtain 'specials' after the shock of the Bristol riots but their effectiveness against determined mobs was always very doubtful, unless they were visibly supported by the presence of troops.[1]

With these thoughts in his mind, Melbourne awaited the second reading of the Reform bill in the Lords. Attwood staged a meeting of 15,000 at Birmingham on 3 October but otherwise there was little outward sign of agitation. But the rejection of the Bill by the Lords on 8 October provoked the most serious set of riots which Melbourne had hitherto experienced, apart from those at Merthyr. At Nottingham, on 10 and 11 October, the property of anti-Reformers was destroyed, notably the Castle which belonged to that notorious Ultra, the Duke of Newcastle. Mobs also attacked and partly pillaged country houses outside the town. Derby was temporarily at the mercy of rioters, between 8-10 October. Less damage was done there, but one of the gaols was stormed. The riots were over too quickly for Melbourne to take much action himself, though he subsequently warned Newcastle not to show himself in public in Nottinghamshire for fear of further trouble.[2] Their character, however, did nothing to reassure him about the state of the country. The riots may have been leaderless and formless but their sudden eruption showed how unpredictable disorders might be. Special constables played a totally insignificant part until the troops arrived, whilst the latter had to be shuttled to and fro between Nottingham and Derby, and were glad of assistance from the yeomanry.[3]

It is possible that these riots would not have taken place without the inspiration of the peaceful meetings which preceded them.[4] The Duke of Newcastle certainly took this view at the time and asked Melbourne to restrict public meetings, especially where large numbers were involved. Melbourne replied that the government and magistrates had no powers to prevent or interfere with

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1. Mather, op.cit., p.85-86.
   Bouverie to H.O. 26 August 1833, H.O. 40/31 ff. 41-8.
2. 31 October H.O. 41/10 ff. 301-3.
3. H.O. to Town Clerk, Derby, Mayor of Nottingham 10, 12 October, H.O. 41/10 ff. 216-17, 221.
   Hamburger, op.cit., pp. 158, 160.
4. ibid. p.161.

1. Melbourne to Newcastle 22 October H.O. 41/10 ff. 273-6.
2. 29 October Grey Papers.
3. ibid.
4. T. Bowes to H.O. 22 Oct. 1831 H.O. 52/12.
   See also: Bouverie to H.O. 17 Oct. H.O. 40/29 ff. 136-7 (Carlisle); Lord Eldon to Lord Stowell 18, 24 Oct. in H. Twiss, Life of Eldon, (1844) III, 154-6 (Blandford); Brock, GRA, p.248.
5. Report of Supt. May 11 October H.O. 52/14.
6. Hamburger op.cit. p.152.
7. ibid. p.147 n.1.
8. Torrens pp. 247-8.
9. Police reports 12 October H.O. 61/5.
10. Hamburger op.cit. p.153.
11. H.O. 64/11.

meetings to get up public petitions.[1] This was sensible, as well as liberal, since a ban on meetings could not eliminate the risk of violence and might actually increase it. Melbourne did not, however, minimise the significance of the Nottingham and Derby riots. Later in October, as they settled into perspective, he wrote to Grey:

> 'Such violence and outrage are I believe quite new and unprecedented in this country; at least I never remember to have heard of country houses being attacked, plundered and set on fire in any former times of political ferment.'2

Melbourne therefore favoured a Special Commission so as to punish 'in the most exemplary and speedy manner these crimes at Nottingham which have certainly been atrocious.'[3]

For the next month there were violent incidents in scattered parts of the country, notably an attack on the Tory Earl of Tankerville at Darlington on 16 October,[4] but nothing to rival the scenes at Nottingham and Derby except for what took place in London. In the days following the Lords' vote Tory peers had their houses attacked and their persons threatened in the streets. Newcastle, Londonderry, Wellington and Cumberland all suffered in this way. One hostile crowd in Whitehall shouted 'Reform for ever' as well as 'No Taxes' and 'No Police'.[5] No organised demonstration took place, however, until 12 October when two of Place's Radical friends, Bowyer and Powell, led a procession from the London parishes to St. James' Palace with a petition to the king. Bowyer admitted that he took this action because 'no movement of the working people, of any important character, seemed likely to take place.'[6] The numbers involved were large, though reputable estimates varied from 15-60,000.[7] Melbourne seems to have been assured beforehand that the march would be peaceful, which turned out to be the case.[8] But in its wake came various riotous mobs who broke the windows of the Marquess of Bristol and Wellington. One section, armed with bludgeons, engaged in a short but violent fight with the police in St. James Square.[9] Cobbett was not impressed by the level of violence overall[10] but there was enough in the riots to substantiate Hall's statement of 11 October:

> 'I find generally a great deal more discontent now than I ever knew.' 11

The riots following 8 October were limited less by public indifference to the Reform bill than by the feeling that the Lords' action by itself did not warrant desperate measures. The 'high' political unions might look forward to another, and more forceful attempt to pass the Bill on the government's part; the 'low' unions could claim to be reserving their strength for grander occasions. Both types of union, however, put increasing pressure on the government over the next six weeks. During this time Melbourne would basically have agreed with what Joseph Parkes told his fellow Radical, Grote:

> 'Government is afraid of the people breaking loose, it is impossible if they but stick to the helm.' 1

On several occasions, however, he thought it necessary to take direct action to prevent 'the people breaking loose'.

So far as the 'low' unions were concerned, an example was set by the Manchester leadership, composed of Broadhurst, Curran, and Ashmore. On 12 October they forcibly broke up a meeting of the Manchester 'high' union at Camp Fields and passed resolutions in favour of universal suffrage. A crowd of 8-10,000 supported them, although some of these were mill-hands reluctantly turned-out to swell the numbers.[2] The 'low' union was also apparently responsible for spreading the idea of refusing to pay rates and taxes, which Foster reported as widely diffused.[3] About this time, Melbourne was warning the Birmingham Political Union, via Place and Parkes, against meetings to organise the non-payment of taxes.[4] He therefore also instructed Foster and Bouverie to publicise the illegality of meetings to this end and the penalties for those who organised them.[5] The next union meeting on 14 October was ill-attended and resulted only in a minor riot which was easily stopped by troops. Another meeting on 17 October was cancelled after Foster

1. Brock, GRA, p.237.
2. Foster to H.O. 12, 13 October H.O. 52/13.
3. Foster to H.O. 11 October H.O. 52/13.
4. Torrens p.248.
5. 13 October H.O. 41/10 ff. 227, 231.

and Bouverie took precautions, including military protection for the mill-hands who feared an involuntary turn-out.[1]

Bouverie concluded from these failures, and the split between the 'high' and 'low' union, that 'there is not much real mischief to be apprehended from the Unions whilst things continue in this state.'[2] This was, however, premature. The Manchester working class leaders were arranging for delegates from other towns to attend a general meeting in Manchester. This plan had been given a trial run in May 1831 when 19 delegates assembled and sent some of their number on to London to try to link up with the N.U.W.C.[3] Thanks largely to Hetherington, the Manchester-London nexus now at least looked plausible and communication with neighbouring industrial centres in Lancashire was not difficult. With 27 branches itself, the Manchester Union certainly had great hopes of the plan: one leader was reported by Foster to have said that, 'there are Delegates out throughout England and the day is not far off when they will have their way.'[4] The fact that the date of the meeting was still unknown to Melbourne by the beginning of November did not lessen his need to take the intention seriously.

In London the N.U.W.C. was also stimulated by the Reform bill's difficulties to bring forward its own proposals and strengthen its organisation. The Committee initiated a fortnightly register of members' names and addresses, partly to collect subscriptions but also so as to locate them in case of need.[5] It also adopted a class system, on 24 October, with class leaders and a theoretical 25 per class. These were primarily local groups which met to discuss ideas and policies but could obviously have other uses. Above all, on 26 October, the N.U.W.C. Committee agreed to hold a large public meeting

1. Foster to H.O. 17 October H.O. 52/13.
2. Bouverie to H.O. 20 October H.O. 40/29 ff. 138-9.
3. Foster to H.O. 22, 28 June H.O. 52/13.
4. Foster to H.O. 19 October H.O. 52/13.
5. Hall's report 20 October H.O. 64/11.

on 7 November in support of universal suffrage, ballot, annual parliaments, and abolition of the peerage. Hall reported that his own Bethnal Green branch proposed marching three abreast with armbands, tricolours and staves. He warned that,

> 'from what I see of the rashness and enthusiasm of many who attend these meetings I do fear much mischief will take place on that day.'[1]

Melbourne would probably have described the N.U.W.C., as he had in the summer, as an 'absurd' body in many ways. He knew that its leaders such as Hetherington, Watson, Cleave, Benbow, and Petrie were as much interested in their businesses as printers, editors, and coffee-shop keepers as they were in revolution.[2] He also knew of the ideological differences within the N.U.W.C. and of the fierce running battle which it was waging with Place's embryonic National Political Union.[3] He could infer from the N.U.W.C's financial problems that its permanent hard core was fairly small.(Its membership was put at about 3,000 by the police and Stafford, the Bow Street magistrate, early in November.[4]) But, as he had told Grey in the summer, it was also a dangerous body. If its regular meetings drew 7-800, it could presumably turn out many thousands for a special occasion. Many members were trade unionists with useful contacts.[5] In its ranks was a minority of militants who might wrest the initiative from the official leadership. With the 'high' unions in a very restive mood,[6] and the N.U.W.C.'s provincial counterparts making plans, Melbourne could not afford an example of even partially successful violence in London. On 29 October, therefore, he suggested to Grey that the meeting should be banned.[7] Over the next week he found much to confirm his decision.

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1. 26 October H.O. 64/11.
2. Hall's report 19 October H.O. 64/11.
3. ibid.
4. H.O. 52/14.
5. The N.U.W.C. was not officially connected with any London trade union but many trade unionists were members: Hall's report 20 October H.O. 64/11.
6. See below p.74
7. Grey Papers.

On the same day as Melbourne wrote to Grey, Bristol became the scene of the most devastating and horrifying acts of mob violence seen in England since the Gordon Riots of 1780[1] The arrival, as Recorder of Bristol, of Sir Charles Wetherall, a notorious anti-Reform M.P., provoked three days of riots. Anticipating trouble, Melbourne had stationed three troops of cavalry in the city but their commander, Colonel Brereton, did not use them effectively till a late stage. Had the latter been more ruthless or, at least, more confident that he had power independent of the magistrates to suppress the riots, the situation might not have become so serious. It is therefore possible to argue that what happened at Bristol was not all that significant.[2]

There were good reasons, however, why Melbourne took a different view of the case. Brereton's reluctance to open fire was evidently not thought to be unique to him. Commenting on such uncertainty to the Duke of Portland, who had raised a similar case, Melbourne wrote:

> 'I am sure that doubt does exist throughout the whole of this country, which as it increases in ignorance, increases in conceit, and calls itself more enlightened in proportion as it becomes more shallow and superficial.'[3]

He also asked the Crown lawyers at the Bristol Special Commission publicly to correct what he called the most absurd and erroneous idea that troops might be used only on a magistrate's order and after the Riot Act had been read.[4] Even had Brereton's attitude been different, his forces might not have overcome the rioters who had not been cowed initially by the military's presence and were enraged rather than deterred when two of their number were killed and three or four wounded by the soldiers on 29-30 October. Military action on the 31st succeeded partly because the rioters were by then largely exhausted or drunken.[5]

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1. For full accounts see Brock, GRA pp. 250-53.
   Hamburger, op.cit., pp. 161-80.
2. See Hamburger, op.cit., pp. 172-80.
3. 15 November MP 88/73, copy
4. Melbourne to Brougham 19 December 1831,
   Brougham Papers 43,485.
5. Brock, GRA, p.253.

The civilian ingredients of the Bristol riots confirmed Melbourne's worst fears about the precarious state of society. The magistrates proved incompetent and irresolute; special constables had been almost impossible to procure; and the Bristol Political Union had declined to come to the aid of the unpopular Corporation. After the riots the middle classes still proved unreliable, but now out of fright. In December the military commander reported,

> 'it is clear, that, in Bristol at the present time, without soldiers there will be no constables.' 1

Troops remained in Bristol till well after the Reform Bill became law. The rioters themselves, or 'the Rabble', as Melbourne called them,[2] had been excited by politics at the outset and had then turned increasingly to plunder and destruction. As a port, Bristol may have had an unusually large number of rootless and unrestrained people but the unemployed or impoverished in other towns were numerous, and responsive to the same stimuli as the Bristol 'rabble'. Melbourne might well, therefore, tell the irresponsible Brougham,

> 'for God's sake do not encourage agitation... we shall have the whole Country in a blaze, and we have not the same means of putting it out, as we had last year.' 3

In London, the news from Bristol increased the belligerency of at least the rank and file in the N.U.W.C. Some said defiantly 'what can they do at Bristol that we can't do here ten times over' and that they would 'shew the people of Bristol that if they had been as united then (sic) as they will be here, they could not have been put down'[4] At a Bethnal Green branch meeting one member (Noquett) urged his fellows to bring staves or pokers on 7 November because

> 'there was something else determined on and he could tell them something if he dare. No - no from the Committee. Well he dare not, however he would say they were going to buy firelocks to Shoot Game.' 5

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1. Maj. Gen. Jackson to Lord F. Somerset 25 December H.O. 40/28 f.146.
2. Melbourne to Brougham 31 Oct. Brougham Papers 20,386.
3. ibid.
4. Report of Supts. Hunter and Smith 3 Nov. H.O. 52/14.
5. Police reports early November H.O. 52/14.

Noquett may have been indulging in braggadocio but more specific plans were revealed to the police by Clements, a N.U.W.C. leader who had turned informer. According to him some members intended to liberate Hetherington from Cold Bath Fields Prison and, if strong enough, to destroy the foreign warehouses in the City. To fulfill their boast that 'they would be no paltry window breakers, but head breakers', they proposed to sell staves on their march at four pence each.[1] A letter to Hetherington confirming Clements' story was, in fact, intercepted on 3 November and an intention to fire the warehouses was reported by an independent source, though two days after 7 November.[2] Staves were certainly on sale and impressed Place with their power to inflict serious injury.[3]

As the meeting approached, its organisation looked more formidable. Two bodies of N.U.W.C. supporters were to assemble at Lincolns Inn Fields and the Rotunda respectively; they would then join together and march to White Conduit House for a final meeting. The N.U.W.C. placards also called for simultaneous public meetings for the same purpose throughout the country. Fortified by an opinion from the law officers, Melbourne decided on 4 November to declare the meeting illegal.[4] The law officers went so far as to say that the meeting would constitute high treason. According to Palmerston, this opinion absolutely shook Althorp when it was announced at a Cabinet on 4 November.[5] Melbourne, however, had no hesitation in making use of it.

The same day Wakley, the Radical M.P. for Finsbury and chairman designate of the meeting, called on Melbourne and learnt of the government's decision.

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1. Report of Supts. Hunter and Smith 3 November H.O. 52/14.
2. Prison Committee to H.O. 3 November H.O. 52/14.
   Sir S. Hall to W. Ballantyne 9 November H.O. 52/14.
3. Brock GRA p. 257.
4. Denman to Melbourne 3 November, H.O. 52/14.
   Melbourne to Grey 4 November, Grey Papers.
5. Palmerston to Lady Cowper 4 November, Broadlands (Hants R.O.) 12.

When the N.U.W.C. committee heard of it, they sent a deputation to see Melbourne on Saturday, 5 November. Lovett apparently assured him[1] that the meeting would be peaceful, pointed out that they had offered to be sworn as special constables, and argued that their demands (i.e. ballot and universal suffrage) were well-known principles. He also made the interesting remark that such meetings acted as safety-valves for working class feeling. At this point, according to the 'Poor Man's Guardian', 'Lord Melbourne seemed as if desirous not to hear further and was going out by a side door, after saying "good morning." ' There then followed a vital concession by the deputation: Cleave told Melbourne that the resolution calling for the abolition of hereditary distinctions had been withdrawn. This demand seems to have been the foundation for the original charge of the law officers because it could be said to involve the monarchy as well as the aristocracy. Melbourne had already promised the deputation that they would not be prosecuted for printing the placard which included this resolution, and if Cleave meant what he said, it would presumably have been difficult to prosecute those who attended or led the meeting.

Melbourne therefore seems to have resorted to something close to bluff. He told the deputation that

> 'it was not that resolution alone, but the whole tenor of the Declaration, which government thought seditious. The calling on persons to come from all parts of the country, and confer on the various subjects described in the Declaration, was assuming that the government of the country was deficient. Any person attending such a meeting would not only be seditious, but in the act of committing high treason.'2

If Melbourne indeed said this, (and the account rings true), he was blurring the facts. The N.U.W.C. had not summoned a national convention - the other meetings were to be held locally - and, except for the resolution on hereditary distinctions, their demands had been freely discussed and publicised throughout Melbourne's time as Home Secretary. It is, perhaps, not surprising that as soon as he had issued this imposing warning, Melbourne broke off discussion and left the N.U.W.C. leaders to reflect on the risks they ran.

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1. The following details are taken from 'The Poor Man's Guardian' 12 November.
2. ibid.

Melbourne's colleagues had no doubt of his major role in the confrontation with the N.U.W.C. and thought that he had handled the situation well. Palmerston wrote to Lady Cowper on 5 November:

> 'It is quite a God send to Melbourne to have an important affair on his hands, it rouses him wonderfully; and his activity is always in proportion to the urgency of the case.' 1

After the meeting had been cancelled by the N.U.W.C., Holland reflected favourably on

> 'the good sense and management of Melbourne who in a frank careless and coarse but easy and plain manner frightened their leaders without offending them.' 2

and emphasised to Grey that

> 'Melbourne's odd ways seem on this as on most other occasions to have answered admirably.' 3

Melbourne's tactics had, indeed, an immediate effect. The spy Hall reported that when the deputation informed the other N.U.W.C. leaders of what had transpired at the Home Office,

> 'the Committee were thrown into great consternation ... and the deputation declared they would have nothing to do with the meeting.' 4

According to Mansell, Wakley 'pictured to the cowardly apostates on the Committee all the horrors of a massacre.'[5] Mansell also thought Melbourne was bluffing because he

> 'did not state it was treason but sedition, and that magistrates had orders to act which is no worse than they have done numbers of times before ...'6

Mansell was rewarded for his outburst by having his letters opened at the Post Office for the next six months; but he remained in a small minority on the N.U.W.C. Committee.[7] On Sunday 6 November, the Committee issued a placard

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1. Broadlands (Hants R.O.) 12.
2. Holland diary 7 Nov., Add. Mss. 51,868 f.197.
3. Holland to Grey 8 Nov. Grey Papers.
4. 6 November H.O. 64/11.
5. Mansell to Curran 6 November H.O. 44/25, copy.
6. ibid.
7. H.O. warrant 8 November H.O. 79/4 f.209.
   Melbourne also called for a police report on Mansell: Insp. Adamson 10 November H.O. 64/16.

announcing the postponement of the meeting; and on Sunday evening Watson, Lovett, and Cleave agreed to meet on Monday morning and possibly assist the magistrates in dispersing any crowd which assembled at White Conduit Fields.[1]

Melbourne's preparations for the meeting nonetheless continued unabated. One battalion of foot guards, two squadrons of life guards, and four pieces of artillery were placed on call (though out of sight) for the magistrates at White Conduit House.[2] 400 Greenwich pensioners were armed. Muskets and hand grenades were supplied to the Bank and Cold Bath Fields Prison.[3] The docks were also protected by a military force.[4] Nearly 7,500 special constables were sworn in, thus releasing 2,000 police for duty at the meeting. In the event, none of these forces were required. A small crowd turned up at White Conduit Fields out of curiosity, mildly abused some of the police, and dispersed quietly by the evening. The 'Poor Man's Guardian' later ridiculed the government's 'extravagant' precautions on 7 November. Melbourne, however, had the example of Bristol before his eyes and also had to remember that he had very little in the way of military reserves. Including the Surrey Yeomanry and over 600 Marines, the Horse Guards claimed that it could dispose only '1,347 mounted Swords and 2,301 Bayonets', after scouring the area within 50 miles of London.[5]

For the N.U.W.C., the meeting's 'postponement' was an important defeat. Lovett tried to put a brave face on it, when writing to Curran in Manchester, by claiming that they had gained invaluable publicity, made the N.U.W.C. feared, and attracted many new members.[6] When Melbourne read his intercepted letter, he could not, however, have failed to see the significance of Lovett's opinion

1. Hall's report 8 November H.O. 64/11.
2. Lord Hill to H.O. 7 November H.O. 52/14.
3. Ordnance Office to H.O. 5 November H.O. 52/14.
4. London Dock Co. to H.O. 9 November H.O. 52/14.
5. Sir Willoughby Gordon (Quarter Master General) 9 November to Sir J. Graham, quoted Hamburger op.cit. p.213.
6. 14 November H.O. 44/24, copy

that a national convention would be best not held in London and his candid admission that although 'the Country always look to this place to take the lead - we on the contrary look to the Country.'[1] More positive evidence that the N.U.W.C. was, temporarily at least, demoralised came from Hall. He reported confusion and disappointment in his own Eastern branch immediately after 7 November, and dull, ill-attended meetings over the next week.[2] Even at the reduced price of three pence, staves found no takers at a branch meeting on 11 November, whilst a motion for public drilling was dropped.[3]

The N.U.W.C.'s appeal to the rest of the country had not been successful. Their Manchester counterparts had not had time to organise a similar meeting and were reserving their efforts for later in the month. Preston seems to have been the only place where a copy of the White Conduit Fields resolutions was both received and, to some extent, acted upon. Hunt held a meeting there on 7 November but spoke moderately. After his departure, however, serious rioting developed. According to the Mayor, a mob of 'desperate characters,' armed with bludgeons, forcibly turned out factory workers, damaged property, and released prisoners from the jail.[4] Bouverie had to send three companies of infantry to Preston, which left him unable to send reinforcements to Newcastle when trouble threatened there.[5] But when Hunt spoke in Leeds soon afterwards, only 200 turned up and dispersed peacefully.[6]

By 7 November, however, Melbourne knew more about the Manchester 'low' union's plans for simultaneous meetings in the northern towns later in the month. Having intercepted a letter from Ashmore and Curran to the N.U.W.C.

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1. ibid.
2. 9, 11, 15 November H.O. 64/11.
3. Brock GRA, p. 257.
4. J. Dixon to H.O. 7, 9 November H.O. 52/13.
5. Bouverie to H.O. 11 November H.O. 40/29 f.147.
6. Bouverie to H.O. 10 November H.O. 40/29 f.144.

he was able to tell Foster of their assertion that 'their number will in a short time defy all opposition, and their hearts are nearly screwed up to the sticking point.'[1] Ashmore and Curran admitted that 'their members are tied to their jobs' but claimed that they could 'on any great event turn out every man in Manchester.'[2] Foster did not dispute this claim.[3] Melbourne hoped, however, that the Manchester men would be disappointed by the failure of the White Conduit Fields meeting 'as they were anxious that the intended meeting on the 21st should have been announced at it.'[4] His action against the N.U.W.C. may have influenced the 18-19 delegates who held a preliminary meeting at Manchester on 16 November, since they decided to postpone the main meetings till 28 November. They persisted, however, with the idea of choosing delegates at these meetings to attend a national convention 'in some central town.'[5]

Despite these Manchester schemes, there was some reason for Melbourne's opinion, imparted to Holland on 10 November, that 'it is a great annoyance to be kept on the alert ... by a set of fellows, who I verily believe not to be very numerous and certainly if not numerous, formidable in no other respect.'[6] But on 16 November Holland recorded in his diary:

> 'Lord Melbourne is deeply impressed not to say alarmed at the state of the Country, thinks some convulsion must happen.'[7]

Doubtless Melbourne's views fluctuated from day to day in any case but there seem to have been particular reasons for this change of opinion. It was during these days that it became clear that there was an imminent danger of the political unions organising themselves on military lines and equipping themselves with arms.

Such a development had been in the air for at least a month.[8] The idea of a National Guard had been widely canvassed as a conservative measure in the aftermath

1. H.O. to Foster 7 November H.O. 79/4 f.208.
2. ibid.
3. Foster to H.O. 12 November H.O. 52/13.
4. H.O. to Foster 7 November.
5. Foster to H.O. 19 November H.O. 52/13.
6. Add. Mss. 51,558 ff. 59-60.
7. Add. Mss. 51,868 f. 210.
8. See Brock GRA p.250.

of the Nottingham and Derby riots. Such a body might be broad-based and classless but it was more likely to assume a middle class character. A National Guard would be especially useful to the 'high' unions, as much to keep up pressure on the government as to protect property. Similar bodies might well be formed by the working class unions, or even by anti-Reformers, though in the former case limits were imposed by the expense of firearms.[1]

From any view point, the idea of National Guards could do nothing but appal Melbourne. As far back as January 1831 he had refused even to reply to a correspondent who had urged the formation of voluntary associations of property owners and half-pay officers to combat the 'frightful spirit' agitating the country.[2] In November 1831, Melbourne refused to sanction armed associations even in the case of Derby or that of rural incendiarism.[3] He made his views clear in a warning letter to Sir Francis Burdett at the end of October 1831, when the latter had assumed the chairmanship of the N.P.U. He wrote that if the pleas of the Times and Morning Chronicle for a National Guard were acted upon in London, the example would be followed 'in all the great towns.'[4] Melbourne claimed that it was unnecessary to defend property in this way and that 'arms, placed in untrained hands, only produce accidental, unintended, and unnecessary bloodshed.'[5] He thought special constables were adequate and that there was no need for recourse to 'establishments with new and foreign names, or to any other weapons than the constable's staff.'[6]

The clamour for such 'establishments' grew, however, in early November, fed by the news from Bristol. It was also stimulated, and exploited, by Colonel Macerone who circulated his proposals for street-fighting tactics and the home manufacture of weapons.[7] In a letter to the Morning Chronicle on

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1. 'Poor Man's Guardian' 8 October.
2. Mr. Grey to H.O. 6 January 1831 H.O. 40/29 f.164.
3. H.O. to Mayor of Derby, 2 November, H.O. 41/10 f.316.
   H.O. to County Fire Office, 9 November 1831, H.O. 43/41 ff.8-9.
4. 27 October MP 20/108.
5. ibid.
6. ibid.
   See also Melbourne to Earl of Glasgow 14 January 1832 H.O. 103/7 f.80-1.
7. Hamburger op.cit. p. 233 n.4.

12 November, Macerone offered to supply bayonets for fixing to guns, though admittedly only at the profiteering price of ten shillings each. Melbourne received an anonymous letter, dated 3 November, which claimed that the Birmingham Political Union was planning to arm its members.[1] Over the next week he also received reports of arming by the 'low' unions at Blackburn and Nottingham.[2] Melbourne was inclined to believe the news from Nottingham at least, especially once the chief magistrate supplied the plausible details that only 16 stand of arms had been purchased as yet but that more muskets would be purchased, at 16s. 8d. each including bayonet, once the union had more money.[3] The idea of armed guards seemed to be spreading even to the new political unions, such as that at Cupar, which had held its first meeting on 3 November.[4] Most important of all, on 7 November the Council of the Birmingham Union discussed a plan to reorganise the Union on semi-military lines; and on 10 November the Morning Chronicle alleged that the idea had been favourably received.

At this point Melbourne decided to take action. He asked the Earl of Warwick and Sir Francis Lawley (M.P. for Warwickshire) to check on these stories about the Birmingham Union.[5] To Lawley he wrote:

> 'Pray if you have any opportunity let these people know, that the Government are determined not to permit these Political Unions to become armed bodies.'

A few days later, Lawley replied that the Union was not to be armed but was to be reorganised in a dangerously powerful way.[6] His opinion was confirmed by another Home Office correspondent who had spoken to Attwood himself.[7] Melbourne was not much comforted by this partial reassurance for, as he told Lawley,

> 'it is unnecessary that a deliberative body should be arrayed, and an arrayed body is entirely unfit for deliberation.' 8

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1. 'Truth' to H.O., H.O. 40/29 f.352.
2. Blackburn magistrates to H.O. 9 November H.O. 52/13. Bouverie to H.O., 11 November H.O. 40/29 f. 147.
3. L. Rolleston to Melbourne 13 November H.O. 44/25.
4. Melbourne to Earl of Rosslyn 11 November H.O. 103/7 ff. 37-8.
5. 10 November MP 89/81, 87/84, copies.
6. 14, 15 November MP 87/85, 86.
7. (anon.) 14 Nov. H.O. 48/28 f.34, copy.
8. 16 November MP 87/87.

For a little while it looked as if the rumours that the B.P.U. was arming were true after all. A London gunmaker, Riviere, was alleged to have supplied 6,000 stand of arms to the Union, although as Althorp said, 'this would have been carrying coals to Newcastle with a vengeance.'[1] Riviere, however, effectively denied the charge, which seems to have arisen out of a contract he had with the Russian government.[2] A second story with a basis of fact centered on a large number of arms barges seen on the Regents Canal, apparently bound for the north or midlands. Police investigations revealed that these had existed but the general conclusion was that their cargo consisted of second-hand, and probably defective guns which France had sold to Russia.[3]

Despite these false alarms, and despite the fact that he knew the B.P.U.'s finances did not permit it to purchase much in the way of arms,[4] Melbourne saw the need to stop Attwood's reorganisation plans. On 16 November Grey asked him to take the law officers' opinion on the B.P.U. scheme for grouping its members into the equivalents of companies, regiments, and divisions.[5] Melbourne did this on the same day, remarking of the proposed new Union that 'tho' unarmed at first it may with the greatest case at any time become an armed force.'[6] On 19 November the law officers advised that the B.P.U.'s plan was indeed illegal.[7] The government could also count on a shift in public opinion by this time. The Times retracted its National Guard proposals; the Birmingham Journal supported Attwood in general but not his latest plan; and the leading military figure among the Radicals, Col. W. F. P. Napier, refused to be put up as leader of any National Guard.[8] As Melbourne wrote to Sir Herbert Taylor on 24 November, the political unions 'have undoubtedly produced in the public mind much alarm, and they have received a considerable check from this feeling.'[9]

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1. Althorp to Earl Spencer, 21 November, Spencer Papers.
2. Hamburger op.cit. p.235.
3. Police reports 19 November H.O. 64/16.
   Ordnance Board to H.O. 15, 16 November H.O. 64/16.
4. Melbourne to Grey 18 November, Grey Papers.
5. MP 5/95.
6. Melbourne to Law Officers H.O. 49/7 ff. 433-4.
7. H.O. 48/28 f.34.
8. Brock GRA p.255.
9. Sanders pp. 137-8.

1. See Chapter I.
2. Mr. Forster to E. J. Littleton 26 November H.O. 40/29 f.458.
3. 23 November H.O. 40/28 f.117.
4. ibid.
5. Brock GRA p.249
6. Melbourne to Brougham 31 Oct. Brougham Papers 20,386. 'The Examiner', 6 November.
7. Mr. Forster to Littleton 26 November H.O. 40/29 f.458. (Curiously, Melbourne did not ask for an army estimate of the capacity of the famous Newhall Hill meeting place till 1833: Col. Thorn to H.O. 22 May 1833, H.O. 40/31 ff. 99-100. Thorn's estimate was 35,000).
8. Hall's report, 22 November H.O. 64/11.
9. ibid.

On 19 November the Cabinet therefore decided on a proclamation banning the military organisation of political unions, at the same time as it agreed to recall Parliament in a fortnight.[1] Warned of this ban in advance, the B.P.U. council dropped their plan on 22 November, the day that the proclamation was published. For the immediate future the 'high' unions had been rendered quiescent by the government's two moves. It was reported of the Walsall Political Union that it had accepted the proclamation.[2] The Bristol Union actually sent its rules to the Home Office and asked for a reassurance of its legality.[3] Melbourne had the satisfaction of refusing to determine 'whether it falls or not, within the prohibition of the late proclamation', thus leaving Herapath and his colleagues with a nagging doubt about even their ordinary activities.[4]

Even so the government could not prevent the formation of new political unions on the old Birmingham model, such as Place's N.P.U., or those at Leicester (2 November), Bolton (31 October), and Leeds (17 November). Attwood, indeed, was said to have received 50 requests for the rules of his Union during October.[5] Melbourne was not deceived by the exaggerated claims advanced on behalf of the 'high' unions. He knew that only about 3,000 had attended Place's inaugural meeting on 31 October, by contrast with press reports of anything up to 15,000.[6] He had some idea, too, that Attwood had the gift of magnifying

> 'a meeting of ten or twenty thousand idlers, mostly women and children into an assembly of one hundred and fifty thousand "of the people" ',

as one of E. J. Littleton's Birmingham correspondents put it.[7] But it was clearly important to have these unions rendered temporarily innocuous by the twin initiatives of 19 November.

The proclamation of 22 November also had a considerable effect on the N.U.W.C. Until that date its leadership had been recovering its nerve after the 'débâcle' of a fortnight earlier. On 21 November the N.U.W.C. had publicly decided on Benbow's plan of dividing members into classes of 25 each; 22 leaders were appointed[8]. Benbow wanted anyone who

> 'had been a soldier or knew the exercise so that he might learn his Class (sic) to march or the use of the Firelock.' 9

Hibbert was heard to recommend 'Colonel Macerone's lance or anything that could be got at' and Lovett said he for one would fight.[1] Talk of military training from a member who said he had always gone armed to public meetings 'ever since the Manchester massacre' was loudly cheered at a N.U.W.C. branch meeting.[2]

On 23 November, however, the leaders were reported by the spy to be in confusion.[3] Some feared that the government would suppress their Union completely; Hibbert 'was sure they could do so.'[4] Benbow had to withdraw his plan for a month's 'holiday', or general strike. On 26 November the N.U.W.C. Committee settled on a compromise: local branches were given up but class leaders were retained. This formula was accepted by a meeting at the Rotunda subsequently.[5] The modification did not, perhaps, fully meet the terms of the proclamation but Melbourne was content to see the N.U.W.C. harassed and in retreat. Hall's reports throughout December indicated that sufficient had been done to douse the N.U.W.C.'s spirits for the time being: its meetings were dull and cautious, members did not pay subscriptions, and class leaders did not attend Committee meetings.[6] Melbourne could also see that the N.U.W.C. was devoting its energies to the struggle with Place for control of the N.P.U.[7]

An important reason for this partial collapse by the N.U.W.C. was the failure of their Manchester counterparts to stage a successful meeting on 28 November at Camp Fields. Troops were distributed throughout Manchester to prevent a forcible turn-out of factory workers with the result that 1-2,000 attended the meeting during the dinner hour but only 500 otherwise.[8] The meeting had to be adjourned to 26 December without any progress towards the hoped-for national convention. The organisation of the Lancashire 'low' unions

1. ibid. See also Police report 23 November H.O. 61/5; Poor Man's Guardian 26 Nov., 4, 10 Dec.
2. Police report 25 November H.O. 61/5.
3. Hall's report 24 November H.O. 64/11.
4. ibid.
5. Hall's reports 28, 29 November H.O. 64/11.
6. 2, 13, 14, 15, 21, 23, 29 December H.O. 64/11.
7. Hall's report 30 December H.O. 64/11.
   Lovett to Curran 14 Nov. H.O. 44/24, copy.
8. Foster to Melbourne 28 November H.O. 52/13.

did not, however, leave much room for complacency on Melbourne's part. On 28 November a speaker had claimed that 104 towns would send delegates to the convention. Foster estimated that 'low' unions flourished in seven towns around Manchester, each with nearly 1,000 members or more, and that such unions were being formed in a further five towns. In addition, he thought that several thousand belonged to the main Manchester unions.[1] Moreover, Foster pointed out to Melbourne that 'it is not the present power of the Unions that is formidable but the possibility that circumstances may render them so.'[2] A slump in trade or industrial disputes could easily arise to provide mass support for the unions.

There was also evidence that 'low' unions were on the increase outside Lancashire. One was formed on 17 November at Leeds, hitherto not a centre of Reform agitation. Walsall's Political Union was nominally in Attwood's camp but it was allegedly composed of members who were far from being £10 householders and who hoped that the Reform Bill would enlarge mob licence, as at Bristol.[3] Its president was described as seldom having a coat on his back; the secretary kept a beer shop; and it terrified persons on its 'black list.'[4] Several 'low' unions appeared in the West Country,[5] the most important being that at Bath which reputedly had 2,500 members and so alarmed the magistrates that they wanted legislation to put it down.[6]

In several cases these unions were alleged to be armed. Melbourne retained a healthy scepticism in the face of these reports. When the authorities at Derby claimed that 200 men were armed with guns concealed in walking sticks but failed to come up with proof, Melbourne eventually endorsed the town clerk's

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1. Foster to Melbourne 27 November H.O. 52/13.
(The towns were: Stockport, Macclesfield, Blackburn, Preston, Bolton, Oldham and Bury.)
2. ibid.
3. Foster to Littleton 26 November H.O. 40/29 f.458.
4. ibid.
5. 27 November, 2 December H.O. 40/29 ff. 440,481 (Bath).
24, 30 November, 1 December H.O. 40/29 ff.437, 475, 477, (Frome, Yeovil, Fairford)
6. W. Clark to H.O. 27 November H.O. 40/29 ff. 440-1.

latest alarmist letter, 'Mr. B. writes, as he talks, very much at random. The Inform. is not worth attending to.'[1] Melbourne had similar difficulties with the Duke of Newcastle who sent in vague and distorted accounts from Nottingham. On 12 November, Melbourne advised him

> 'to weigh well the intelligence which you receive, and to be much upon your guard against false and exaggerated information.'[2]

When Newcastle reported nocturnal military training, Melbourne replied, with more than a touch of irony, that he was sure the duke had long since informed the local magistrates also and that

> 'if by any accident, Your Grace ... has hitherto omitted to take this course, you will, I feel confident, now immediately hasten to adopt it.' 3

Melbourne adopted this discouraging line because, as he freely admitted to Newcastle, he feared 'any act of precipitation, temerity, or indiscretion.'[4]

In fact, Melbourne would probably have admitted that Nottingham was one of the worst areas with which he had to contend. A local correspondent, whom Melbourne had deemed reliable enough to check on the rumours, informed him that 'there is certainly a very bad feeling abroad now and the Arms Clubs continue to be on the increase.'[5] The Clubs met on Sunday evenings to hear the papers read and drilling was practised to some extent. Those who were armed allegedly planned to repeat the attacks on country houses of 11-12 October, if the troops were diverted by any riot in Nottingham itself, and

> 'they scruple not to declare that if resistance is attempted and fails, scenes like what have been acted at Lyons shall follow and total destruction be the result.' 6

He concluded:

> 'Trade is stagnant, Misery and discontent are daily increasing. The meeting of Parliament is looked forward to with intense anxiety...' 7

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1. H.O. to Derby 3, 20 Dec. H.O. 41/10 ff. 453-4, 41/11 f.4. Mr. Balquey to H.O. 2, 23 Dec. H.O. 52/12.
2. MP 88/29, copy.
3. 3 December H.O. 41/10 f. 455.
4. 12 November MP 88/29.
5. T. Barber to Melbourne 3 December MP 86/8.
6. ibid.
7. ibid.

Nottingham also provides a clear illustration of Melbourne's difficulties in dealing with arms. As he had conceded to Burdett in October, it was perfectly legal for an individual to possess arms for self-defence.[1] Consequently, he told the Nottingham magistrates that they

> 'would not be warranted in seizing Arms, merely on the ground that by possibility they may be dangerously employed.' 2

As a result, Melbourne was prepared to issue arms to local authorities who requested them. In the case of Nottingham he authorised a supply of hand grenades for a bank and 100 muskets for the defence of public buildings.[3] He also permitted muskets to be issued to the magistrates at Bristol and Hull, the prison authorities at Wakefield, and the West India Dock Company in London.[4] These were probably little more than gestures but they show, perhaps, the extent to which Melbourne credited the stories of arming. This emerges also from what he told Russell at the onset of the Chartist emergency in 1839: 'arms were given in my time, but it was almost flagrante bello.'[5]

During November and December 1831 industrial disturbances were greatly overshadowed by the direct political agitation but they remained a disturbing, unpredictable element in Melbourne's calculations. The Merthyr troubles lingered on, but, after a joint campaign by the employers and Melbourne himself against the trade unions, they were a suppressed murmur compared to those of the summer.[6] There was also a brief outburst from weavers in Coventry on 7 November when some new power looms and other property were destroyed.[7]

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1. 27 October MP 20/108.
2. 12 December H.O. 41/10 ff. 485-7.
3. 28 November H.O. 40/29 f. 462.
   9 December H.O. 40/29 f.158.
4. Ordnance Board to H.O. 21,28 November H.O. 50/376.
   H.O. to Ordnance Board 14,30 November H.O. 41/10 ff. 394, 442.
5. 2 July 1839 MP 14/42.
6. Melbourne to Marquess of Bute 24 October H.O. 41/10 ff. 284-5.
   Melbourne to Mr. Hill 4 November H.O. 41/10 ff. 332-3.
   See below p.126
7. Mayor of Coventry to Earl of Warwick 8 November H.O. 52/15.

1. Mr. Dalton to H.O. 8 December H.O. 40/29 f. 507 (Dudley)
Worcs. and Staffs, magistrates to H.O. 3 December H.O. 52/15.
Dudley magistrates to H.O. 5, 7 December H.O. 52/15.
British Iron Company to H.O. 8 December H.O. 44/24.
H.O. to Dudley magistrates, 2 Dec., H.O. 41/10 ff. 451-2.

2. Bilston magistrates to H.O. 30 November, 4 December H.O. 52/15.
Mr. Grove (Lichfield) to H.O. 10 December H.O. 52/15.

3. Mr. Leigh to H.O. 12 December H.O. 40/29 f. 527.
Dudley magistrates to H.O. 15 December H.O. 52/15.

4. Dalton to H.O. 8 December H.O. 40/29 f. 507.
W. Penn to H.O. 19 December H.O. 40/29 ff. 537-9.

5. Maj. Gen. Campbell to H.O. 5 January 1832 H.O. 40/30 ff. 33-6.

6. Melbourne to Sir H. Taylor 24 Nov. 1831, Sanders p. 137.

7. Melbourne to Lord Hill 19 December H.O. 41/11 f.2.

8. H.O. 50/14.

9. Foster to H.O. 26 December H.O. 52/13.

The most serious disorders occurred in the Black Country, centered on the towns of Dudley, Bilston and Wolverhampton. Striking coal miners caused a series of riots from the end of November to mid-December.[1] On one occasion a body of miners staged a march on Wolverhampton, after which 120 were arrested. The local magistrates believed that the men were overawed only by the presence of regular troops and claimed to be desperate for reinforcements.[2] The use of the military eventually contained the riots and quiet returned to the area.[3]

As with previous industrial disturbances, none of these had any direct political significance.[4] It is interesting, however, that dissatisfaction was later reported at the acquittal of some of the allegedly most culpable Dudley rioters by a Worcester jury which contained three members of the Worcester Political Union.[5] At one point in November, moreover, Melbourne was inclined to think that trade unions might be converting themselves into political unions, though he cited Nottingham as his only example.[6] Industrial troubles were, however, likely to be a serious danger only in the event of a general political crisis, such as had threatened in mid-November. For the moment the latter had been avoided; but Melbourne still thought it worthwhile to establish a new military headquarters at Dudley, under Maj. Gen. Campbell.[7] If he needed a further reminder that the army's resources were fully stretched, Lord Hill at the Horse Guards told him on 30 December that he did not see how troops in Ireland could be reinforced, given the needs of the manufacturing districts and London.[8]

With the exception of Manchester, there was a lull in political meetings once the new Reform bill was introduced in the Commons on 12 December and given a second reading on 18 December by 324-162. The Manchester working class radicals, however, proceeded with their own plans. On 26 December they reconvened the meeting of 28 November with a view to creating a national convention. But only 3-400 attended and Foster reported that the meeting

> 'excited so little attention that were it not for the placards the town in general would be ignorant of its having taken place.'[9]

1. Foster to H.O. 22 January 1832 H.O. 52/18.
2. ibid.
   Bouverie to H.O. 25 January 1832 H.O. 40/30 ff. 99-101.
3. H.O. to Foster 25 Jan., 9 Feb. H.O. 79/4 f. 213, 41/11 ff. 73-4
4. 26 January H.O. 41/11 ff. 51-3.
5. Bouverie to H.O. 29 January H.O. 40/30 ff. 106-8.
6. Foster to Melbourne 29 January H.O. 52/18.
7. Melbourne to Bouverie, Foster 31 January H.O. 41/11 ff. 58-60.
8. ibid. Melbourne to Foster 3 February H.O. 41/11 ff. 65-6.
9. reports 9, 20 January H.O. 64/12.
10. reports 12, 18 January H.O. 64/12.
11. report 16 January H.O. 64/12.
12. Hall's reports 12, 18 January H.O. 64/12.

The union persisted, however, and held another meeting on 22 January 1832, this time on a Sunday to swell the numbers which at least rose to about 1,000.[1] There were also reports of nocturnal military training and other projects, such as an attack on the soldiers whilst attending church service.[2] Bouverie discounted these as coming from a single police informant but Melbourne was prepared to pay for spies to discover the truth.[3] He decided that the Manchester meetings should be stopped and told Foster and Bouverie to take appropriate action.[4]

A further meeting for 29 January was therefore declared illegal by the Manchester magistrates and, in fact, cancelled by the union.[5] Several hundred still attended,[6] however, and the union's leaders were arrested soon afterwards. Melbourne felt pleased that he had successfully stiffened the will of the Manchester authorities.[7] He also offered government money for the prosecution of the leaders and told Foster that he hoped to set an example by this suppression of what he called 'the mischevious spirits who are at work against the public peace.'[8] Six weeks later, Ashmore, Broadhurst, Curran and Gilchrist were convicted of unlawful assembly, though acquitted on charges of conspiracy, and sentenced to one year in prison.

Meanwhile, the N.U.W.C. in London had continued at a low ebb. The spy, Hall, noted that class leaders did not attend at Watson's or Benbow's as they should have done.[9] Membership was falling because the leaders only talked instead of resisting the government, a supineness which he attributed to Melbourne's action in November.[10] Only 500 new membership cards were ordered in early 1832. Hall described Benbow as isolated in his 'visionary' idea of a Congress whilst his 'National Holiday' struck Cleave and Watson as a 'mad scheme.'[11] The union was in debt and therefore unable to organise an open air meeting to support those on trial for their part in the Bristol riots.[12] There was, according to Hall, 'a good deal of excitement' on this account; and the death sentences at Bristol made some of the union 'very vicious in

1. 27 January H.O. 64/12.
2. Hall's report 30 January H.O. 64/12.
3. 1, 9 February H.O. 64/12.
4. Benbow to Ashmore, 17 December 1831 H.O. 64/16.
5. Hall's report 1 February H.O. 64/12.
6. Hall's report 7 February H.O. 64/12.
7. 23 February H.O. 64/12.
8. ibid.
9. C. Hall to H.O., H.O. 64/16.
10. 12 March H.O. 64/12.
11. ibid.

their language.'[1] But such reactions merely caused the resignation of Hibbert, who feared extremist action and consequently government proscription; Watson and Cleave talked of following suit.[2]

The news from Manchester at the end of January seemed to complete the N.U.W.C.'s discomfiture. The arrests there caused confusion and alarm among the union's leaders who were, Hall reported, 'fearful the Government means to suppress all Unions.'[3] There were in any case disagreements between the Manchester and London unions. In December, Benbow had implicitly criticised Ashmore's tactics when he advocated 'boldness' as against 'underhand means in bringing about the triumph of the people.'[4] For unexplained reasons, the N.U.W.C. leaders rejected the Reform resolutions passed at Manchester in January as 'foolish and absurd.'[5] Although the N.U.W.C. eventually raised some money for the defence of the Manchester leaders, their relationship, which had seemed so promising a few months previously, went into a decline.

The N.U.W.C. itself, however, proved to be considerably more resilient than Hall had foreseen. Soon after the Manchester arrests, it began to contemplate a semi-political demonstration for March 21st, to counter the government's decision to make that a national fast-day as a gesture against the current outbreaks of cholera.[6] Hall reported that many of the N.U.W.C. classes pressed for 'some show in public' and that it would be 'a day of rejoicing more than anything else.'[7] The Committee, he thought, meant 'no mischief' but, equally, many individuals seemed to have 'very bad intentions.'[8] Another member of the N.U.W.C. felt it his duty to report military training on 13 February and a novel plan to kidnap Princess Victoria, on one of her walks in the park, 'as a hostage for their rights.'[9]

Hall continued to send in disquieting reports in March. At Watson's class, an ex-cavalry trooper, Murphy, 'agreed to learn any persons of the Union the Sword Exercise.'[10] Watson himself publicised 'Maceroni's (sic) Lances.'[11]

The spy summed up feelings in the N.U.W.C. as on previous occasions:

> 'There is no organisation in us as a body, but many do calculate that on that day [21st] we shall have a good opportunity to do something.' 1

On 15 March Hall gave advance warning of sword exercises held by the 73 class, which called itself 'the Fighting Class.'[2] When the police raided the exercise yard in Spitalfields, they found only two members of the union present, but the spy later claimed the training had taken place earlier than he had thought. He confidently gave the time and place of future exercises in the Minories in the City.[3] By 15 March, however, Melbourne was already consulting the law officers on a notice warning those who assembled on 21 March to keep the peace.[4]

Melbourne did not regard the Fast day march as comparable with the White Conduit Fields meeting. Police were therefore used in considerable numbers but the troops do not appear to have left their barracks. The N.U.W.C. procession started in Finsbury Square and proceeded into the City where it was diverted northwards by the police. Near Tottenham Court Road, it was split into two by a body of police and regrouped only after one section rushed the police barrier. Staves were used by the police and stones by the crowd. Several were injured on both sides and seven arrests made. Soon afterwards the procession dispersed quietly, for purely festive purposes.[5] The police also met resistance when they cleared Finsbury Square of those who had stayed behind.[6] Whether the police need have been employed at all is a relevant question, but perhaps Melbourne was as restrained as he could afford to be in the light of the information he had received beforehand and the delicate political situation.

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1. ibid.
2. H.O. 64/12. Hollis op.cit. p.42.
3. Hall's reports 20, 26 March.
   (There is no evidence that the spy 'urged on' those who participated in the exercises: Hollis op.cit. p.42 . This seems to be an incorrect inference from Popay's later activities. See Appendix p. 115)
4. H.O. 79/4 f.215.
5. 'Poor Man's Guardian' 24 March (based on the account in the 'Morning Chronicle')
   Hollis, op.cit., p.45.
   Large, op.cit., p.122 gives a figure of 20,25,000 marchers.
6. Annual Register 1832 p.40-41.

Subsequently, Lovett, Watson, and Benbow were prosecuted for their part in the Fast day march, but acquitted in May by a highly sympathetic jury.[1] Perhaps as a result of Melbourne's consecutive actions against the N.U.W.C. and its Manchester allies, the union kept in the background until the middle of May 1832.[2] Its Committee claimed to be 'careless' about the fate of the Reform Bill in the Lords but did not attempt to push its counter-proposals as it had done in November 1831.[3] Some of the rank and file continued to show an interest in arms, to the extent that two ex-soldiers considered opening sword-schools and placing advertisements in the Poor Man's Guardian; but such activities remained subterranean and, apparently, rare.[4] Hetherington, now out of jail, departed on a tour of the north but only to promote the sales of the 'Poor Man's Guardian'.[5] But, even if the general impression was placid, Melbourne had too much experience of the N.U.W.C. to write it off as a spent force.

During the first four months of 1832, Melbourne had no overt trouble from the 'high' unions. Attwood continued to mount large petitions and meetings[6] but there was no novelty or immediate danger in that, so long as the Reform bill was not baulked again by the Lords. Activity outside Birmingham was less well publicised and not always intimidating. Melbourne described a meeting of the Dudley Political Union on 22 April as apparently 'of the most contemptible description', despite the appearance of its leaders in uniform on horseback, accompanied by banners and music.[7] The Yeovil Political Union rather timorously sent its rules to Melbourne in an attempt to prove its legality and loyalty.[8]

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1. Hall's reports 18, 22 May H.O. 64/12.
2. Hall's reports 17, 19, 26 April H.O. 64/12.
3. Hall's report 12 April H.O. 64/12.
4. Hall's report 8 April H.O. 64/12.
5. Hall's report 17 April H.O. 64/12.
6. Hamburger, op.cit.,p.135-8.
7. Melbourne to Gen. Campbell 25 April H.O. 41/11 f. 148.
   Campbell to H.O. 23 April H.O. 40/30 ff. 49-50.
8. 4 February H.O. 40/30 f.288.

Nonetheless there is some evidence that the leaders of the B.P.U. were made especially anxious to secure the passing of the Reform Bill at this stage by the knowledge that they could not indefinitely restrain their followers from violence.[1] Melbourne could not overlook the possibility that if there were violence, it would reach formidable proportions: it might begin merely with personal attacks on Attwood by his disillusioned supporters but it could easily end in a real 'émeute'.

Nor could Melbourne be indifferent to the renewal of industrial disturbances in the spring of 1832. The mining areas of South Wales, including Merthyr, required the use of troops to preserve the peace throughout the spring and summer.[2] A similar, but even worse state of affairs prevailed in Northumberland and Durham during the same period. The miners' annual contract had expired; violence was employed against imported miners and local moderates; pitched battles between strikers and special constables reinforced by soldiers occurred when the employers evicted miners from company houses.[3] The leader of the miners' union, Hepburn, was a keen Reformer although his followers were not particularly interested in politics.[4] But, even so, a large number of troops were tied down. Bouverie considered that one pitman equalled at least three weavers and hoped that the keelmen and sailors would not become involved, otherwise his force 'would be very soon harassed to death.'[5]

Melbourne must, therefore, have approached the final stage of the Reform Bill crisis in May 1832 with a nicely balanced set of thoughts. He knew that he could deal with scattered industrial disorder, however violent, and he had scored several successes over the London and Manchester working-class radicals.

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1. Brock, GRA p.277.
2. Melbourne to Revd. Powell (Abergavenny) 6, 7 April H.O. 41/11 ff. 131-2.
   Melbourne to Mr. Moggridge (Newport) 13 April H.O. 41/11 f.140.
   Col. Love's reports: 10, 29 April, 5 May, 23 June, 27 August, H.O. 40/30 ff. 255-6, 262, 264, 268-70.
3. Bouverie to H.O. 2, 4, 20 April, 7, 10 May, 29 June, H.O. 40/30 ff. 132, 134, 142, 148-9, 182.
   Hamburger op.cit. p.194.
4. ibid.
5. Bouverie to Lord F. Somerset 1 April H.O. 40/30 ff. 130-1.

But all this depended on the passivity of the 'high' political unions. If their leaders, official or unofficial, cut loose, the example could easily be copied or perhaps supported by the 'low' unions. A full scale political confrontation of this sort would probably encourage the trade unions to enter the field and would certainly lead to a sharp slump in trade and serious unemployment. As Melbourne himself said, 'the complicated and artificial state' of English society would not stand such a series of blows.

Lyndhurst's disruption of the Reform bill's progress in the Lords on 7 May seemed likely to put these calculations to the test. The resignation of Grey's government on 9 May meant that Melbourne was theoretically no longer in a position to deal with the country's reaction to the Tory 'coup'. It is likely that Melbourne put in at least some attendance at the Home Office between 9 - 15 May, whilst Wellington struggled vainly to form a government. It is also likely that he would not have idly stood by had he thought he could take any steps to counter the mounting agitation and threats of violence during these days. This argument applies even more strongly to the second phase of the 'Days of May', between Grey's return to office on 15 May and the King's unconditional surrender over a creation of peers on 18 May, because Melbourne was then indisputedly Home Secretary once more. It is therefore a remarkable fact that he does not seem to have issued an order, and barely wrote even a routine letter, during these ten days.[1] This suggests that he regarded events as virtually out of his control.

If this was indeed Melbourne's view, it receives support from the most recent analysis of the 'Days of May'.[2] The political unions showed every sign of becoming the spokesmen of public opinion in general, as Melbourne had feared they would if obstructed or persecuted. Attwood's Union had already held the

1. On 15 May he cancelled his request to Foster for the leading Manchester paper to be sent to him, H.O. 41/11 f.92. He may, of course, have communicated in person with, for example, the army commanders at the Horse Guards.

2. Brock, GRA pp. 294-309, from which some of the following details are taken.

largest of its Newhall Hill meetings on 7 May and now increased its numbers by 500 in one day. Place's N.P.U. gained 5,600 new members between 1 - 15 May. Impressive petitions were sent to Parliament, such as that from Manchester which was signed by 25,000 in three hours on 10 May. Place and Attwood disregarded the laws against the correspondence of political societies and began to organise meetings of delegates in London and Birmingham.

It is true there were limits to this form of response. Place prevented a meeting on Hampstead Heath, partly because he feared the N.U.W.C. might take it over, but probably also because he could not be certain of a sufficiently large turn-out to overawe Wellington. A meeting led by the Radical M.P., Hume, was reported to have fallen flat. Attwood's associated unions seem to have been shadowy bodies in some cases, not least the Northern Political Union, centered on Newcastle, led by his brother Charles.[1] Nonetheless, there was enough in the unions' activities to make the Tory 'Standard' complain on 15 May that if they were not checked, 'the government of the country is virtually in their hands.'

The reformers certainly looked like precipitating a sudden economic crisis. The calls for a run on the banks and a refusal to pay direct taxes had some effect in themselves but still more in creating a general loss of confidence. Business activity dwindled and the Bank of England's reserves seeped away until the king gave his guarantee to Grey on 18 May. Trade in Manchester was reported as coming to a standstill by 12 May.[2] In the Commons on 17 May one of the two Staffordshire M P*s* claimed that thousands were being thrown out of work in the Wolverhampton area and that violence would result, if political uncertainty continued.

Working class radicals also began to stir themselves. On 9 May the N.U.W.C. Committee agreed that 'in case the Reform Bill did not pass the Union would stand at ease.'[3] But on 11 May the Committee resolved to urge a run on Savings

1. Hamburger, op.cit., p.136.
2. 12 May 'Manchester Guardian'.
3. Hall's report 11 May H.O. 64/12.

Banks and Benefit Societies

> 'as the City of London, the Birmingham Union and the Political Union had agreed with the House of Commons to stop the supplies of Government by a refusal to pay taxes.' 1

By 17 May Benbow was advocating a National Congress of working class unions, to meet in the Midlands, to mobilise working class opinion,

> 'in case anything may occur to render our assistance necessary and to be prepared for our defence to resist it.' 2

The Committee postponed this idea[3] but the N.U.W.C. seems to have been moving towards a surprising rapprochement with other shades of Reform opinion. A few days later the N.U.W.C. even agreed to 'stand at ease' until they could see 'what the Reform Bill will do'[4]

Other impromptu bodies and unofficial leaders also began to emerge during the Days of May. A working class political union was formed in Lambeth on 14 May and could allegedly call on 3,000 men.[5] At its inaugural meeting, a mechanic from the engineering firm of Maudslay's said he hoped he would not see a general revolt

> 'but if it came to that point he was sure such was the spirit of Englishmen that every man who heard him would rush to the ranks and die in the cause';

as for the non-payment of taxes, 'that came as a matter of course.[6] The members expected to correspond with similar unions and loudly cheered allusions to the deposition of the king, to 'doing away with the Lords and the clergy, of resisting taxes and the bloody bayonets of Wellington.'[7]

In a strictly military sense, the armed strength of the various unions was not great. Attwood's union was said to have mustered 1,500 armed men at a meeting on 16 May.[8] Elsewhere it seems to have been a matter of individual

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1. Hall's report 12 May H.O. 64/12.
2. Hall's report 17 May H.O. 64/12.
3. Hall's report 18 May H.O. 64/12.
4. Hall's report 22 May H.O. 64/12.
5. R. Lemon to H.O. 15 May H.O. 64/16.
6. ibid.
7. ibid.
8. Brock, GRA p. 307.

arming, though one Radical in Bristol requested from a London firm the price of Macerone's guns and lances singly, per dozen, and per hundred.[1] There were, however, enough people with arms and the determination to use them to justify the Radicals' talk of barricades and resistance on the model of Paris.[2]

Professor Hamburger infers from the virtual absence of violent disorder in May 1832 that the situation was not particularly dangerous.[3] This seems to corroborate his general argument that because the Radicals deliberately exaggerated the dire consequences of a failure to pass the Reform bill, in an attempt to intimidate both the government and the anti-Reformers, those consequences would indeed be insignificant. His exposure of the calculated distortion of the unions' real strength by Attwood, Place, or Parkes, is entirely convincing. Even at the time their propaganda did not completely take in discerning politicians like Melbourne.[4] When Parkes asked Melbourne's private secretary, during the Days of May, for a frank on a letter to Napier requesting him to take command of Attwood's 'army' at Birmingham, his real motives were a little too obvious.[5] Melbourne believed,as he told Taylor in September 1831, that 'it is the public feeling which is dangerous, not the political unions.'[6] The Home Secretary was not given to imagining that he was about to be murdered in his bed by a revolutionary mob.

The architects of the Radical campaign were, however, far from knowing everything about the state of the country; still less could they have controlled events exactly as they wished, for all Place's complacent belief that a week 'would have finished the business against Wellington.'[7] It is therefore unrealistic to rely simply on the assessment of the Radicals. Hamburger does not take into account either the opinions of the Radicals' contemporaries or the

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1. J. Masters 18 May H.O. 64/16.
2. The 'Standard' 15 May (Hume's meeting).
   T. Young to Napier 25 June 1832; J. K. Buckley Joseph Parkes (1926), pp. 195-6.
3. op.cit. pp. 197-9.
4. see above p. 58
5. Young to Napier 25 June 1832.
6. 26 September 1831 Sanders p. 134.
7. Young to Napier 25 June.

sequence of events. The Whigs thought that the explosion was still being prepared on 18 May.[1] Fighting did not break out because first Wellington, and then the king gave way to the Reformers. The balance of the evidence from May 1832 suggests that the gloomiest fears which even Melbourne had sometimes entertained over the previous eighteen months had not been baseless.

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1. Brock, GRA p. 306.

The Home Office (2): Political Agitation

(b) May 1832 - July 1834

Once the Reform bill's passage was assured, it might have been expected that political agitation would cease. The fact that it did not caused the Whig ministers to consider putting an end to political unions by direct means. Grey himself was particularly concerned to do so, suffering under the unions' continued existence far more than any of his colleagues.[1] Melbourne, however, knew how difficult it would be to take action against the unions. As he told Wellington in November 1832, the only effective law was that of 57 George III c. 19 which prohibited correspondence or communication between societies. Even this Melbourne thought it best not to use, 'except in a very clear case and upon very sufficient and unquestionable evidence.'[2] New legislation was prone to all the objections he had pointed out to Sir Herbert Taylor in September 1831, and would be even less acceptable to a reformed Parliament than to its predecessor.

In the months following May 1832, Melbourne thought that politics were 'undoubtedly in a great and fearful crisis', as he told his brother Frederick.[3] He judged, however, that the 'high' unions did not look sufficiently menacing to warrant measures against them. In June there were stories that at least 100 guns at three shillings each had been sold to the Bristol Political Union; two of the guns were even sent to the Home Office as samples; but the affair petered out tamely enough.[4] Attwood's Union made its presence felt in the Walsall election of December 1832 when its supporters, allegedly armed with bludgeons, rioted and intimidated the Tory voters. They dispersed, however, at the approach of troops, leaving behind 40 prisoners.[5] The 1832 elections were notably hard fought, with a good deal of minor violence, as

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1. Littleton diary 31 May, 1 June 1832; Aspinall, Three Diaries, pp. 270-3. Grey to Brougham 5 Nov. 1833; Brougham, Life and Times, III, 316-17.
2. Melbourne to Wellington 10 Nov. 1832 MP 89/93.
3. Melbourne to Frederick Lamb 8 September 1832 MP 106/13.
4. Mr. Faugorin to H.O. 12 June, H.O. 40/30 f.301.
   Melbourne to Mayor of Bristol 15 June, H.O. 41/11 ff. 170-1.
5. Gen. Campbell to H.O. 12 December H.O. 40/30 ff. 83-4.
   Melbourne to Walsall magistrates 13 December H.O. 41/11 f.301.

1. Melbourne to Frederick Lamb, 8 Sept. 1832, MP 106/13.
Serious riots occurred at: Wolverhampton, Bolton, Preston, Huddersfield, Sheffield, Norwich, Nuneaton; H.O. 40/30 ff. 87-8, H.O. 41/11 ff. 305-6, 318, 319, 323, 338, 341.

2. Melbourne to Rev. Bellairs (Bedworth, Warwicks) 3 July 1832, H.O. 43/42 f. 162.
Anon. to H.O. 14 Nov. 1832, H.O. 40/30 f. 326 (Horsham).

3. Melbourne to Mayor of Newcastle 22 Feb. 1833, H.O. 43/43 f. 250 (Northern Political Union).

4. Lansdowne to Melbourne 26 Oct. 1833, Sanders pp. 154-5.
Hall's report 4 Nov. 1833, H.O. 64/13.

5. Melbourne to I. Spooner, 14 May, H.O. 41/11 ff. 407-8.

6. Grey to Melbourne 22 May, MP 5/107.
Melbourne to Spooner 23 May, H.O. 41/11 ff. 417-18.
(These may refer to the rival Midland Union.)

7. Col. Thorn to H.O. 18, 21, 22 May, H.O. 40/31 ff. 91, 97, 99-100.

8. Grey to Melbourne 22 May, MP 5/107.

9. Hansard, xviii. 854-6 (17 June 1833)

10. Bouverie to H.O. 26 July, 26 August, H.O. 40/31 ff. 39-40, 41-8.

11. Mr. Unett to H.O. 8 June 1834, H.O. 40/32 f. 307.

Melbourne had expected, but Walsall seems to have been the only place where a 'high' union was directly implicated.[1]

A few unions seem to have been formed or revived in the excitement of the actual passing of the Reform Act[2] but most faded into obscurity[3] or took up local causes, such as the campaign against the house and window tax waged by some of Place's Radicals in London.[4] The Birmingham Political Union itself caused a final flurry in May 1833 when it planned a meeting on Newhall Hill to pass a vote of no confidence in the government. Melbourne allowed the meeting to go ahead after some reflection.[5] Troops were held in readiness but the meeting proved entirely peaceful, although there were reports that clubs to procure arms were being established in the area.[6] The military commander estimated that a maximum of 20-30,000 assembled but most of these soon departed, leaving only 3,000, comprising mainly women.[7] Grey thought that the meeting had not answered Attwood's purposes but was left wishing for 'a good jury' which, Grey was confident, would pronounce parts of the speeches at the meeting 'highly seditious.'[8]

Melbourne's attitude was somewhat different. As he told the House of Lords in June 1833, he thought political unions pernicious but he evaded the Tory demand that he take steps to suppress them.[9] This policy of allowing the unions to die a natural death worked well, at least so far as the middle class ones were concerned. In the summer of 1833 Bouverie noted that there was scarcely a vestige of them in his area.[10] Fittingly, perhaps, just before he left the Home Office in 1834 Melbourne was informed that the Birmingham Political Union had been dissolved, as a result of a revival in trade and Attwood's failure to satisfy the expectation of his followers.[11] By this time the focus of Radical activity was the House of Commons itself. As a result, the problems of Melbourne as Home Secretary may be said to have diminished between mid-1832 and mid-1834 in proportion as those of Melbourne the politician increased.

The working class Radicals provided Melbourne with more worries in the two years after May 1832 than did the Birmingham-style unions. The N.U.W.C. in particular had a great deal of life left in it. Early in June 1832 it decided to reject the Reform bill as inadequate.[1] At the same time it moved to new premises in Theobalds Road, London, where larger meetings were possible than at the Rotunda. Its leaders might disagree over the details of Co-operative ideology but they united in staging a meeting at Copenhagen Fields on 30 July to celebrate the French Revolution of 1830.[2] Some N.U.W.C. members, from the 92nd class, arrived at the meeting brandishing arms and were reprimanded by the leadership.[3] Williams, the leader of this armed group, had a later record of arming.[4] There was further talk of arms at Watson's 'Chapel' in August and at a Lambeth meeting chaired by Hunt in the autumn.[5]

More important, however, was the growing connection between the N.U.W.C. and the Irish Anti-Union Association. The former enrolled a large number of much-needed members, the latter gained publicity and support for Repeal.[6] The Irish section was led by Lawless and Duffy, who were on the fringes of O'Connell's party. Melbourne summarised this development and his views of it in a letter to Grey of 13 September:

> 'Those Rascals in London I learn are trying to induce all the Irish labourers to join their meetings, unions etc. ... They are very contemptible, but still they are a set, who intend and are always meditating violence and this move of theirs should not be overlooked.' 7

In fact, many N.U.W.C. members objected to this Irish influx but there was an obvious attraction in, as Duffy described it, a union of 50,000 English and

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1. Hall's report 7 June 1832 H.O. 64/12.
2. Hall's report 12 June H.O. 64/12.
3. Hall's reports 9, 12 July 2 August H.O. 64/12.
4. Police report 20 May 1833 H.O. 61/8.
5. Hall's report 13 August H.O. 64/12.
   J. S. Popay's report 30 October H.O. 64/16.
6. Hollis, op.cit., pp. 265-6.
7. Grey Papers.

1. Hall's report 11 September 1832 H.O. 64/12.
2. Melbourne to Post Master General 10 September H.O. 79/4 f. 215.
3. Bouverie to H.O. 16 September, 2, 3 October H.O. 40/30 ff. 202-3, 206-7, 208-9.
4. Do H.O. 26 October H.O. 40/30 ff. 57-8.
5. Hall's report 11 October H.O. 64/12.
6. Hall's report 25 October H.O. 64/12.
7. Campbell to H.O. 26 October.
8. Hall's report 1 November H.O. 64/12.
9. Hall's report 6 November H.O. 64/12.
10. Hall's report 8 November H.O. 64/12.

Irish because 'we could then demand our Rights either Morally or Physically.'[1] For his part, Melbourne had the Irish leaders investigated and their letters opened but did nothing else for the moment.[2]

Very little was heard of the 'low' unions outside London in the summer and early autumn of 1832. Nothing was reported to Melbourne except the free-lance activities of a Hull Radical, James Acland, who published the unstamped 'Hull Portfolio'. According to the Hull magistrates, Acland had been active in Bristol before the riots in 1831 and was now stirring up the lower classes in Hull on the pretence of being a Parliamentary candidate. The large meetings which Acland aroused called for the presence of troops in Hull until the demagogue himself was arrested in October 1832.[3]

In late October, however, working class groups in the Birmingham area began to form a Midland Political Union because, as General Campbell reported, 'they say, Mr. Attwood is asleep, and does not go far enough.'[4] Moreover, the N.U.W.C. sent Hethington, Cleave, Lawless, and Mee as delegates to this new union.[5] The Birmingham meeting was also supposed to be imitated in other northern towns.[6] Despite all these extra dimensions, Melbourne took no steps against the meeting itself. Campbell reported the Birmingham magistrates as much surprised at Melbourne's inaction - presumably a deliberate understatement of their feelings.[7]

After the Birmingham meeting, Cleave went on to Preston and Hetherington established agencies for his papers in Birmingham.[8] On the way south they addressed the Northampton shoemakers, whilst Mee thoughtfully left his card, a 'Poor Man's Guardian', and an account of their northern tour at Woburn for the Duke of Bedford.[9] Melbourne could afford to disregard all this but when the N.U.W.C. received letters from embryonic unions in Coventry and Northampton, he endorsed the spy's report:

> 'It appears to me very necessary ... that some steps should be taken respecting this correspondence of unions by delegates etc.' 10

1. See below p. 112

2. H.O. to Whalley magistrates 27 September H.O. 41/11 ff. 246-7.

3. Bouverie to H.O. 14 October H.O. 40/30 ff. 212-17.

4. H.O. 40/30 (Shaw's reports are now missing from this series in the P.R.O. My original transcripts did not include the folio numbers.)

5. H.O. 40/30.

6. Bouverie to H.O. 20 November H.O. 40/30 f.236.
Shaw to H.O. 23 November H.O. 40/30.
Campbell to H.O. 27 November H.O. 40/30 ff. 78-82.

7. Hollis op.cit. pp. 270-1.
Large op.cit. pp. 125-6.

8. Hall's reports,n.d. and 8 November H.O. 64/12.
Bouverie to H.O. 4 December 1833 H.O. 40/31 f.51.

Melbourne may have been especially sensitive to the N.U.W.C.'s ambitions in the provinces because some of the Lancashire 'low' unions were reported to be very active in October and November 1832. The area involved was the triangle formed by Blackburn, Burnley, and Clitheroe. There had been a serious incident at Clitheroe between troops and working-class radicals in July 1832[1] and since September the local magistrates had been claiming that the political unions were acquiring arms.[2] Colonel Shaw, the military commander in Manchester, doubted the magistrates' sinister interpretation of union activity but confirmed that the unions held inflammatory meetings, attended by delegates from Birmingham.[3] On 18 November, Shaw sent further reports of arming, including one that the Blackburn Political Union possessed 130 muskets and bayonets. He added, however, that 'the unions are increasing seemingly to be ready for anything but they know not what.'[4] On 20 November, Shaw informed Melbourne that the Briercliffe and Burnley Political Unions intended to petition Parliament for radical reforms, 'with the consent of the Great National Union of the working classes.'[5] After this date, however, the alarm subsided. A spy hired by Shaw found that there were not, in fact, many arms in and around Clitheroe; some of the local authorities also expressed scepticism of the arms stories; and Spooner, the chief magistrate in Birmingham, discredited the claim that firms in his area had been supplying arms to these unions.[6]

There was, nonetheless, a considerable provincial network of political unions connected to the N.U.W.C. and publicised in the 'Poor Man's Guardian'. Indeed, this largely survived into the first phase of Chartism.[7] Pursuing the same policy as he did with the 'high' unions, Melbourne left this facet of working class radicalism alone, however much he was tempted to apply the law against it. He may have been reassured by the spy's reports in November 1832 of backsliding by the London class leaders, or by the virtual absence of activity on the part of the Manchester leadership even when released from prison in 1833.[8]

Early in 1833 the N.U.W.C. stepped up its Irish campaign as the government's Irish Coercion Bill became a subject of controversy. After N.U.W.C. meetings on 24 and 25 February, Melbourne at least began the prosecution of some speakers for incitement to rebellion over the Coercion Bill.[1] This was an exceptional step because Melbourne had long conceded that 'nothing is so difficult to prove as the utterance of words.'[2] It is significant that he took action on Irish affairs but tolerated violent language against members of the government, including himself. In March, for instance, Petrie said he looked forward to 'a great Tribunal' which would try and execute 'certain persons.'[3]

By the spring of 1833, the N.U.W.C. leadership had changed considerably. Lovett and Watson had quarrelled with Benbow and left the union. With Hetherington in prison again, the extremist group of Lee, Mee, Petrie and Preston had come to dominate the N.U.W.C.[4] As well as attacking the Coercion Bill, they talked seriously once more of a National Convention. In May 1833, Lee and Mee, together with Lorymer, editor of Hetherington's 'Radical' and 'Republican', called a meeting in Cold Bath Fields to discuss the formation of a National Convention. On 11 May, two days before the meeting, Melbourne conferred with the Metropolitan Police Commissioners, Richard Mayne and Col. Rowan. On the grounds that some of the unionists would be armed, and with regard to the declared purpose of the meeting, Melbourne held the latter to be illegal. He therefore instructed the police to arrest the leaders, if they attempted to hold the meeting. On the same day he also issued placards declaring the meeting illegal and warning people to stay away. On this occasion the N.U.W.C. was not to be intimidated and its members duly assembled on 13 May.[5] A strong body of police attempted to arrest the leaders but

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1. Melbourne to Law Officers 27 February 1833 H.O. 79/4 f.218.
   S. M. Phillipps to Maule 4 March H.O. 79/4 f.219.
2. Melbourne to T. Sanctuary 6 January 1831, MP 89/22.
3. Hall's report 9 March H.O. 64/14.
4. Hollis op.cit. p.42.
5. See G. Thurston, The Clerkenwell Riot (1967)

succeeded only in causing a serious clash with the crowd in Calthorpe Street, adjacent to Cold Bath Fields. The police seem to have got out of control and attacked people indiscriminately. Some of the crowd, however, fought back and three policemen were stabbed, one fatally, before the meeting was broken up. A partisan local jury returned a verdict of 'justifiable homicide' when an inquest was held on the dead policeman.

Subsequently a Parliamentary Select Committee investigated the Cold Bath Fields affair. The principal issue was the degree of responsibility to be assigned to the Home Office and the Metropolitan Commissioners respectively.[1] The latter had already submitted a Report in which they claimed that Melbourne had stated that the meeting

> 'was not to be allowed to take place: that the meeting, if attempted, was to be dispersed, and the Leaders seized on the spot.' 2

In front of the Committee, both Rowan and Mayne further claimed that the Home Office had not disputed their version.[3] For his part, Melbourne was somewhat evasive before the Committee, saying that

> 'the instructions were not quite accurately stated in this Report, at the same time... they were correct in substance.'[4]

It is impossible to be sure what Melbourne meant because his instructions, as usual, had been purely verbal.[5] The issue was clouded by each party trying discreetly to shift the blame for the riot onto the other. A genuine misunderstanding during their conference on 11 May cannot be ruled out because Col. Rowan, at least, was a much less subtle man than Melbourne.

What was crucial, however, was Melbourne's miscalculation of the effect of his instructions to arrest the leaders. He thought that this could be effected fairly easily and that the meeting would then disperse of itself.

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1. See Donajgrodzki op.cit. pp. 391-3.
2. 20 May 1833 H.O. 61/8.
3. Parliamentary Papers 1833, xiii (718), p.610, 612.
4. ibid. p. 779.
5. ibid. p. 780.

He underestimated the crowd's hatred of the new police and the difficulty of carrying out such a limited operation without creating a large scale conflict between the two sides. Rowan and his subordinate officers may have allowed the police to concentrate simply on dispersing the meeting, and the bystanders, rather than on seizing the leaders but the basic errors seem to have originated with Melbourne. He may have been misled by the reasonably successful use of the police against the N.U.W.C. Fast-day procession in 1832. A degree of carelessness is also apparent in his actions before 13 May. He failed, for instance, to sign the placards he issued, despite a reminder from Rowan, thus weakening their force. He did not ensure that a magistrate was present at Cold Bath Fields, as he had done for the White Conduit Fields meeting in November 1831. Reading the Riot Act or some other last minute warning might have induced the crowd to depart and would certainly have placed the police action in a better light.[1] Melbourne was, perhaps, fortunate that the Report of the Select Committee, whilst exonerating the Metropolitan Police, made no mention of his role in the affair.[2]

Melbourne's action may have prevented a worse riot, or what he himself called 'the disorganisation of society', but this is very uncertain. It is probably significant that he did not prosecute any of the N.U.W.C. leaders after the riot, though one man was tried (and acquitted) for the wounding of a policeman. Melbourne's suppression of what was obviously a far from revolutionary meeting was already receiving an unpleasant amount of publicity without further emphasis from the Home Office. The N.U.W.C., however, did not attempt to hold a similar meeting and the idea of a National Convention faded into the background. The London working-class radicals did not mount any important campaign for the rest of Melbourne's time as Home Secretary, with the exception of the demonstration on behalf of the Dorsetshire labourers in April 1834 which is examined below. Their ideas, and many of the individual leaders, re-emerged in the Chartist movements but until then Melbourne might feel that he had at least fought a drawn battle.

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1. 'The Times' 21 May 1833.
2. op.cit. p.591-2.

Home Office (2): Political Agitation

(c) Conclusion

To evaluate Melbourne's characteristic methods and achievements in dealing with political agitation, it is useful to look at his reaction to the exploitation of the press by working class radicals. From 1830 the Home Office was faced with a flood of popular papers, most of them unstamped and therefore illegal, and many of them containing extremely inflammatory political views. Melbourne was under constant pressure from the king, the tories and outraged members of the public to take action against these unstamped papers.[1]

It has recently been argued that Melbourne responded to this pressure with a diligent prosecution of the unstamped press. Dr. Hollis claims that Melbourne's

> 'energy in chasing sedition was tempered only by the cautious and perhaps more liberal attitudes of his law officers, Denman and Sir John Campbell'

and that Melbourne failed to keep a cool head when the Tories 'loudly complained of the licentiousness of the press.'[2] Dr. Hollis admits that from 1833 Melbourne adopted a more restrained policy[3] but there is some reason to question her interpretation of the previous two years or so.

Melbourne was certainly disposed at first to prosecute the leading publishers of alleged seditious or criminal libels. He continued the case against Carpenter which Peel had begun, and instituted proceedings against Carlile and Cobbett for their supposed efforts to excite the agricultural labourers in the autumn of 1830. To blame the 'Swing' rising on the radical press is clearly a most inadequate explanation but in December, 1830 it was, perhaps, at least an understandable impulse. Moreover, there was some sort of indirect connection between 'Swing' and radical journalism, at least in some counties, as Hobsbawm and Rudé concede.[4] Indeed, Dr. Hollis's map of the distribution of radical papers shows that Carlile had a definite following in several southern rural areas. Whatever the objective basis of Melbourne's

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1. Hollis, op.cit., pp. 34,36.
2. ibid. pp. 36, 54.
3. ibid. pp. 36, 59-60.
4. Captain Swing pp. 90, 104, 143, 169, 217-19.

prosecutions, they were certainly supported by other ministers, including the extremely liberal figure of Althorp himself.[1]

Even in December 1830, however, Melbourne had an open mind about attempts to discipline the radical press. On 20 December he wrote to Grey that he had had a long conversation with Brougham, of whom he said, 'I confess he has a good deal shaken me with respect to the propriety of prosecuting Cobbett.'[2] It is more than probable that Melbourne's doubts were heavily reinforced by the mixed success of these three prosecutions. Carlile was imprisoned for two years and heavily fined; the charge against Carpenter had to be reduced to one of publishing unstamped papers; and, in July 1831, a jury acquitted Cobbett altogether.[3]

It is not clear, however, that Melbourne actively sought to prosecute unstamped papers or similar publications on many other occasions. There seem to be only three instances in the Home Office papers of Melbourne advising local magistrates to prosecute printers or vendors. Two arose out of complaints from Earl Talbot, Lord-Lieutenant of Staffordshire, and Lord Harewood, Lord-Lieutenant of the West Riding, in November 1830 and June 1831 respectively.[4] Their official zeal left Melbourne in an awkward predicament since he could hardly tell either peer that there was little to be done about such publications. He therefore passed the responsibility for a prosecution back to the local authorities, thus effectively ensuring that no action would be taken at all. This interpretation is reinforced by a consideration of Melbourne's correspondence with Isaac Spooner, the chief magistrate in Birmingham, in December 1831. Spooner was much exercised by a handbill which attacked the Tory peers and bishops in unmeasured terms. He also offered Melbourne the necessary evidence against the printer, including

1. Althorp to Denman 1 January 1831 Brougham Papers 14,913.
2. Grey Papers.
3. Hollis op.cit. pp. 33-4.
4. Melbourne to Talbot 30 November 1830 H.O. 41/8 f.245.
   Melbourne to Harewood 20 June 1831 H.O. 41/10 f.137.

his name.[1] Melbourne replied unhelpfully:

> 'There is no doubt of the libellous character of this paper. Mr. Spooner possesses the power of enforcing the law against the Printer, and his local knowledge will render him the best judge of the expediency and discretion of doing so.' 2

This brought an indignant rejoinder from Spooner, who said that the magistrates had no fund applicable to such an end and they would not bear the expense privately.[3] At this point Melbourne terminated the correspondence.

The third occasion was rather different from the first two. In July 1831 Melbourne recommended the prosecution of a Bolton printer for a circular in which local mechanics denounced some of their fellows as 'Black Sheep'.[4] The case is somewhat obscure but it does not appear to have much to do with Radical politics. Of greater significance are the times when Melbourne simply ignored the existence of apparently seditious handbills or placards, even when the printer's name was known. His indifference is particularly noticeable in the autumn of 1831 by which time it was clear that political stability depended on much more than control of the unstamped press.[5]

Dr. Hollis cites a clutch of instances in May and June 1832 where Melbourne asked the law officers and Brougham for their opinion of radical publications.[6] Melbourne's letter to Brougham makes it clear, however, that in the case of Acland's 'Hull Portfolio' and Brook's 'People's Charter' he was made to do this by the king, who had somehow got hold of these papers, and that he himself thought it imprudent to prosecute.[7] Similarly, the key question he asked the law officers was, 'is it expedient?'[8] He also sent the law officers a placard for a 'National Convention', issued by Lorymer, but this

1. Spooner to H.O. 10, 17 December 1831 H.O. 44/24, 40/29 f.535.
2. Endorsement on 10 December letter.
3. 23 December H.O. 44/24.
4. 30 July H.O. 40/29 f. 256.
5. Letters of 22 March, 12 October, 7, 9, 12 November 1831, H.O. 40/29 ff. 225, 300, 388, 398, 413.
6. op.cit. p. 34.
7. Melbourne to Brougham 18 June 1832 Brougham Papers 43, 487.
8. Melbourne to law officers 24 May 1832 H.O. 49/7 ff. 457-8.

is arguably a different matter from ordinary radical newspapers since it raised the question of an illegal public meeting, clearly more dangerous than mere words, especially in the context of May 1832.[1] Likewise, Melbourne thought of prosecuting Attwood for the handbills advertising his Birmingham meeting in May 1833.[2] Finally, in July 1832, Melbourne consulted the law officers about a placard headed 'Military Torture'.[3] His motives here are unclear; it is possible that this again was something forced upon him by the king.

This last, somewhat doubtful case seems to be the only one Melbourne initiated between December 1830 and the spring of 1833. Its unusual nature is underlined by what Melbourne wrote to Grey on 15 June 1832:

> 'The real fact is that prosecutions are subject to so many objections, liable to so many difficulties, followed by so many consequences, which entirely counteract their effect, that they are no check whatsoever upon the violence and malignity of the press ...' [4]

A year later, Melbourne adopted a similar position in the House of Lords.[5]

There is little evidence to support Dr. Hollis's claim that Melbourne regularly sent reports of N.U.W.C. meetings to the law officers with a view to prosecution.[6] He took such action only when the N.U.W.C. countenanced extreme measures over Irish Coercion in February 1833.[7] This last is the sole instance cited by Hollis.[8] Otherwise Melbourne left N.U.W.C. meetings alone, though doubtless greatly irked by them. He also tolerated nearly all the issues of the 'Poor Man's Guardian', the virtual right arm of the N.U.W.C. He attempted to prosecute Hetherington only for the edition of 25 May 1833

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1. ibid.
2. H.O. 79/4 f. 220
3. H.O. 49/7 ff. 460-1
4. Grey Papers
5. Hansard, 3rd series, xviii. 854-6 (17 June 1833)
6. op.cit., p.34
7. 27 February, H.O. 79/4 f. 218
8. op.cit., p.34 n.3

which contained Julian Hibbert's notorious 'Palafox' letter recommending working men to bring sharp knives to meetings. This Melbourne saw as a 'direct incitement to assassination.'[1] Even here the original trial for criminal libel was abandoned in favour of a prosecution for publishing unstamped newspapers.[2] Moreover, Melbourne had already disregarded an oblique threat to his own life in the paper and Hetherington's provocative offer of £5 to the best pistol shot in the N.U.W.C.[3]

Doubtless Melbourne was often tempted to prosecute the radical press. As late as May 1833 he consulted the law officers about issues of 'The True Sun'. He curbed his irritation, however. On 27 April, 1834 he was faced with an issue of 'The Republican' which incited 200,000 'Republicans' to loot gunsmiths' shops and to 'écraser' the 9,000 soldiers and 5,000 police which London allegedly contained. It also described and illustrated techniques of street fighting.[4] With some justice, Melbourne described the paper to Grey as 'a compleat incitement to rebellion, with instructions the most likely to be successful.' He concluded, however, with reference to Lorymer, the publisher, 'it is evident that we should not reach him by a prosecution.'[5]

If Melbourne's interventions against the more dramatic forms of radical journalism were very rare, they were virtually non-existent where the day-to-day prosecutions of unstamped papers were concerned. He neither stopped nor encouraged the activities of the police and common informers by which publishers and vendors of the unstamped were ordinarily brought to book[6] There is apparently but one case of Melbourne 'approving' a magistrate's action in arresting the distributors of even an inflammatory handbill.[7] There was

1. 31 May H.O. 79/4 f.220.
2. Hollis, op.cit., p.35
3. See above p.42
   P.M.G., 11 August 1832.
4. Copy in H.O. 64/19.
5. Melbourne to Grey 27 April 1834, Grey Papers.
6. Hollis op.cit., pp. 49, 166-7.
7. 7 December 1830 H.O. 40/26 f. 166 (Doncaster).

an upsurge in the number of street vendors arrested in London in the period January 1832 to January 1833 but there is no evidence to support Hamburger's theory that this was the result of deliberate Home Office policy.[1]

There are two cases where Melbourne took decisive action against representative figures in the world of the unstamped but in both there was an extra dimension of practical political activity.[2] He always had Hetherington carefully watched whenever he toured the north as the emissary of the N.U.W.C., but showed no great interest in the provincial agencies for the 'Poor Man's Guardian' which Hetherington assiduously established.[3] Melbourne was not averse to seeing Hetherington in jail for his offences against the Stamp Acts but left his charge and conviction to chance. Melbourne also used his influence against Lucking, a warehouseman with the East India Company. He denounced Lucking to his employers for spreading 'Republican Principles' and forming 'a Secret Society' amongst his fellows 'by introducing Penny Papers.'[4] As a result, Lucking was dismissed and his colleagues warned off radical papers.[5] This was harsh but Melbourne would have claimed that Lucking was more than just a vendor of the unstamped: he was prominent at N.U.W.C. meetings, and not as a moderate;[6] he was an ex-soldier who now drilled recruits to the East India Grenadier Company; and he worked in a sensitive section of London commerce.

Lucking was, perhaps, unfortunate to be a known Radical in a vulnerable position because he remains the exception rather than the rule so far as Melbourne's general policy goes. When Melbourne was alerted that Henry Berthold, a founder of the unstamped in 1830, was a refugee from Saxony and thus eligible for deportation as an alien, he declined to use this weapon.[7] His refusal to use

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1. Hamburger, op.cit., p.251.
   Hollis, op.cit., p.172.
2. Melbourne to Foster 28 December 1832 H.O. 79/4 f. 217.
3. Melbourne's comments on Hall's reports, 16 Sept. 1831, 27 Dec. 1832; H.O. 64/11, 12.
4. To J. G. Ravenshaw 30 March 1833 H.O. 79/4 f. 219.
5. Hollis, op. cit., p.44.
6. Hall's reports 2, 16 September 1831 H.O. 64/11.
7. Schenck to H.O. 20 March 1831 H.O. 40/29 f. 222.

the Aliens Act is especially striking in that he had supported it in the Commons back in 1824.[1] He even seems to have helped reduce the prison sentences of Carpenter and Hetherington, in 1831 and 1833 respectively.[2] On another occasion, in response to a deputation from Bulwer, Hetherington, Benbow, and Cleave, he agreed to investigate the unhealthy conditions in Cold Bath Fields prison, where some of the vendors of the unstamped were held.[3]

Melbourne could, therefore, have adopted a much tougher policy towards unstamped papers and other forms of radical self-expression. He did not do so largely out of prudence and regard for the practical difficulties of prosecution. But he was not completely powerless, nor was he afraid to act decisively; consequently, there was in his policy an element of general tolerance of radical writing and speaking. One Radical, stamped paper of the period, 'The Voice of the People', stated:

> 'The best criterion, perhaps, by which to decide the merits of a government, is its conduct towards the press.' 4

By viewing the excesses of working class radicals as a necessary evil of popular liberty, Melbourne helped endow the government with at least some claim to such merits. His attitude towards the press is a good example of that moderation within the limits of the conventional thinking of the ruling class to which reference has been made above.[5]

Enlightened restraint was, indeed, the keynote of Melbourne's general policy towards political agitation. It is remarkable how little he actually did to counter political disturbance both during and after the passage of the Reform bill. This is especially noteworthy in the light of his support for

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1. Hansard 2nd series, V. 1[illegible],
2. Hollis, op.cit., p.51.
3. ibid., p.70
4. 27 August 1831.
5. p.29

the Six Acts a decade earlier. He may have revolved in his mind the advantages of such legislation but he never made the slightest move in that direction and did not avail himself of those parts of Sidmouth's powers which still remained. He kept to a minimum his interference with public meetings, the press, political societies, and the possession of arms. This policy was largely imposed on Melbourne by the depth and extent of the crisis the government faced. His submission to circumstances was, however, no small achievement in itself. He can also be credited with a genuine respect for the principles of popular liberty, however much he resented their alleged abuse.

Melbourne was quite capable of firm, even relentless measures if he thought them called for. The N.U.W.C. particularly suffered from his attentions whenever it tried to move beyond the confines of the Rotunda or Theobalds Road. The executions following the Nottingham and Bristol riots stike a sombre note.[1] But he attempted to be discriminating and to keep a sense of proportion. In November 1831 he told a Somerset magistrate:

> 'My dear Sir, Dismiss entirely from your mind the idea of a Special Commission to try the Rioters of Sherborne and Yeovil. If you apprehend tumults swear in Special Constables ... and thus put the district in the way of maintaining its own tranquillity, which may be easily done by a little energy and exertion.' 2

Melbourne impressed similar views on the Mayor of Worcester in November 1831 when the latter requested military aid:

> 'You will take care not to call for this assistance, nor to introduce the Troops into the City of Worcester, unless you are thoroughly persuaded that a strong necessity exists for such a step ... and you will upon no account ... relax in your exertions to swear in Special Constables ... by which the peace of the City may be protected, in the safest and most constitutional manner.' 3.

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1. Hamburger, op.cit., p. 260.
2. Melbourne to W. Dickinson 14 November, MP 86/68, copy
3. 2 November H.O. 41/10 ff. 319-20.

This distaste for the use of troops, and a scrupulous employment of them if they had to be called in, were hall-marks of Melbourne's policy. On at least one occasion, however, local magistrates lost their heads and precipitately resorted to military force. On 31 July 1832 an election was held at Clitheroe, Lancashire, which was contested by a popular Reformer and Irving, a representative of the old borough-mongering interest.[1] Alarmed by a hostile crowd, Irving prevailed on the magistrates to summon a troop of 15th Hussars from Burnley. They did this before he even entered the town and before any breach of the peace occurred. Indeed, at no stage was Irving himself subject to more than hisses and groans. The hussars were used against the crowd on two occasions before finally escorting Irving away. Some soldiers were struck by stones whilst thirteen of the crowd were injured. Melbourne was extremely angry at the authorities' behaviour and wrote several peremptory letters demanding an explanation from them.[2] He obtained no satisfaction, however, and, given his very limited powers over magistrates, had to let the matter rest.

Melbourne's policy during the Walsall election later in 1832 forms a complete contrast to that of the Citheroe magistrates. It was graphically recalled in 1840 by Peter Potter in a speech at a Walsall Operative Conservative dinner.[3] Potter related how he and the Earl of Bradford had informed Melbourne of the intimidation of Conservative voters, to which he replied 'with a few "damns" etc. that they should take the mob before a magistrate.' Potter, however, wanted troops brought in. At this Melbourne said

> ' "Oh, can't let you have any military, can't let you have any military. It's no joke - it's no joke to fire on a mob; you can't have any military." '

Not surprisingly perhaps, Potter said he had not liked Melbourne, considering him a free and easy sort of man, who treated most affairs in a very off-hand manner.

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1. The following account is to be found in the 'Poor Man's Guardian', 11 August, which relied on the version of the 'Manchester Guardian'. See also D. Bythell, The Handloom Weavers (1969), p. 215.
2. Melbourne to Colonel Clayton 4, 27 August, to Clitheroe magistrates 4, 8 August, H.O. 41/11 ff. 211, 231-2, 213-14, 216.
3. The Times 13 October 1840.

These qualities were, however, precisely Melbourne's strengths as Home Secretary. He knew that his powers were limited and also suspected that they did not need to be invoked frequently. Their use might have unfortunate consequences, and, even if not, it was undesirable on principle to have recourse to them. As Melbourne apparently once told S. M. Phillipps and the Under-Secretary, George Lamb, 'whenever you are in doubt what should be done, do nothing.'[1] Melbourne's casualness was deceptive: it came from his ability to see everything in perspective and not from a refusal to treat problems seriously. His sense of humour, however, undoubtedly helped. At the height of his difficulties in mid-November 1831, Melbourne was recorded by Holland as saying

> 'with some pleasantry that neither Bristol nor White Conduit Street nor the innumerable information (sic) he has received make him half so gloomy as an hour conversation with Abercrombie ... [who is] fully convinced that a week's delay in passing the bill, or the change of an iota will subvert the whole frame of [the] constitution and throw the whole island into confusion.' 2

Melbourne's achievement was to keep his nerve during the most serious political crisis of his lifetime. His treatment of political agitation could not easily have been bettered by any other likely Home Secretary of the day.

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1. Torrens p. 251.
2. Holland diary 16 Nov., Add. Mss. 51,868 f. 210.

Appendix

Home Office Spies 1830-1834

The most important spy in Melbourne's time, and certainly for the Reform Bill crisis itself, was Abel Hall. His Radical credentials went back to the Cato Street conspiracy and he was in touch with the Rotunda and N.U.W.C. leaders.[1]

The most notorious spy was W. S. Popay, a police sergeant. His undercover career began about October 1831, according to the Radical paper 'The True Sun' which denounced him in June 1833.[2] He attended N.U.W.C. class meetings and offered to train members in the use of arms. His spy career was investigated and criticised by a Parliamentary Select Committee in 1833 but it is not clear whether he was directly controlled by the Metropolitan Police Commissioners or by the Home Office, both of whom sought to evade censure.[3] It seems probable that Popay's more dubious activities were not known to either the Commissioners or the Home Office.[4] It is unlikely that Melbourne would have countenanced an 'agent provocateur'. In January 1831 he had rejected a suggestion from a magistrate that such methods be used to combat rural incendiarism. With the example of 'Oliver' in 1817 before his eyes, Melbourne had told his correspondent:

> '... we should run as little risk as possible of involving innocent persons in accusations, and still less of adopting measures which may encourage the seduction of persons, now innocent, into the commission of crime.' 5

Moreover, Melbourne obtained almost as much information as he could hope for through Hall, lesser N.U.W.C. informers, and other plainclothes policemen without hiring an 'agent provocateur'. Popay's importance is hard to gauge because few of his reports seem to survive in the H.O. records. It is clear, however, that nearly all of the references to him in P. Hollis, The Pauper Press ought to be to Abel Hall instead.

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1. Large 'William Lovett', op.cit., p.123 n.90. Hall's report 20 November 1830, H.O. 64/11.
2. 14 June 1833, copy in H.O. 64/12.
3. Parliamentary Papers 1833, xiii, Petition of Frederick Young, pp. 409, 413-25, 577, 579, 585-6.
4. Donajgrodzki, op.cit., p.388.
5. Melbourne to H. Drummond 23 January 1831, MP 86/78, copy

The Home Office (3): Trade Unions

When he became Home Secretary, Melbourne confronted what was arguably the most intense and militant outburst of trade union activity in the first half of the nineteenth century. The pattern of trade union behaviour in the decade following the end of the Combination Laws is still very much a matter of debate.[1] At the time, Melbourne was even more hard put to estimate and explain trade unions' varied and fluctuating strengths. A sympathetic understanding of their nature was beyond him. So far as he was concerned, they gave more or less continuous trouble, whatever trade was chosen, and whether there was a recession, as in 1830-2, or comparative prosperity, as in 1833-4. He was, indeed, subject almost to a siege mentality where trade unions were concerned.

Such an outlook is not easily understood now. The principal concerns of all unions were wages and conditions of work. On the majority of occasions they tried to achieve their objectives by peaceful negotiations with employers. They might also buy off unwanted new workers by mutual agreement. More violent methods were, however, also used. Attacks on employers' property, public shows of strength, and personal intimidation of non-union workers became the more sensational hallmarks of trade unions in the minds of the upper classes. The alarm of the latter was increased by attempts at 'national' and 'general' unions. The most famous of these when Melbourne took over the Home Office were the Grand General Union of Operative Spinners, formed in 1829, and the National Association for the Protection of Labour, formed in 1830. Both were heavily dependent on Lancashire cotton unions. None of these large organisations, however, lasted long. The Grand General Union disappeared with the defeat of the Manchester cotton strike in the winter of 1830-1. The National Association disintegrated in 1832 when the Lancashire spinners refused to aid strikers in the Midlands. Even whilst it lasted, its moving spirit, John Doherty, was unusual in his interest in wide social and

1. A. E. Musson, British Trade Unions 1800-1875 (1972), chapters 2, 3, 4, 5.
   W. H. Fraser, 'Trade Unionism' in Popular Movements c.1830-1850, ed. J. T. Ward (1970).

political horizons, such as Owenite co-operation. Most of his supporters were concerned only with sectional trade objectives and joined the Association for the sake of a general strike fund.[1]

Whatever the limitations of trade unionism in the early 1830's, Melbourne felt that it was a novel and unwelcome phenomenon. Ten months after taking office, he recalled to Sir Herbert Taylor that in November 1830 he had talked with Peel about the unions and had agreed that the local unions to raise wages 'and the general union for the same purpose' constituted 'the most formidable difficulty and danger with which we had to contend.'[2] Melbourne was opposed to what he saw as the new character of trade unions on three main grounds. Following contemporary economic orthodoxy, he believed that the unions

> 'have proposed to themselves, in the settling and securing a certain rate of wages and a sure supply of employment objects which it is impossible by any means whatever either violent or otherwise to obtain.' 3

Therefore, their activities could produce only 'much mischief to the Country and much loss and distress to those who engage in them.'[4] Apart from the economic losses which he attributed to the unions, Melbourne disliked them on moral grounds as alleged instruments of intimidation, 'gross injustice and blind tyranny'[5] from which both employers and workmen suffered.

Above all, Melbourne was always uneasy about the political implications of trade unions. The cotton spinners' strikes in 1830 were influenced by the July Revolution in France and Doherty's National Association tried to arouse political feelings in unions outside Lancashire.[6] The N.U.W.C. grew out of the London co-operative and trade union movement. In the Nottingham area it was difficult to distinguish between the economic and political ambitions

1. H. A. Turner, Trade Union Growth, Structure and Policy: A Comparative Study of the Cotton Unions (1962), p. 101.
2. 26 September 1831 Sanders, p. 130-1.
3. Melbourne to Marquess of Bute 24 October 1831 H.O. 41/10 ff. 284-5.
4. ibid.
5. Melbourne to Lord Sandon 15 June 1833 MP 89/24, copy. Hansard, 3rd series, xiii. 1155-8 (29 June 1832).
6. See above p. 50

of working class groups, presumably composed mainly of out-workers in the textile industry, though Melbourne did not precisely define their occupation.[1] Worst of all, from his point of view, was the connection between politics and trade unionism in the Merthyr area. (His reactions to the Merthyr unions are discussed below.) In fact, the involvement of trade unions in politics was very restricted, especially in the case of the stronger societies such as the spinners or engineers, whilst the Northumberland and Durham miners' unions were almost apolitical. In December 1833 the 'Poor Man's Guardian' was 'grieved to find among the leaders of the Unionists a disposition to exclude politics altogether from their deliberations.'[2]

It was natural, however, to assume that trade unions would turn to politics eventually. Even as trade revived and political agitation died away in 1833, Bouverie warned Melbourne that trade unions were so extensive and well-organised that 'they not only embarrass Trade, but in times of Trouble would be easily converted into Political Unions.'[3] In February 1834, Bouverie reported that wages were not the ultimate objects of the unions, which were strongly republican in feeling, and, by virtue of their interconnections, posed a threat to the government and the country.[4] These were vague and misplaced fears but in the early 1830's it was easy to see trade unions as a new and disturbing form of power. As Melbourne told Lord Lyttelton in March 1834, he did not expect trade unions to disappear 'without much menace, much alarm and possibly actual commotion.'[5]

Melbourne's anxieties over the rise of trade unions were particularly acute during his first few months in office. He told a Lancashire correspondent he hoped that the local gentry would

> 'become sensible of the state of the manufacturing districts, which, if they do not advert to it in time, will undoubtedly press itself upon their attention in a shape and form which cannot be disregarded.' 6

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1. See above p. 81, 83.
2. 14 December 1833.
3. 26 April 1833 H.O. 40/31 ff. 41-8.
4. 25 February 1834 H.O. 40/32 ff. 35-7.
5. Melbourne to Lyttelton 29 March 1834, MP 87/136, copy
6. Melbourne to W. Hulton 30 December 1830, MP 87/54.

In an equally pessimistic strain he asked Grey on 26 December 1830 whether they should allow trade unions to grow until they were so menacing that they had to be suppressed by force or take 'timely measures' now.[1]

Significantly, it was towards the end of 1830 that Melbourne appointed Nassau Senior, professor of political economy at Oxford, to investigate trade unions and suggest possible counter measures against them. Senior's 'Report on Trade Combinations 1831' recommended that all attempts to induce men to join a union, to join a strike, or to picket during a strike should be severely punished by law; that employers should be empowered to arrest trade unionists without warrant; and that union funds should be confiscated. Melbourne rejected these stringent legislative proposals, deeming them, as he later told Sir Herbert Taylor, 'a serious infringement upon the constitutional liberties of the country' which Parliament would not have tolerated.[2] He also came to realise that a new law against the unions would only strengthen the loyalties of their members.[3]

The one area where Melbourne was seriously tempted to introduce a new law was that of picketing. On 16 January 1831 he told Grey that 'something must be done about this picquetting' and then on 29 January wrote to Grey in favour of 'a summary power of arrest in the case of intimidation by picquetting or otherwise.'[4] Grey seems to have been amenable to such suggestions[5] but Melbourne apparently dropped the idea. In 1834, under pressure from Foster in Manchester, he again thought seriously of such a law but sensibly pointed out to Foster that other means would be found to replace picketing if it was banned.[6]

Melbourne therefore overcame any initial tendency to attempt the defeat of trade unions by new laws, though he sometimes looked back wistfully to the

1. Melbourne to Grey 26 December 1830, Grey Papers.
2. Melbourne to Taylor 26 September 1831, Sanders p. 131.
3. ibid. p. 132.
4. Melbourne to Grey 16 Jan. 1831, Grey Papers.
5. Grey to Brougham 4 Jan. 1834; Brougham, Life and Times, III, 323.
6. Foster to Melbourne 12 January, 15 April 1834, H.O. 40/32 ff. 172-5, 180-2. Melbourne to Grey 31 March 1834 Grey Papers.

days when the Combination Laws had been in force.[1] It seems likely that practical experience of industrial troubles persuaded him that trade unions were not quite so dangerous as they looked. The defeat of the Manchester cotton strike early in 1831 was an important indication of the unions' underlying weaknesses. Likewise it gradually became apparent during 1831 that most trade unions were not, for the present at least, interested in political campaigns.[2] Events in South Wales in the summer of 1831 gave Melbourne a nasty jolt, but, on the whole, he seems to have revised his initial impressions of the unions. He became encouraged by the financial strains which long strikes imposed on unions and by the ease with which employers could find new workmen to replace strikers.[3]

Consequently, he adopted a policy of waiting, as he later explained to Lord Sandon,

> 'until the Unions break up and dissolve, as they must ultimately do from the false principles upon which they are founded, and the unattainable nature of the objects which they propose to themselves.'[4]

Melbourne was confirmed in this attitude by the advent of a Reformed Parliament. He believed that, whereas it would have been difficult to obtain new powers from any Parliament, it would be impossible to do so after the Reform Act without 'the cordial and open co-operation of those members who represent the manufacturing towns and districts', and they would never dare to act publicly against the unions, as Melbourne told Sandon.[5] If this was his main reason for leaving things alone, Melbourne also genuinely disliked the idea of repressive legislation. As he wrote to E. B. Portman in December 1833, the trade unions could not be put down 'without giving such Powers to the Government as it would hardly like to ask.'[6]

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1. Hansard, 3rd series, xiii. 1156 (29 June 1832).
2. Even the N.U.W.C. was not directly connected with London trade unions: Hall's reports 9 August, 20 October H.O. 64/11.
3. Melbourne to Sir H. Taylor 26 September 1831 Sanders pp. 131-2.
4. Melbourne to Sandon 15 June 1833, MP 89/24.
5. ibid.
6. 12 December 1833, MP 88/84, copy

1. Melbourne to Lord Derby 11 January 1831, MP 86/63.

2. Bouverie to H.O. 8 July 1832 H.O. 40/30 ff. 186-8.
Mayor of Newcastle to Duke of Northumberland 21 July 1832 H.O. 52/19.

3. J. Hardcastle to H.O. 30 November 1831, H.O. 44/24 (London).
Mr. Ratcliffe to H.O. 25 January, 22 February 1834, H.O. 40/32 ff. 295, 298 (Oldham).

4. Melbourne to R. Bourne 5 November 1833, H.O. 41/11 ff. 460-2.

5. MP 5/116.

6. William IV to Melbourne 30 March 1834,
Melbourne to William IV 2 April 1834, Sanders pp. 158-61.

7. See p.54

8. 22 May 1831 H.O. 40/29 f. 71.

9. 2 April 1832 H.O. 40/30 f. 132.

10. Melbourne to Duke of Northumberland 5 May 1832 H.O. 41/11 f. 151.

11. 4, 18 November 1832 H.O. 40/30 ff. 227, 233.
25 March 1833 H.O. 40/31 f. 19.

12. 30 June 1833 H.O. 40/31 f. 35.
Melbourne to Sandon 15 June 1833 MP 89/24.

Melbourne maintained this attitude despite continual pressure to introduce legislation against the unions. The magistrates and manufacturers of Lancashire set the pattern in this respect during the cotton strikes of 1830-1.[1] They were followed in the summer of 1832 by the magistrates and coal-owners of Northumberland and Durham.[2] Individual demands for stronger action against unions frequently reached the Home Office, presumably from aggrieved employers.[3] Melbourne was inclined to be unhelpful in such cases, informing a manufacturer in the Potteries, for instance, that his kind must either resist the unions locally or propose new laws to Parliament through their MPs.[4] Grey himself wrote to Melbourne on 24 October 1833 that 'something must be done, if possible, to put down these Trades Unions.'[5] William IV, not surprisingly, added his voice from time to time. When he demanded immediate action against the unions in March 1834, Melbourne characterised previous legislation as a 'long list of failure' and said it was even doubtful whether the recent upsurge in union activity could be blamed on the 1824-5 repeal of the Combination Laws.[6]

What, therefore, did Melbourne do to curb the trade unions? Where riots or violent attacks on what were called 'well-disposed' workers resulted from industrial disputes, he had no hesitation in authorising the use of troops. Examples of such action have already been noted above;[7] it will suffice to add only a few here. Bouverie in the North inevitably often had to report such incidents. In May 1831 cavalry from Manchester arrested six men out of a mob of three hundred attacking new hands at a Pendlebury colliery.[8] In April 1832 troops from Newcastle arrested six pitmen who were rioting at Hetton.[9] When the troops proved insufficient in number, Melbourne once approved the issue of arms by Bouverie to constables and coal owners in Northumberland and Durham.[10] In November 1832 troops were sent to Macclesfield where there was a turn-out by silk-weavers; though the strike proved peaceful, the troops were retained until March 1833.[11] In June 1833, Bouverie sent troops to Liverpool where there was a strike among the building trades.[12]

The use of troops on these and many other occasions was in fact not the extreme measure it might appear. They assumed the role which would otherwise have been taken by the police. Bouverie, at least, was content with this arrangement, believing that it had preserved peace and had not made the troops unduly unpopular.[1] Melbourne did not like using the army in this way and tried to restrict calls upon it as much as possible.[2] If troops were needed, he preferred cavalry because, as he informed a Huddersfield correspondent in January 1833, it could 'disperse crowds with comparatively little injury.'[3] Nonetheless, as he reminded Lord Derby on 11 January 1831, troops could 'produce but a short and uncertain tranquillity, and .. after all it is a most unsatisfactory way of maintaining order and preserving the public peace.'[4]

There were, indeed, occasions when Melbourne deliberately left employers or magistrates without military aid. In December 1830 Bouverie refused to quarter troops in the Ashton and Stayley Bridge areas of Manchester despite tumults from workers, who faced a lock-out by masters attempting to reduce wages. He told Melbourne that 'the Masters have decidedly brought this state of things upon themselves', an opinion in which Melbourne tacitly concurred.[5] In February 1832 Bouverie was faced with violent demonstrations in Manchester from handloom weavers who, as he said, were driven to desperation by the masters who had cut wages by one quarter, even though wages had been at starvation level previously. He wrote to Melbourne:

> 'I have decided that if possible the Troops shall not be shown, or made to appear to take any part in these Quarrels, but that the Masters shall be left to their own means of getting themselves out of the difficulties, which they have created ...'

Melbourne replied that he thought this course 'the most prudent that can be adopted.'[6] Bouverie soon reported that the masters had given in to the weavers.[7]

1. Bouverie to H.O. 26 August 1823 H.O. 40/31 ff. 41-8.
2. 27 December 1830 H.O. 40/26 f. 293.
3. Melbourne to Capt. Fenton 12 January 1833, H.O. 41/11 ff. 356-7.
4. Melbourne to Derby MP 86/63.
5. 7, 8, 11 December 1830 H.O. 40/26 ff. 170, 176, 188.
6. 24 February 1832 H.O. 40/30 ff. 120-1.
7. 25 February H.O. 40/30 f. 122.

In what appears to be part of this affair, Melbourne applauded Foster, the chief Manchester magistrate, for telling an employer that

> 'his workmen had just cause of complaint against him.'

Melbourne added his opinion that

> 'the conduct of Mr. Orrell ... in delivering outwork without specifying a price ... and after the work had been done fixing a lower price than had been before paid is not according to law.' [1]

In December 1833 Melbourne had to restrain Lord Lyttelton from using troops to execute warrants against iron workers at Stourport. Instead, he told him to use special constables, pointing out that 'to execute process by Troops in the first instance would be to go further than has been yet gone in Ireland' and concluding, 'I should recommend acting in this case with great caution.'[2] This was, perhaps, an unusual instance, as were those at Manchester noted above, but they serve to show that Melbourne's customary moderation was not completely overwhelmed by his automatic reflexes against organised industrial workers.

After the containment of open violence, the most obvious weapon against trade unions was prosecution in the courts for illegal acts. Following the 1824-5 repeal of the Combination Laws, unions were not illegal in themselves and could conduct collective bargaining on wages and hours, but they were still subject to the common law of conspiracy to prevent criminal acts of intimidation and coercion. Melbourne thought that all unions were indictable in this way, but, as he told Sir Herbert Taylor in November 1831, the government did not deem it prudent to bring such charges.[3] Later he admitted to Sandon that the real difficulty lay in the procuring of evidence to substantiate such charges.[4] In July 1833, however, Foster charged some Manchester tailors with conspiracy after they had struck work and beset their masters' shops. At the same time he threatened similar proceedings against

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1. 28 February 1832 H.O. 41/11 ff. 98-99.
2. 26 December 1833 H.O. 41/11 ff. 483-4.
3. 24 November 1831, Sanders p. 137.
4. 15 June 1833, MP 89/24.

local builders, who were on strike, if they practised intimidation. Melbourne congratulated Foster on these moves and offered government money for any prosecutions.[1] Nonetheless it is hard to believe that Melbourne had been searching for a dramatic test-case since he entered office; equally good opportunities must have already presented themselves. It looks as though Melbourne's undecided mind was carried away, as on other occasions, by someone else's sudden initiative. Whatever the outcome of Foster's case, trade unions remained virtually untouched by the law of conspiracy.

It was somewhat easier to prosecute individual members of unions for ordinary criminal offences committed during strikes, such as attacks on non-union workers. Melbourne frequently encouraged magistrates and employers to bring such cases.[2] Here also, however, it was very difficult to find the necessary evidence and witnesses even for such notorious riots as those around Manchester during the cotton strike of December 1830.[3] In one, admittedly isolated case, Melbourne authorised £300 for the protection of witnesses during the trial of some members of a miners' union in the west of Scotland.[4] The acquittal of some of those most prominent in the Black Country miners' riots of December 1831 has already been noted.[5] It was also possible to prosecute employees under the law of master and servant but this was exclusively a matter for individual employers as it depended on workers breaking their contracts. It was rare for Melbourne to be even indirectly concerned in this way. One case is recorded for October 1833 when troops were called upon by West Bromwich magistrates in case pitmen tried to rescue three of their fellows who had been arrested for leaving their work without due notice.[6] Finally, there were a few obscure laws, notably those passed at

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1. Foster to H.O. 13 July 1833 H.O. 40/31 ff. 55-7.
   Melbourne to Foster 15 July 1833 H.O. 41/11 ff. 426-7.
2. Melbourne to Glossop magistrates 23 December 1830,
   Melbourne to Revd. Powell (Abergavenny) 7 April 1832, H.O. 41/9 f.178,
   41/11 f. 131.
3. Foster to Melbourne 19 December 1830, H.O. 40/26 f. 249.
4. Treasury to H.O. 6 December 1832 H.O. 40/30 f. 345.
5. See above p. 83
6. Col. Thorn to H.O. 26 October 1833 H.O. 40/30 f. 111.

the end of the 1790's, to which trade unions might be vulnerable but Melbourne made no serious attempt to invoke them until early 1834. (The circumstances under which he then did so will be considered below.)

Understandably, Melbourne had no great confidence in the efficacy of legal proceedings against the trade unions. He believed, as he wrote to Brougham in December 1833, that 'the redress of the evil must be effected by the spirit and determination of the Masters themselves.'[1] The difficulty here was that, as Melbourne went on to say, 'great sacrifices must be made both of capital and profit.'[2] Employers did not really want indefinite lock-outs any more than unions wanted prolonged strikes. Nor were employers likely to maintain a united front for long. In Manchester jealousies between the cotton masters seem to have prevented effective co-operation during the strikes of late 1830-31.[3] In May 1834, attempts by the Leeds master manufacturers to dismiss all union members came to nothing when the workmen threatened a general turn-out and began to arm themselves with daggers.[4] Melbourne agreed with Bouverie that, unless the masters were prepared to go through with their plan, it was to be regretted that they had embarked upon it.[5] There was certainly no consistent attempt by employers to test Melbourne's belief that

> 'nothing will open the eyes of the working people, but the blowing out of forges, the stopping of works, and the leaving the Persons who gained their subsistence by them to indigence and beggary.' 6

The only important success achieved against the unions by a combined effort from the government and employers occurred in South Wales in the summer and autumn of 1831. It is not clear what unions, if any, existed in this area before the Merthyr rising of June 1831 but the excitement of the rising itself

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1. 24 December Brougham Papers 45,498.
2. ibid.
3. Melbourne to Lord Derby 11 January 1831, MP 86/63.
   Foster to Melbourne 13 January 1831, H.O. 52/13.
4. Bouverie to H.O. 10, 15 May 1834, H.O. 40/32 ff. 85-6, 93-6.
5. ibid. f.96.
6. Melbourne to Brougham 24 December 1833, loc.cit.

and the reaction against its military repression produced a wave of union clubs covering the whole area from Swansea to Newport.[1] Their creation seemed especially sinister since it coincided with the missionary efforts of delegates from Doherty's National Association for the Protection of Labour.[2] The latter had moved into South Wales shortly before the rising itself and represented the most sophisticated form of union organisation evolved up to that time. It now looks highly unlikely that these delegates played any important part in the rising itself but there is no doubt that their activities included the preaching of radical politics.[3] What they did after the rising is unknown, but the Merthyr miners allegedly talked of a national strike to be called on their behalf by the N.A.P.L., so the delegates seem to have had some impact.[4]

Whatever the N.A.P.L.'s precise role, extremes of radical politics and trade unionism seemed to be welded together in the Merthyr area. In London, speakers at the Rotunda hailed events in Merthyr as the vanguard of revolution.[5] Major Mackworth, a staff officer in the area, reported in August that 'The Political Union Clubs are doing infinite, and if not soon checked, irreparable mischief' and that in Merthyr

> 'every individual miner .. is a member of a secret society, and has taken Oaths of Secrecy.' 6

Accordingly, Melbourne pursued the N.A.P.L. in both South Wales and its Lancashire headquarters. He failed, however, either to find evidence of its participation in the Merthyr rising or to discover anything about William Twiss, its reputed chief delegate to Wales.[7]

Baffled in this direction, Melbourne joined the South Wales iron masters in a concerted attempt to break the local unions. Selecting important

1. G. A. Williams, op.cit., p. 240-1.
2. ibid. p. 239.
3. ibid. p. 240.
4. Sir Watkyn Williams Wynn to H.O. 8 June H.O. 52/16.
5. 'Poor Man's Guardian', 'Prompter' June - August 1831.
6. 26 August H.O. 52/16, copy
7. Williams op.cit. p. 240.
   Foster to Melbourne 15 June, 7 August H.O. 52/13.

test places, such as the works at Dowlais, the masters issued in September 1831 what was called 'the document,' by which their men had to foreswear the union on pain of dismissal.[1] Melbourne encouraged the masters in this move and the bitter lock-out which followed. Moreover, as Professor Williams states, he pushed his intervention 'to the brink of illegality.'[2] In October, the men's wives appealed for poor relief from the magistrates, one of whom, J. B. Bruce, referred the matter to Melbourne. He in turn consulted the law officers who advised that poor relief should be granted. Melbourne did not pass on this decision to the Merthyr magistrates but did assure them of his support for any strong, sustained action they might take. As a result, the magistrates refused poor relief throughout October and November 1831. The unions collapsed under these pressures by the end of November, though South Wales remained a disturbed area long afterwards with 300 troops stationed at Brecon and Abergavenny at the request of the Merthyr magistrates.[3]

Melbourne's action against the Merthyr unions is likely to remain controversial. It does not seem probable that he was looking for a decisive confrontation with trade unions as such, although Professor Williams contends that he was.[4] In the summer of 1831 there was a lull in union activity so far as Melbourne was concerned and it made sense to pursue a policy of containment rather than one of outright suppression. Towards Doherty's organisations, Melbourne had adopted a watchful but passive attitude in December 1830 - January 1831; since then he had had no cause to take particular notice of them.[5] It looks, therefore, as if Melbourne was surprised and alarmed by the full-blooded political character of the Merthyr unions and took exceptional measures

1. Williams op.cit. p. 241.
2. ibid. p. 241 (The following account is drawn from his article.)
3. Melbourne to Lord Fitzroy Somerset, and Swansea magistrates, 9, 10 February 1833, H.O. 41/11 ff. 369-70.
4. op.cit. p. 239.
5. Melbourne to L. Rolleston 25 Dec. 1830, MP 89/12.
   Melbourne to Earl Talbot 11 February 1831 H.O. 41/9 f. 413.

1. Melbourne to Taylor 24 November 1831, Sanders p. 137.

2. 5 September H.O. 40/30 f. 200.

3. Col. Thorn to H.O. 31 October, 18, 22 November 1832, H.O. 40/31 ff. 117, 122, 124.

4. Foster to H.O. 7 August 1831 H.O. 52/13.
Bouverie to H.O. 26 August 1833 H.O. 40/31 ff. 41-8.
See D. Bythell, The Handloom Weavers (1969) p. 176 seq.

5. Col. Love to H.O. 4 September 1832 H.O. 40/30 f. 272.

6. 17 October H.O. 40/31 f. 49.

7. 4 December H.O. 40/31 f. 51.

8. 7 December MP 87/130, copy.

9. 13 July 1833 H.O. 40/31 ff. 55-7.
12 January 1834 H.O. 40/32 ff. 172-5.
25 January 1834 H.O. 40/31 ff. 67-8.

10. 5 January, 25 February 1834 H.O. 40/32 ff. 9-11, 35-7.

against them on that ground alone. No other trade unions attracted such severe treatment from him until the Tolpuddle case of 1834.

For nearly two and a half years after the Merthyr rising Melbourne contrived to live with the trade union problem. He did this reluctantly but he could draw comfort from the fluctuating fortunes and behaviour of the unions during this period. In November 1831 he thought that they were 'not at present either flourishing or extending themselves.'[1] The miners on the Tyne and Wear caused considerable trouble in the early summer of 1832 but, by September, their unions were reported by Bouverie to be breaking up.[2] In the Black Country mining areas, which had been so riotous late in 1831, unions thereafter held peaceful meetings to form a strike fund and submitted petitions to the masters for higher wages.[3] The Lancashire cotton unions lost much of their driving force during 1831; whilst the handloom weavers seem to have become almost conditioned by the distress under which they suffered.[4] The Merthyr iron workers still held meetings in 1832 but they now passed off quietly.[5] Above all, the lifting of the economic depression in 1833 eased conditions in the industrial areas. By October 1833, after a tour of the North, Bouverie could report:

> 'since I have been honoured with the command in this District I have never known it to be in so satisfactory a state.' 6

In December 1833 he even asserted that the trade unions were 'in a great measure dying away.'[7] This was an opinion which Melbourne himself echoed to Lord Lyttelton soon afterwards.[8]

In fact, a reduction in serious industrial disputes and their violent consequences did not mean the end of the trade unions. The improvement in trade actually strengthened the position of unions, especially in a financial sense. Foster had shrewdly noted this as early as July 1833; in January and February 1834 he reminded Melbourne that the unions' underlying strength was increasing, even if they gave no trouble for the present.[9] By early 1834 Bouverie was also inclined to be more worried by the degree of working class organisation which the unions had apparently achieved.[10]

Apart from a general burgeoning of trade unions in 1833, there had been two developments of more than local significance. In November, Robert Owen, Doherty, and J. Fielden had founded the Society for National Regeneration which campaigned for an eight hour day and whose journal, 'Herald to the Rights of Industry', flourished for a while. Responding to what Professor Harrison calls the 'unprecedented development of trade unionism in 1832-33', Owen had also been busy since October 1833 founding the body which emerged early in 1834 as the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union.[1]

The Regeneration Society gained a certain amount of support from the Lancashire cotton spinners and intended to call a general turn-out in March 1834. But, as Foster reported in January 1834, it lacked strong connections with other trade unions and its efforts to call a strike were unlikely to be successful unless trade conditions were very favourable to it.[2] Late in February, the Society postponed its strike until June and did not even finally decide upon that date.[3] In fact, the Society's failure exhibited the strongly sectional and local characteristics of all the spinners' trade societies in these years.[4]

The G.N.C.T.U. sounded formidable but actually had a paid-up membership of only about 16,000, and most of this drawn from the London tailors, shoemakers and silk-weavers.[5] The cotton spinners, builders, engineers and printers held aloof. Efforts by the Staffordshire and Cheshire consolidated unions to link up with it foundered on the inertia of the G.N.C.T.U.'s London headquarters.[6] Its provincial support remained weak and scattered, depending heavily on the personal contacts made by individuals like the old N.U.W.C. Radical, George Petrie.[7] Nonetheless, the 'Grand National' had an important newspaper in the

1. J. F. C. Harrison, Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America (1969), p. 211.
2. 12 January H.O. 40/32 ff. 172-5.
3. Foster to H.O. 25 February H.O. 40/31 ff. 67-8.
4. H. A. Turner, A Comparative Study of the Cotton Unions, p. 93-96.
5. F. H. Oliver, 'The Consolidated Trades' Union of 1834', Econ. Hist. Review, Aug. 1964, p.85.
6. Oliver, op.cit. p. 87-88.
7. ibid. p. 86.

'Pioneer', edited by James Morrison, a Birmingham trade unionist. Further, it was inspired by the protracted contest at Derby between silkweavers and their masters, which began in November 1833 and ended only in April 1834 when the men were forced to return to work. In turn, whilst it lasted, the G.N.C.T.U. had a wider appeal than ordinary trade unions; it attracted, for instance, farm labourers, including George Loveless from Dorset.[1]

Melbourne knew a fair amount about the activities of the G.N.C.T.U. as a result of spy reports on its London branches. These offered, however, conflicting opinions about the Union's significance. One informer wrote in on 11 February that delegates were about to leave for the North and warned of the consequences 'if those Lodges with their Oaths and secret Insignia is much permitted (sic).'[2] This spy was told by Petrie that the Union 'mustered one million and a half and in 3 days ... would paralize all the Efforts of the Government.'[3] Another unionist informer gave details in March of the sums of money raised by the Union to support the Derby strikers but concluded, 'from all I can see or learn of these Unions it is not likely much injury will be effected by them.'[4]

Melbourne himself thought that the unions supporting the Derby strike would very soon be bankrupt.[5] He had also had experience of wild claims from N.U.W.C. leaders that they could call a general strike in conjunction with the great industrial towns.[6] At the end of March 1834 he received information from Lord Lyttelton about the various metal trades in an around Birmingham, which Melbourne called

> 'very remarkable ... because it shews how different their situations are, how different their objects are ... and consequently how difficult it will be to reconcile all these, and to unite them into one body for the purpose of any general and simultaneous movement.' 7

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1. Harrison op.cit. p. 213.
2. G. M. Ball H.O. 64/15.
3. ibid.
4. anonymous report (Hall's?) 18 March 1834 H.O. 64/15.
5. To Grey n.d. [early 1834] Grey Papers.
6. e.g. Spy report on N.U.W.C. meeting 9 March 1833, H.O. 64/14.
7. Melbourne to Lyttelton 29 March 1834, MP 87/136

He had no doubt that similar differences would emerge 'if other trades were accurately inquired into.'[1] This was Melbourne's only explicit statement on the subject but it is unlikely that he had been totally unaware of the fragmented nature of the trade unions until this date.

It is still somewhat surprising that Melbourne should have regarded the Regeneration Society as more of a menace than the G.N.C.T.U. When he wrote to his brother Frederick in February 1834 or consulted the law officers, he singled out the Society but made no mention of the 'Grand National'. In May 1834 he completely ignored an offer from a member of the G.N.C.T.U. in Macclesfield to supply information against the Union, though a month earlier he had been glad enough of information about ordinary trade unions in the North to offer a reward to two unionist renegades.[2] By the time Melbourne left the Home Office in July 1834, the G.N.C.T.U. had, however, all but collapsed. The Derby strike had failed in April and a similar set-piece strike by the London tailors disintegrated by the end of May for lack of funds.[3] Owen fell out with his more radical lieutenants, Morrison and Smith, and, in August 1834, re-named the G.N.C.T.U. and brought it into line once more with his other, purely moral and educational organisations.[4]

Even if he excluded the G.N.C.T.U. from his calculations, by February 1834 Melbourne must have felt that trade union activity was at a greater height than at any time since late 1830. His mood is conveyed by what he wrote to Frederick Lamb on 21 February:

> 'The Trades Unions ... bother us to death ... They seem as if they must break up by their own absurdity, and yet these absurdities, when they become very general, are sometimes very formidable.' 5

Until the beginning of March, however, Melbourne had made no special move against the unions.

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1. ibid.
2. J. Browne to H.O. 23 May H.O. 64/15.
   Melbourne to J. Walker 17 April H.O. 79/4 f. 224.
3. Spy reports (Hall's?) 28, 29, 30 May, 10 June, H.O. 64/15.
4. Harrison op.cit. p. 212.
5. Panshanger 28.

But at this point, developments in Dorset may have forced him to reconsider his position. Since January 1834 there had been allegations of unionist ambitions among the agricultural labourers around Dorchester. On 30 January, the leading local magistrate, James Frampton, informed Melbourne that he hoped soon to have proof of 'combinations of a dangerous and alarming kind ... bound by oaths administered clandestinely' and asked his advice on the best way of prosecuting anybody involved in such unions.[1] Melbourne approved his investigations and referred him to 57 Geo. III, c. 19 section 25.[2] The latter was a still operative part of the 1817 Seditious Meetings Act, most of which had lapsed; it made illegal any society whose members took an oath not required or authorised by law; it also made illegal any society which employed delegates to communicate with other societies.

In November 1832, Melbourne had brought this act to the attention of the Duke of Wellington when the latter complained of political unions among the Hampshire labourers.[3] On this occasion, however, Melbourne had not had cause to emphasise the provision against secret oaths, and, unlike his reply to Frampton, his letter cautioned Wellington not to bring a case without 'very sufficient and unquestionable evidence.' Melbourne's different approach in 1834 seems to call for some explanation. In fact, Melbourne had wished to prosecute trade unionists who took secret oaths from his earliest days at the Home Office,[4] but had been frustrated by what he called

> 'the obstinate fidelity with which the lower classes cling to one another, and the difficulty which exists of obtaining information of their proceedings.' 5

In November 1832 the question of secret oaths simply had not come up, whereas it did do so in January 1834 and on many other occasions, including the troubles at Merthyr in 1831.

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1. The Martyrs of Tolpuddle, ed. V. Citrine (1934), p.172.
2. Melbourne to Frampton 31 Jan.; Citrine, op.cit., p. 172.
3. Melbourne to Wellington 10 Nov. 1832, Sanders p. 151.
4. Melbourne to Hon. T. Kenyon 5 January 1831, Earl Talbot 20 January 1831, Lord Derby 31 March 1831, Lord Lynevor 18 November 1831, Capt. Fenton 12 January 1833, H.O. 41/9 ff. 275-6, 374-5, 487-8; MP 86/94, copy; H.O. 41/11 f. 356-7.
5. Melbourne to Lord Lyttelton 29 March 1834, MP 87/136.

There is little doubt that Melbourne intensely disliked the practice of secret oaths. He described them to Brougham as being of 'the most minatory and damnatory character'; and added that 'the Athanasian Creed is milk and water to them.'[1] He also disliked the oaths because, as he told Brougham, 'secret conspiracy is still more dangerous than open union.'[2] He was, indeed, somewhat irrational on the subject because, as he himself admitted, 'the present laws force them [the unions] to secrecy and the most illegal means of enforcing it.'[3]

In a sense, therefore, Melbourne returned a routine answer to Frampton and not one designed to bring on a crisis which might end in a severe defeat for trade unions in general or even, perhaps, for unions among agricultural labourers. A week after replying to Frampton, Melbourne wrote to E. B. Portman, the leading Whig landowner in Dorset, on the subject of the local trade unions. He told Portman he expected that

> 'these Meetings and Associations will have the same fate, as all those which have taken place amongst the Manufacturers, have hitherto had, and that their principal effect will be to inflict serious and permanent injury upon those, who engage in them.' 4

This does not suggest that Melbourne was particularly worried by the Dorset unions or contemplating their suppression at all costs. He was certainly concerned to check what he saw as their worst features, as with other unions, and to this end pointed out to Portman the law against secret oaths. He did not intend, however, merely to exploit obsolescent laws, because he also emphasised that if the labourers agreed not to cut corn when ripe, and prevented others from doing so, as Portman had alleged, this constituted a conspiracy indictable at common law.

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1. Melbourne to Brougham 24 Dec. 1833, Brougham Papers 43,498.
2. ibid.
3. ibid.
4. 10 February MP 88/87, copy

Moreover, Melbourne wished any action against the unions to be taken privately by the farmers. He was opposed to any public pronouncement by the magistrates or to any declared counter union by the farmers. He told Portman:

> 'I have not yet heard of any similar practises among the rural labourers in any other part of the Country, and such a proceeding may give publicity to what is taken place in Dorsetshire and encourage Associations of the same nature in other counties.' 1

Although Melbourne clearly preferred a world without agricultural trade unions, he may have been more philosophical about their existence than has sometimes been assumed. At the end of March 1834 he wrote a remarkably candid letter to Frampton in which he reflected on the problem in general and discountenanced Frampton's draconian counter-measures. (He did this, admittedly, after the trial of the Tolpuddle labourers, by which time second thoughts may have been prevailing.) He pointed out that unions for the purpose of raising wages were legal and asked:

> 'Is it possible, then, for the Government to advise the magistrates, or for the magistrates to advise the farmers, to discharge their men for doing that which may be not only legal, but just and reasonable?' 2

Melbourne thought the farmers were, in any case, even less resolute and united than master manufacturers. He saw no way of preventing agricultural trade unions and concluded that it was

> 'highly improbable that an evil which has so long afflicted the manufacturing districts should not, in the present state of general restlessness, creep into and infest the agricultural parts of the country.' 3

These views were expressed after he had lost confidence in Frampton and at a time when he had reason to be having cooler thoughts about the whole affair; but they echo both his established views about urban trade unions and his words to Portman six weeks earlier.

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1. ibid.
2. 26 March MP 86/103, copy
3. ibid.

Melbourne was quite prepared to see the farmers refuse to employ labourers who belonged to any union, as he made clear to Frampton on 31 March.[1] This was a straightforward economic struggle in his opinion which need not concern the government. Even so he would not support the farmers if they 'generally attempted to reduce the wages of the labourers below their fair and natural level.'[2] He also thought that a labourer discharged by a farmer for belonging to a union could not be refused parish relief. This underlines the fact that he did not place Dorset unions in the same category as those at Merthyr in 1831.

What was crucial to the Tolpuddle case was not some strategy on the part of Melbourne but the initiative taken by James Frampton. It was Frampton who secured the evidence, however imperfect, of secret oaths and then determinedly pressed charges against the six labourers on 1 March, after which they were committed to the Dorchester Assizes on 14 March. He did not inform Melbourne of his actions until after the arrest and committal of the men. Doubtless Melbourne would have sanctioned Frampton's move had he known of it beforehand: one half of his mind was concentrated on the need to prosecute trade unions for any obvious illegality. But he was not initially dedicated to staging an exemplary show trial. Replying to Frampton on 3 March, Melbourne advised against a public proclamation or an offer of a reward 'as such an act would give publicity to a state of things in Dorset, which, as far as he is aware, has not yet spread in any other County.'[3] To this extent Melbourne may be said to have stumbled into the Tolpuddle case.

When, however, he received copies of the depositions against the accused and other information from Frampton, Melbourne's attitude hardened. On 6 March he told Frampton that

> 'these proceedings in your County are a part of the general system, which is now attempted to be established in many other parts of the Kingdom, and that they proceed from some general directing authority.'[4]

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1. MP 86/106, copy
2. ibid.
3. H.O. 43/44 f. 492.
4. H.O. 43/44 ff. 507-11.

Frampton had reported that agricultural unions were extending into other parishes. He also presumably informed Melbourne of the discovery in George Loveless's cottage of a printed paper headed 'Flax and Hemp trade of Great Britain', obtained from a Leeds trade union by Loveless's brother. He certainly reported that delegates were traversing the county and may have discovered as early as this that Loveless had made contact with the G.N.C.T.U. in the autumn of 1833.[1] What Frampton related was anyway enough to make Melbourne a wholehearted supporter of the labourers' prosecution at the assizes 'for the greater publicity of the proceedings, and for the most authoritative exposition of the Law'. This was an attitude contrary to his recent one.[2]

The government now took over the prosecution of the Dorchester labourers, which meant that a formidable legal apparatus was brought to bear against them. The outcome of their trial was almost a foregone conclusion as a result. Their conviction and sentence of seven years transportation required, however, the ingenious conflation of parts of three acts of Parliament: the Seditious Meetings Act (1817), the Combination Act (1799), and the Mutiny Act (1797).[3] The last act was the basis of the indictment and alone enabled a heavy sentence to be passed. The men were sentenced on 19 March and five transported on 11 April, George Loveless following them towards the end of May. In all of this Melbourne was as much implicated as anyone.

Frampton's revelations also seem to have caused Melbourne to consider a more general campaign against the unions early in March. On 6 March, he asked Foster if he could collect evidence to substantiate reports that delegates from various branches of the Regeneration Society had met in

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1. J. Marlow, The Tolpuddle Martyrs (1971) p. 42-3.
2. Melbourne to Frampton 6 March; Citrine, op.cit., p. 177.
3. Marlow, op.cit., p. 67-8

Manchester on 21 February, with a view to prosecution under 39 Geo. III c.79 section 2.[1] On 10 March, Melbourne asked George Maule, the Treasury Solicitor, if the Regeneration Society and Trade Unions, which he described as 'spreading very generally' and connected together, could be prosecuted under the act modifying the repeal of the Combination Laws in 1825, the 1817 Seditious Meetings Act, or the 1797 Mutiny Act.[2] Melbourne's motives here are hard to understand. The latest reports he had received on the Regeneration Society indicated that it was making little headway in Lancashire and Nottingham with its plans for a general strike.[3] Unions in general were profiting from the economic improvement, but there was nothing new in this by March 1834 and it is not clear that they had made themselves more vulnerable than usual to the laws Melbourne had in mind. It is also very odd that he should have omitted the G.N.C.T.U. from his scrutiny. In fact, nothing came of Melbourne's inquiries to Foster and Maule. On 19 March, Bouverie reported that the Regeneration Society was also weak in the West Riding where the unions were intent on wage rises only.[4] In short, the forebodings which Melbourne had suddenly felt at the beginning of March had not been borne out by subsequent events. It was he himself who gave substance to his apprehensions about trade unions by provoking the latter into action on behalf of the Dorset labourers.

Once the Dorchester sentences were announced, a great public outcry ensued. The Radical papers, notably the 'True Sun', took up the cause of the labourers with a vengeance. It is remarkable, however, that 'respectable' papers of varying political hues - the Times, Morning Chronicle, Morning Post, Morning Herald, Globe - also criticised either the severity of the sentences or the underhand methods used to attack trade unions.[5] Discussion in the

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1. H.O. 79/4 f. 223.
2. H.O. 49/7 ff. 504-6.
3. Bouverie to H.O. 2 March H.O. 40/32 ff. 41-2.
   Foster to H.O. 25 February H.O. 40/31 ff. 67-8.
4. H.O. 40/32 ff. 49-51.
5. Marlow on.cit. p. 108.

Commons was cut short by the Easter recess between 26 March and 14 April; but petitions against the sentences poured in once Parliament reassembled[1] and the attacks of Radical M.P.s were led by O'Connell. Outside Parliament, the agitation centered on the Owenite headquarters in Charlotte Street, London. A deputation from there, backed by a crowd of several thousand, took a petition to Melbourne on 30 March and apparently obtained an assurance that the men would not be transported until the king had received it.[2] This was widely interpreted to mean that the sentences would be mitigated. In fact, Melbourne merely hastened the departure of the prisoners for Australia, a move which was denounced as duplicity by the 'Morning Post' on 7 April.[3] The precipitate transportation of the labourers in itself was a testimony to the strength of feeling which their treatment had aroused.

To all appearances Melbourne stuck to his guns and made what he could of the labourers' defeat. He wrote to Lord Lyttelton on 29 March:

> 'I trust that the convictions which have lately taken place in Dorsetshire will have some effect in proving to them [trade unionists] the illegality of their combinations ... and the determination of the Government to carry the law into effect.' 4

Privately, however, he must have had doubts about what he had allowed to happen. It was at the end of March that his soberer views about agricultural trade unions reasserted themselves and made him dissociate himself from Frampton's continued harrying of the Dorset labourers.[5] Melbourne also began to distrust Frampton's judgement and veracity. The latter's allegations about the six labourers' previous bad character were based on such flimsy evidence that the government dropped this line of argument soon after Parliament reassembled.[6]

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1. ibid. p. 115-16
2. ibid. p. 112
   See also S. Austin (Secretary of Owen's National Institution) to Melbourne 30 March, H.O. 64/15.
3. Marlow, op.cit., p.112.
4. MP 87/136.
5. See above p.135
6. Frampton to Melbourne 29 March, 2 April,
   Melbourne to Frampton 31 March, MP 86/105, 107, 106.
   Marlow, op.cit., p.122.

1. Spy reports 1, 3 April H.O. 64/15.
2. Bouverie to H.O. 14, 15, 16 April H.O. 40/32 ff. 58-9, 146, 62. Marlow, op.cit., pp. 112, 115-16.
3. H.O. 40/32 ff. 64, 69-70.
4. Bouverie to H.O. 20 April H.O. 40/32 f.71.
5. H.O. 40/32 ff. 184-5.
6. 21 July 1834 H.O. 40/32 ff. 106-11.
7. ibid.
8. Grey Papers.
9. H.O. 40/32 ff. 184-5.

By the middle of April there was every sign that the Dorchester trial had inflamed rather than subdued working class feelings. In London the Owenite and N.U.W.C. Radicals were joining forces for a monster demonstration on 21 April and had sent delegates to Manchester.[1] Protest meetings had been held at Birmingham, Nottingham, Coventry, Leeds, Newcastle, Liverpool, and Hull, though admittedly without any co-ordination between them.[2]

Melbourne found reports from Oldham of 16 and 17 April particularly 'alarming', as he himself endorsed one of Bouverie's letters.[3] A riot occurred there on 15 April when two men, who had been arrested out of a crowd of 150 assembled to take trade unionist oaths, were taken before the magistrates by constables without a military escort.[4] This was followed by further secret activity on the part of the local unions, including the dispatch of delegates to Manchester to promote a turn-out there, as Foster informed Melbourne on 17 April.[5] Oldham had a bad reputation amongst the authorities even for a Lancashire cotton boom-town. Bouverie later wrote of the great hostility between masters and workpeople there,

> 'each having the very worst opinion of the other, and as far as I have been enabled to judge, each side with good reason for its opinion.' 6

He thought the workpeople to be 'as nearly savages as can be imagined in any Country which boasts of civilisation.' 7

Whatever the truth of such assertions, Melbourne certainly seems to have believed for a few days after 17 April that something at least as bad as the Merthyr rising might develop. On 17 April he advised Grey against a proclamation publicising the law on secret oaths because

> '... it would infallibly incite the Magistrates to greater activity against the Unions, and as their prulence could not always be reckoned upon, a greater risk would be run of riot and tumult, such as has recently taken place at Oldham. Disturbances upon this subject, if they commence in one place, may run through a great many, and go to an extent, for which we are hardly prepared.' 8

Foster's letter of 17 April was endorsed:

> 'Immediate measures will be taken to strengthen the military force in the district.' 9

On 19 April, Melbourne took the almost unprecedented step of asking Wellesley in Ireland to send over whatever troops he could safely spare.[1]

In the event, the ferment quickly subsided. Oldham returned to tranquillity and the troops there began to leave by the end of April.[2] Foster reported that all was tranquil in Manchester on 23 April. A trade union meeting there on 5 May was attended by only 3-4,000 and passed off quietly.[3] It is hard to resist the conclusion that through the Dorchester trial Melbourne had given himself an unnecessarily anxious time so far as the northern towns were concerned.

A major reason for Melbourne's concern about events in the north was that they coincided with intensive preparations in London for the demonstration on 21 April. In fact, neither the G.N.C.T.U. nor the N.U.W.C. Radicals had achieved any significant contact with northern working-class unions, despite sending Petrie to Manchester. In London there were conflicting indications of what might be expected on the 21st. Early in the month the Home Office spies reported violent talk from the meetings at the Charlotte Street Institute, including Hetherington's remark that 'he was for physical force and settling the matter.'[4] Suggestions of a general strike or arousing the rural labourers were not, however, taken up. One spy also reported that the working class leaders were fearful that they would be arrested by the government and that, as a result, they kept moving their meeting place.[5] At the same time, however, he judged from the words of some unionists that 'their (sic) will be one too many of those displays of moral power.'[6]

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1. Wellesley Papers, Add. Mss. 37,306 f. 424.
2. Bouverie to H.O. 20, 26, 29 April H.O. 40/32 ff. 71, 79, 81.
3. H.O. 40/32 ff. 190-1, 193-4.
4. 3 April (Hall's report?) H.O. 64/15.
   1 April (Ball's report) H.O. 64/15.
5. Ball's reports 5, 15 April H.O. 64/15.
6. Ball's report 15 April.

To set against the more sinister reports, Melbourne had the experience of separate visits from Owen and the Committee organising the demonstration, through which he was informed of the peaceful intentions of the procession and of the route to be taken. Melbourne received his visitors with 'his accustomed courtesy', as the True Sun put it,[1] expressed his disapproval of their plans, and informed them that he would be at the Home Office from 11.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. on the day concerned. He told Owen, at least, that he would not receive any petition from a deputation backed by a large procession.[2] He had also refused to accept a N.U.W.C. petition on 11 April because it was 'disrespectfully worded'.[3] There were, therefore, ample signs of how he would treat the procession's official objective.

The Metropolitan magistrates issued a proclamation warning of the dangers of participating in the procession on the 21st but did not forbid it. Melbourne's main strategy, however, was to leave the streets clear for the procession whilst keeping strong forces in reserve. Greville noted that London was 'alive with troops, artillery and police.'[4] Extra troops were in fact brought into London, such as the Life Guards from Windsor, and other bodies arrived a few miles outside. The Household infantry and cavalry were held in their barracks under arms and in readiness. Artillery from Woolwich was stationed in the Horse Guards, Regent's Park, and Knightsbridge.[5] But no soldier was to be seen on the route of the procession and even the two mounted sentries outside the Horse Guards were withdrawn.[6] Several thousand special constables were sworn in, but, learning from the Calthorpe Street affair, Melbourne kept the New Police themselves off the streets. Melbourne could hardly have avoided taking precautions so it was, perhaps, an achievement to have kept them as discreet as this. 'The Examiner', not a

1. 22 April.
2. 'Poor Man's Guardian', 26 April.
3. 'Poor Man's Guardian', 19 April.
4. Greville diary 21 April; III, 81.
5. 'The Standard' 21 April.
6. ibid.

1. 27 April

2. Greville diary 21 April; III, 81.

3. ibid., p. 82.
Journal of Lady Charlotte Guest 1833-1852, ed. Earl of Bessborough (1950), p. 26.

4. The Times 22 April.

5. The Standard 22 April.
The Examiner 27 April.

6. Le Marchant to Lady Holland n.d. [21 April] Add. Mss. 51591, ff. 108-9.

7. Torrens p.283

8. 26 April

9. Howick diary 21 April, Grey Papers.

10. Le Marchant to Lady Holland, Add. Mss. 51591, ff. 108-9.

paper particularly friendly to Melbourne, wrote of his arrangements:

> 'Everything was done in precaution against riot or tumult, and yet there was no menacing or affronting display of force.' 1

There was a good deal of excitement on the day of the procession, despite Greville's bland assertion that

> 'so much has the general alarm of these Unions subsided that there is very little apprehension, though some curiosity to see how it goes off.' 2

The marchers were orderly and peaceful, with many of them respectable-looking.[3] They were, however, numerous: the most reliable estimates agreed upon a figure of 30-35,000 for the procession itself.[4] Some newspapers afterwards were honest enough to admit their relief that everything had been so peaceful.[5] It is possible to detect the same feeling beneath Le Marchant's comment to Lady Holland:

> 'The conspirators did not look very formidable - the Duke of Richmond said that a troop of Horse Guards would have no difficulty in dispersing them.' 6

Melbourne himself felt that he must resist what he saw as an attempt to overawe the government. As the procession moved down Whitehall, he made a point of being seen at one of the front windows of the Home Office.[7] Then a five-man deputation brought into his office the petition for the release of the Dorchester labourers, which had been 'agreed' by 250,000, according to the Poor Man's Guardian, and had been carried around London by twelve men.[8] Phillipps, the permanent secretary, informed the deputation that Melbourne would not receive the petition under such circumstances, but would do so if presented on another day and in a becoming manner. After some demur, the deputation accepted this answer but asked permission to leave the Home Office by the back door into the park, as Howick, who was there as Under Secretary, recorded.[9] Le Marchant, who was also present, characterised it as an attempt 'to abscond by the back way.'[10] What then happened is fully described only in an obituary letter about Melbourne, which necessarily may be inaccurate. According to 'An Old Whig', however, Melbourne himself refused the deputation's

request and told them:

> 'up those stairs you brought your petition, in the eyes of the mob; and down those stairs, in the face of that mob, you must return.' 1

It is at least certain that the deputation, led by a Mr. Brown, came out at the front of the Home Office and related Melbourne's official reply to the crowd. At this news, again according to Melbourne's posthumous tribute,

> 'the mob, in place of shouts of anger and defiance, burst out into peals of laughter, and with that laughter the danger ceased.' 2

At any rate the procession moved on to Kennington Common and there dispersed quietly in the middle of the afternoon.

This was the last encounter Melbourne had with the trade unions, and, indeed, the last with the N.U.W.C. By his successful handling of the situation he redeemed himself, at least with regard to his political reputation, from the worst consequences of the uproar over the Dorchester trial. He had probably blundered into the Tolpuddle affair without knowing exactly what he hoped to achieve from it, and certainly without sufficient appreciation of the nature of the case and its likely results. He tacitly admitted his mistake when he gave way to Russell's demand in October 1835 that the sentences upon the six labourers should be curtailed.[3] Russell's efforts, and those of other campaigners such as the Radical M.P., Thomas Wakley, eventually led to a free pardon for the six men in March 1836.

A final assessment of Melbourne's relations with the trade unions is not easy, especially if it differs in emphasis from that to be found in the work of the Hammonds and Webbs.[4] It seems likely, however, that Melbourne inhibited the development of organised labour a great deal less than did the difficulties inherent in the economic structure of the age; and that, on the whole, he was much less of a persecutor of trade unions than has sometimes been supposed.

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1. Letter to the Times 7 December 1848.
2. ibid.
3. Melbourne to Russell 13 October 1835, MEL/RU/186.
4. J. L. and B. Hammond, The Town Labourer 1760-1832 (1918), p.176; The Skilled Labourer 1760-1832 (1919), p. 133.
   S. and B. Webb, History of Trade Unionism (1920) p. 142.

Conclusion

During Melbourne's time at the Home Office, there were several occasions when, judged even by his own restricted criteria, things went wrong in a way directly attributable to him. The trial of the Dorset labourers was his greatest single mistake, but there were others: the early press prosecutions, the Fast Day affray, the Calthorpe Street riot - all are examples of over-reaction or, at best, negligence on Melbourne's part. But these are the exceptions to the general run. So much else might have gone wrong but did not. In the circumstances, his attitudes were as enlightened, and his methods as felicitous as could be expected. His period as Home Secretary might even be said to have served the interests of a much wider segment of society than that which he himself so obviously represented.

Chapter Three

Governments and General Elections 1834-1841

'the Radicals must be in power before three years are passed', J. A. Roebuck; 'Tait's Edinburgh Magazine', August 1833.

'he [Melbourne] has no common sagacity, and facility of turning himself round and measuring the force of the currents in the Political Ocean', Parkes to Durham, 10 October 1836; J. K. Buckley, Joseph Parkes of Birmingham, p. 156.

By the beginning of 1834 Grey's government was close to breaking up.[1] Radical demands for further reform of the Irish church were supported by Althorp and Russell but opposed by Stanley, Graham, and Richmond. Grey himself had wanted to retire since at least the summer of 1833 and very nearly resigned in January 1834 when a strong minority in his Cabinet opposed his Portuguese policy. Melbourne therefore had good reason to expect a crisis in the next session of Parliament, out of which he feared might emerge a much more Radical government. Nonetheless, he told Frederick Lamb that the Government would resist the Radicals and that he himself had helped to bring about this determination.[2] Melbourne believed he saw 'a greater disposition in the country to quiet and repose, than has been the case for the last three years,' particularly with the return of economic prosperity.[3] Like Althorp and Grey he was ready for a rest from office, but not for a permanent retirement. However, he cautiously added, 'in politics no one can tell ... how long you may remain in or what you may be irresistibly called upon to undertake.'[4]

Melbourne correctly, if a little prematurely assessed the waning of interest in the more extreme Radical ideas such as household suffrage or annual parliaments. He underestimated, however, the strength of feeling in the Commons at least on the subject of the Irish Church. The idea of appropriating to lay uses the surplus revenues of that Church had become the favourite Radical proposal. Russell impetuously declared for the principle of appropriation in his famous speech of 6 May, 1834, at a time when it was not official policy, and received loud applause in the Commons. His action forced the issue and even a compromise commission of inquiry into the Irish Church revenues did not prevent Stanley, Graham, Richmond and Ripon from

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1. Althorp to Littleton 5 Jan. 1834, Add. Mss. 37,306 ff. 308-9.
2. Melbourne to Frederick Lamb 25 Jan., 1 Feb. 1834; Panshanger Papers 28.
3. Melbourne to Frederick Lamb 12 Feb., Panshanger Papers 28.
4. ibid.

resigning at the end of May. Although he might seem as conservative as these four, Melbourne notably did not go out with them. The Irish Church provided the great litmus test in distinguishing liberals from non-liberals. Melbourne silently but deliberately ranged himself with the former.

There followed an even more disruptive Cabinet row over Irish affairs. The Coercion Act of 1833, now due for renewal, contained a ban on political meetings which was intensely disliked by O'Connell's party. Wishing to conciliate the latter, Althorp and Brougham tried to get the offensive clauses dropped. At their instigation, Littleton, the Irish Secretary, secretly persuaded Wellesley, the Lord Lieutenant, to recommend the abandonment of that part of the bill. Littleton also privately assured O'Connell that the bill would be thus amended. Grey and most of the Cabinet, however, insisted on proceeding with the original bill, whereupon O'Connell denounced the whole transaction in the Commons. Althorp felt obliged to resign on 8 July and Grey thankfully did likewise.

Melbourne had expected such a turn of events ever since Wellesley's letter of 21 June supporting a less stringent bill, or so he told Howick on the day that the government broke up.[1] He also complained that one of Wellesley's follies had been to write to Grey rather than to himself, who could have suppressed the letter.[2] Similarly, Melbourne told Mulgrave later that Wellesley, like his predecessor Anglesey, never consulted him about anything, especially if it was thought he would disapprove of the step contemplated.[3] Notwithstanding such behaviour, Melbourne reproached himself with the failure to control the Irish government: he had already admitted to Wellesley that he ought to have kept him better informed of Cabinet opinion on the Coercion bill.[4] Such feelings contributed considerably to his decision to stay in office and help salvage something from the wreck of Grey's administration.

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1. Howick diary n.d. [8 July] Grey Papers.
2. ibid.
3. Melbourne to Mulgrave 19 May 1835, Mulgrave Papers MM/13.
4. Melbourne to Wellesley 30 June, Add. Mss. 37,307 ff. 98-9.

When Grey resigned he advised William IV to send for Melbourne. At one time Grey had thought of Althorp as his successor but the king was unfavourable to the idea and, according to Holland, Grey had, prior to the events of June-July 1834, suggested Melbourne to William IV 'as one who might fill his office with less danger of divisions than most publick men.'[1] Melbourne's name was also put forward by Brougham, in a letter of 9 July to William IV.[2] The Chancellor believed that his intervention was decisive but, in view of the king's dislike of him, this is unlikely. Grey's choice was eminently reasonable in the circumstances. The obvious candidate, apart from Althorp, was Lansdowne but he had no desire for the onerous burden which Grey had been carrying, as he virtually admitted to Greville later.[3] Melbourne himself, and doubtless many others also, had expected that Stanley would eventually succeed Grey as prime minister. A year or so before Grey's resignation Melbourne had met the young Disraeli and, on learning of his ambition to be prime minister, told him:

> 'It is all arranged and settled. ... Nobody can compete with Stanley. ... you must put all these foolish notions out of your head; they won't do at all.' 4

The events of May 1834 had ruined such predictions, however, by leaving Stanley at odds with not only the Radicals but also many Whigs. On the positive side, Melbourne was thought to have qualities appropriate to a prime minister. He had long been thought of as an intelligent, gifted man, even Brougham, who was not given to praise of others, admitting that Melbourne had 'many valuable and even brilliant qualities.'[5] As Home Secretary he had acquired a reputation for firmness, and efficiency at his work;[6] indeed, his time there was crucial in raising him to the front rank of politicians. He was personally popular, the most remarkable testimony to this fact coming from his antagonist Durham

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1. Holland diary Add. Mss. 51,870 ff. 729, 736, 739.
2. Brougham, Life and Times; III, 401.
3. Greville diary 29 Nov. 1848; VI, 250.
4. Torrens pp. 274-5.
5. Brougham, Life and Times; III, 408-9.
6. Holland diary Add. Mss. 51,867 ff. 126-7.
   'The Examiner' 27 July 1834.

who had said that 'Melbourne is the only man to be Prime Minister, because he is the only one of whom none of us would be jealous.'[1] Above all, he was likely to be a conciliatory manager of the Cabinet and party. The long-serving Whig back bencher Sir Robert Heron thought Melbourne an 'admirable choice' whose 'temper and discretion are particularly calculated to cement together the different, and not always accordant parts of the administration.'[2]

There were, therefore, good reasons for Grey to prefer Melbourne. That did not mean, however, that Melbourne himself was eager for the part allotted to him. The well-known remark to his secretary, Thomas Young, that he thought it 'a damned bore'[3] to be prime minister was made not because he was a political dilettante, nor even because he wished to seem that,[4] but because he could see very clearly the difficulties confronting him. He would face the same conditions that had broken Grey: a large Commons majority which was not amenable to control; intractable Irish problems; and a set of colleagues some of whom looked capable of further collusion with the Radicals or O'Connell. Melbourne referred obliquely to such discouraging thoughts in the Lords on 14 July when he said that only

> 'a knowledge of the extreme difficulty in which both his sovereign and the country were now placed, could have induced him to act on this occasion.' 5

Loyalty to the monarchy was no small consideration for Melbourne but his principal concern was for the situation in the Commons and opinion out of doors. The election of December 1832 had not been a triumph for the extreme Radicals: the Commons contained fewer of the 'Blackguard Interest' than Melbourne had once feared.[6] But there was at least a very large anti-Tory majority in the Reformed House, however diverse and ill-assorted it might be. Further reforms in the English and Irish Churches and in English municipal government

1. H. L. Bulwer, Life of Palmerston; II, 203.
2. Sir R. Heron, Notes (1851), pp. 209-10.
3. Greville diary 4 Sept. 1834; III, 129.
4. Ziegler, Melbourne pp. 170-1.
5. Hansard, 3rd series, xxv. 23.
6. Melbourne to Frederick Lamb, 8 Sept. 1832, MP 106/13.

were expected as a minimum; there would also be some difficulty in resisting further political reforms, particularly the ballot. It was conceivable that Peel might form a government with royal support but he was credited with a mere 150 Tories in the Commons. The very existence of such a government, even if it undertook some reforms would probably produce a sharp reaction, possibly a violent one, from the Radicals and Irish. Palmerston foresaw a revival of agitation on the lines of 1831-2 if a Tory government was formed, with an extremist House of Commons resulting, followed by a clash with the House of Lords.[1] Russell feared much the same result if the Whigs failed to form a government;[2] and after Melbourne's government had been formed, Granville wrote from Paris to congratulate the new prime minister on averting just such a disaster.[3] Howick expected to see a Radical government led by Brougham and Durham within six months, an opinion which was fairly objective as it was given before Melbourne had succeeded in forming his own, and before Howick was disappointed of high office.[4] Durham certainly had great hopes at this time[5] and would have been a most suitable figure head for discontented reformers. Melbourne was well aware of all these possibilities and told the Tories in the House of Lords that even if they broke up his government they could not form one of their own.[6] His fears were not confined, moreover, to longer-term developments: he was nervous about a Radical initiative even as he formed his government. When the king raised his obstructive idea of a coalition, Melbourne told the king's secretary, Sir Herbert Taylor, that a new government could not be 'indefinitely postponed, nor even for very many days' and that the Commons, despite Althorp's hold over them, would soon become impatient.[7] For the same reason he hurriedly sent his final terms to the king on 15 July in spite of the fact that, as he admitted to Brougham, they

1. Palmerston to Melbourne 12 July 1834, MP 11/6.
2. S. Rice to Lansdowne 10 July, Torrens p. 292.
3. Granville to Melbourne 21 July 1832, MP 26/77. See also 'The Globe' 10 July.
4. Howick diary 9 July, Grey Papers.
5. Hobhouse diary 29 May 1834; iv, 343-4.
6. 'The Spectator' 19 July 1834.
7. Melbourne to Taylor 11 July, MP 110/9.

'should in truth have been submitted to the Cabinet, but there was not time.'[1] In fact, Melbourne had taken a week to form a government, not a long time by the standards of the age. He clearly felt under some pressure if he thought this a dangerously extended period.

These, then, were the considerations which determined Melbourne's actions from the time when, on 9 July, the king asked him to form a government. The first problem was the king's strong desire for a coalition including the Tories and Stanley. Melbourne knew that this was out of the question in the present state of the Commons. He told William that no common ground existed when the Tories would not accept the government's Irish Tithe bill and Irish Church Commission both of which, but especially the last he felt to be 'vital and essential in the present state of public feeling and opinion.'[2] Melbourne had to agree to inform the opposition leaders of the king's wishes but did so indirectly by sending copies of his own reply to the king of 10 July, which he hoped would cut short any negotiations for a coalition.[3] Although Melbourne's tone was curt and his views unmistakable, this tactic, in fact, prolonged the difficulty because Peel and Wellington merely sent formal acknowledgements of Melbourne's communication. It took another series of letters before William was convinced that they also regarded a coalition as impossible.[4] Melbourne's firmness was of great importance because Peel and Wellington made it clear that it was his attitude, not theirs, which had killed the chances of a coalition government; and that they would have been ready to make the attempt, even in the unfavourable circumstances, including, if necessary, an appeal to the electorate.[5] Melbourne's attitude showed considerable hard-headedness because he liked and admired Stanley, even if not the Tory leaders. He was very sensitive to the Parliamentary

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1. Melbourne to Brougham 16 July, Brougham Papers 43,503.
2. Melbourne to William IV, 10 July, MP 110/3.
3. Melbourne to Wellington 11 July, Torrens p. 290.
   Melbourne to Peel 11 July, Add. Mss. 40,404 f. 197.
4. Wellington to Melbourne 11, 13 July, MP 110/14, 20.
   Peel to Melbourne 11, 13 July, MP 110/13, 22.
5. N. Gash, Sir Robert Peel (1972), p. 71

situation, to the point of fearing that his enforced communication with Peel and Wellington would damage him in the eyes of those whom he was attempting to lead and control in the Commons.[1] It is true that William was in a weak position because he had a horror of another dissolution at this time,[2] but in any case Melbourne was too anxious for the rapid creation of a stable administration to be over-tender of the king's feelings. He told William that he reserved the right to reform the Church in both England and Ireland 'as may appear to be advisable' and refused to adopt any principle of exclusion in the appointment of ministers.[3] The king did not like this treatment but, sensibly recognising Melbourne's underlying moderation, late on 15 July he approved his Cabinet list.

In constructing his Cabinet Melbourne's principal difficulty had been to persuade Althorp to withdraw his resignation and remain as Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the Commons. As Melbourne said 'it seems that Althorp is the Tortoise on which the world now rests.'[4] It took some hours of argument on Melbourne's part to persuade Althorp to remain.[5] Three days later, on 17 July, Althorp nearly resigned again when Littleton offered his resignation. He had to be dissuaded by the king in person, with Grey adding his pleas, and Melbourne was obliged to retain Littleton as Irish Secretary.[6] Many of the other figures in Grey's government also remained at their posts. Following Lady Holland,[7] Ziegler claims that the whole government was really Grey's and not Melbourne's at all.[8] It is not easy to accept this view. Even in terms of personnel Melbourne made important changes. Sir John Hobhouse and the Earl of Mulgrave were promoted to the Cabinet, both carrying reputations as liberal Whigs. The appointment of Duncannon as

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1. Melbourne to Brougham 12 July, Brougham Papers 43,502.
2. Greville diary 10 July; III, 104.
3. Melbourne to William IV, 15 July, Sanders pp. 204-8.
4. Littleton to Wellesley 14 July, Torrens p. 293.
5. Torrens p. 293.
6. Greville diary 17 July; III, 111.
7. Lady Holland to Henry Fox 25 July; Lady Holland to her Son ed. Lord Ilchester (1946) p. 151.
8. Ziegler, op.cit., p.174.

1. Howick diary 18 July, Grey Papers.
2. 19 July; July 1834 pp. 520-1.
3. Holland diary n.d. [summer 1834] Add. Mss.51870 f. 728.
4. Howick diary 10, 15 July, Grey Papers.
5. Holland diary, n.d. [summer 1834] Add. Mss. 51,870 f. 740.
   Howick diary 19 July, Grey Papers.
   (E. J. Stanley is to be distinguished from his greater namesake, Lord Stanley, later 14th Earl of Derby, who had resigned in May 1834.
6. Melbourne to Brougham 13 October 1835, Brougham Papers 43,538.
7. Hansard, 3rd series, xxv. 46-7.
8. Holland diary, n.d. [summer 1834] Add. Mss. 51,870 f.749.
9. 'Address to the Reformers of England and Ireland' 1834;
   D. Southgate, The Passing of the Whigs (1965), p.42.
10. Holland diary, n.d. [summer 1834] Add. Mss. 51,870 f. 749.
11. Melbourne to Holland, Add. Mss. 51,558 f. 62.
12. Brock, GRA p. 316.
    I.D.C. Newbould, 'The Politics of the Cabinets of Grey and Melbourne, and Ministerial Relations with the House of Commons, 1830-1841 (Manchester Univ. D.Phil. thesis 1971), p.212.

Home Secretary was an even more important move: the leading Whig sympathizer with O'Connell and Irish grievances now directly controlled the government of Ireland. Melbourne could not, however, rid himself of the trouble-making Brougham and cheerfully admitted to Howick that the Chancellor 'will end some day by blowing up both us and himself.'[1] The new government was well received by the independent liberal press: The Spectator noted a solid block of liberals in the Cabinet and was pleased that Melbourne was at least not an 'Obstructive': the Edinburgh Review thought the government had 'given universal satisfaction to the friends of liberal principles throughout the country.'[2] It was not so well received by Grey and his family. Once out of office Grey began to feel undervalued and neglected;[3] he therefore took a certain gloomy pleasure in foreseeing difficulties for Melbourne.[4] On personal and political grounds he was also displeased by the appointments of Duncannon, Mulgrave, and E. J. Stanley (now an Under Secretary).[5]

There were more profound reasons for the alienation of Grey. Melbourne always tried to deny that there was any great difference between Grey's government and his own, but in this he was deceiving himself.[6] He agreed, reluctantly and with many disclaimers, to pass the Coercion bill without the contentious clauses which Wellesley had so belatedly rejected.[7] This in itself seemed a triumph for the English Radicals and O'Connell; Duncannon's appointment and the pursuit of further reform of the Irish Church made it worse. According to Holland, Grey had a 'childish aversion to O'Connell'[8] who had, indeed, attacked him in bitter personal terms;[9] as a result 'any compliances with him [O'Connell] however inevitable were arraigned with less delicacy or disguise than was agreeable to Lord Melbourne'.[10] Melbourne did not like O'Connell and as late as 10 July he expressed his belief in the need for a coercion bill with all the disputed clauses included.[11] He was prepared, however, to subordinate these feelings to the greater question of securing political stability in England and Ireland as a whole. To say that Melbourne was a pliant prime minister is true enough[12] but it somewhat misses the point

that in July 1834 he made a realistic appraisal of the political scene and took determined action, an achievement of which Grey was no longer capable. Of great importance were their differing attitudes to the House of Commons. Grey blamed his resignation on the vociferous demands of the majority there, claiming that he could not pursue his own policies.[1] Melbourne was ready to respond to such demands in the hope of controlling them; in the last resort he would also admit that he sympathised with them, particularly in the case of a more conciliatory policy towards Ireland. Althorp reported to his father that Melbourne agreed measures should be calculated to please the Commons and that the opinions of the Lords should not be attended to 'so much as Lord Grey has hitherto attended to them.'[2] In illustration, when the Irish Tithe bill was defeated in the Lords in August 1834, Grey thought the government should resign. He believed that Melbourne's determination not to do so showed a desire to reduce the Lords' power by ignoring them.[3] Melbourne himself thought that such a policy of exclusive reliance on the Commons in defiance of the Lords was 'rather awkward and objectionable ... seeing that it is directly contary to the spirit and theory of the constitution.'[4] It was, however, a policy which he made his own in July 1834 and adhered to throughout his years as prime minister.

Once in office Melbourne cautiously continued a reforming policy for Ireland.[5] Development of plans for England and Ireland was cut short by the elevation of Althorp to the Lords as a result of his father's death on 10 November. This necessitated considerable changes in the government and on 18 November Melbourne wrote to the king asking for an opportunity to discuss these. His letter was somewhat vaguely phrased. He left it open to the king to seek advice from others and to take any action which might benefit

1. Grey to Holland 2 Nov. 1835, Add. Mss. 51,557 f.64.
2. Althorp to Earl Spencer 13 July 1834, Spencer Papers.
3. Grey to Princess Lieven 15 August 1834, Correspondence of Princess Lieven and Earl Grey, ed. Le Strange (1890), III, 4.
4. Melbourne to Mulgrave 23 Sept. 1836, Mulgrave Papers MM/103.
5. See below p.227-9

the country.[1] In retrospect this seems to have made it only too easy for the king to get rid of Melbourne's government. Melbourne could scarcely have thought a Tory government much more viable than he had done in July and his intention was almost certainly to give William the opportunity of inviting Althorp to become prime minister. Even if there was only a slight chance of this happening, it would be well worthwhile to keep Althorp in politics, as well as fair to the king to suggest it. Probably he assumed that his own government would continue. He sounded his colleagues and decided on Russell as the new Commons Leader.[2]

When Melbourne arrived for his interview at Brighton, however, he found the king in no mood to listen to such plans or to his own declaration of willingness to continue the government. William had been deeply suspicious of the government's plans ever since Stanley resigned and was especially fearful of what might be intended for the Irish Church. Duncannon had made some unguarded disclosures about the possibility of appropriation.[3] On a personal level, William could scarcely control his dislike of Brougham and felt little more tender towards Russell. The precise details of Melbourne's reaction to the king's hostile reception are not clear. William afterwards claimed to Wellington that Melbourne had stressed divisions within the Cabinet over the Irish Church and thus provoked his dismissal.[4] This, however, was the unreliable assertion of a not over-intelligent and extremely worried old man who badly needed to persuade Wellington to rescue him from a very awkward situation. There is, in fact, no good evidence that Melbourne wittingly did anything of the sort. He was not as yet absolutely sure of support from Lansdowne and Rice for Duncannon's Irish Church plans; but he admitted to William only that there might be differences over details.[5]

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1. Melbourne to William IV, 12 Nov., Sanders pp. 219-21.
2. Holland diary 12 Nov., Add. Mss. 51,870 f. 771.
3. ibid., n.d. [12-13 Nov.] Add. Mss. 51,870 ff. 776-7.
4. A. Macintyre, The Liberator (1965), p. 135-6.
5. Holland diary, Add. Mss. 51,870 f. 777.

Melbourne also stressed that, despite the loss of Althorp, the government retained the confidence of the Commons.[1] He was unyielding on the key issue of the Irish Church. Holland recorded Melbourne's belief that if he

> 'could have guaranteed him [William] against any such Church measure, he would according to his conjecture have obtained his concurrence in the other arrangements.' 2

As a result, William virtually dismissed his ministers that evening. According to one account, he was so wrought up that, after regaling Melbourne with naval anecdotes at dinner, he suddenly told him 'there is no help for it, you must all resign.'[3] A formal dismissal came on the morning of 14 November. On this occasion Melbourne tried to point out to the king the dangerous consequences of defying a large majority in the Commons but he was too proud to remonstrate with him for long.[4] That he was surprised and even slightly bitter at his treatment may be gauged from his parting remark to Sir Herbert Taylor, who had also been George III's Secretary, that 'your old master would not have done this.'[5] Melbourne took back to London what he knew to be a royal summons to the Duke of Wellington, but only because, as he later said, it would have been 'the most captious, churlish, ungracious conduct to refuse.'[6]

It can be argued that Melbourne made light of these events. He told Grey that he could sympathise with the king's motives and that he had no personal cause for complaint.[7] Back in London on the evening of 14 November, Greville saw him laughing cheerfully at a play involving the dismissal of a minister.[8] After four hard years in office Melbourne was human enough to feel that 'after a time one gets tired of being out and longs for office again, but at first nothing can be more delightful.'[9] None of this, however, should

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1. Melbourne to Grey 18 Nov., Grey Papers.
2. Holland diary, n.d. [12-16 Nov.] Add. Mss. 51,570 ff. 778.
3. Lord David Cecil, Lord M. (1954), p. 118.
4. Torrens p. 311.
5. Torrens p. 312.
6. Hansard, 3rd series, xxvi, 88 (1835)
7. Melbourne to Grey 14 Nov., Grey Papers.
8. Greville diary 17 Nov.; III, 151-2.
9. Melbourne to Holland 25 Nov., Add. Mss. 51,558 ff. 74-5.

detract from his opinion that William IV's action was 'a fearful expedient' and 'what will be the consequences God only knows.'[1] Melbourne discerned the gradual conservative reaction in the country: he warned reformers soon after his dismissal that although they

> 'were strong in principles ... and had the sympathy of a large body of the country ... they were not strong enough to afford to be disunited.' 2

But he knew that it was too soon to flout their opinions in the way the king had done. The fact that he did not publicly condemn William is hardly surprising: to do so would have been disloyal. Melbourne had no time for the activities of Brougham and the press, as he told Grey 'the efforts made to raise a flame in London seem to me quite contemptible, and to proceed from the lowest quarters.'[3] Avoiding at all costs such an example, Melbourne therefore made a very cautious speech on 26 November when an address was presented to him in Derbyshire which praised his ministry and regretted its dismissal.[4] Perhaps prompted by representations from his party, he came out into the open rather more when a second address was presented on 1 December at Melbourne Hall. On this occasion he commented on the abrupt nature of the dissolution of the government and emphatically denied that the Cabinet was divided in itself and would have broken up anyway.[5]

He had, indeed, every reason to be annoyed at the circumstances of his dismissal and worried by the likely political consequences. He feared that partisan feelings would be aroused by the existence of a Tory government and an imminent general election. Duncannon warned him that the party, which would have listened to him whilst he was prime minister, was now 'irritated, and in that state plunges into promises that I am aware must embarrass a new government.'[6] Melbourne himself wrote anxiously to Mulgrave on 12 December:

> 'For God's sake get our people, if you can, not to pledge themselves about Ballot and the duration of Parliaments ...' 7

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1. Melbourne to Grey 18, 14 Nov., Grey Papers.
2. Derbyshire speech; 'The Times' 5 Dec.
3. Melbourne to Grey 19 Nov., Grey Papers.
4. 'The Times' 29 Nov.
5. 'The Times' 5 Dec.
6. Duncannon to Melbourne 18 Dec. MP 3/29
7. Melbourne to Mulgrave 12 Dec., Mulgrave Papers MM/6.

1. Ziegler, Melbourne p. 185
2. D. M. Close, 'The Formation of a two party alignment in the House of Commons between 1832 and 1841', Eng. Hist. Rev., lxxxiv (1969) p. 261.
3. Hansard, 3rd series, xxvi.79 (1835)
4. Wood to S. Rice, 24 Jan. 1835, Monteagle Papers 13,379.
   Ellice to Durham, 18 Feb. 1835, Lambton Papers.
   Gash, Peel, p. 101.
   D. M. Close, 'The General Elections of 1835 and 1837 in England and Wales' (Oxford D. Phil. thesis 1967), p. 213, estimates the Radicals at 99 and points out that they were proportionately stronger than in the old Parliament on account of the Whigs' losses in the election.
5. Macintyre, The Liberator, p. 137.
6. Melbourne to Grey, 23 Jan. 1835, Grey Papers.
7. ibid.

It is therefore very difficult to accept Ziegler's view that Melbourne 'was not merely ready to accept dismissal but positively welcomed it.'[1] The idea that Melbourne might risk serious political upheavals merely for an uncertain chance of returning to office on his own terms, freed from 'the ugly heritage of Grey's government', shows a limited understanding of his political priorities.

The political temperature, in fact, greatly increased when Peel brought about the election of January 1835. Most candidates firmly aligned themselves for or against Peel; party animosities hardened.[2] The Tories benefitted greatly from a rally in defence of the Church and Constitution, and from Peel's commitment to moderate reform in the Tamworth Manifesto. They also had the advantages of an efficient electoral machine and undoubted royal support. They gained nearly sixty borough seats and thirty five county seats overall, finishing nearly three hundred strong in a House of 658. But, as Melbourne himself later emphasised, Peel's gamble, although remarkably successful, had not been successful enough.[3] The supporters of the late government had been diminished in numbers but those who returned did so with a greater commitment to reforms and a stronger anti-Tory feeling than before. This applied to most of the Whigs who survived; it certainly applied to the Radicals, variously estimated at seventy three, one hundred and twelve, and even one hundred and fifty in the new Commons.[4] Moreover, O'Connell now controlled over sixty Irish members.[5] It looked as though Peel would have against him a majority whose violent partisanship more than made up for reduced numbers.

These results left Melbourne in a difficult position. Writing to Grey on 23 January, he attributed the Tory successes principally to 'the natural influence of the Government and of the King's' but he also thought that they showed 'to a certain degree a change of opinion in the country.'[6] He was uncertain of his course when

> 'the elections have been for the most part very hardly contested, and very nearly run, which shows a very even balance of parties.' 7

He expected there to be a majority 'very inveterate against the Ministry and eager for action.' But he wondered greatly whether he should agree to lead such a majority and

> 'engage in a political warfare with the Crown, with the decided majority of the House of Peers, with almost the whole of the clergy, and ... with three parts at least of the gentlemen of the country.' 1

Since he refused utterly to have anything more to do with Brougham, Durham, or O'Connell as persons, Melbourne was not even sure that he would have a majority to lead.[2] These views show Melbourne in his most puzzled and indecisive mood. The prospects before him were even more troubled and uncertain than they had been in July 1834; he therefore half-hoped to evade his responsibilities. But he must have known that the odds were against this. His own words provide the best answer to one of the crucial questions he raised in his letter to Grey quoted above. Over a year later, he reminded the House of Lords that the interests represented by the majority there

> 'are not omnipotent in this country; nor were they omnipotent when other interests, such as those of towns and cities, the interest of commerce and manufacturers, the interests of the Dissenters, and the general opinion of the people, were all as nothing compared with what they are now.' 3

As in July 1834 it was necessary to lead and restrain the representatives of these other interests.

Moreover, Melbourne had a certain pride in vindicating his policy and government of the previous year. As early as 29 December 1834 he had agreed that it was right to oppose the election of Manners Sutton as Speaker in the new Commons because he had taken a prominent part in the formation of Peel's government, including the actual dissolution of Parliament.[4] Subsequently, Melbourne pressed the rather reluctant Abercromby to stand as the Whig candidate, after being urged to this course by Hobhouse, Poulett Thomson and other radical

1. ibid.
2. ibid.
3. Hansard, 3rd series, xxxiv. 885 (27 June 1836)
4. Melbourne to Russell 29 Dec. 1834, MAL/RU/133.

1. Duncannon to Melbourne 16 Jan. 1835, MP 3/30.
Melbourne to Holland 21 January 1835, Add. Mss. 51,558 f. 68.
Hobhouse to Melbourne 19 Jan. 1835, MP 6/78.

2. Grey to Melbourne 1, 3 February 1835, MP 5/128, 129.

3. Melbourne to C. Rice 30 Jan. 1835, Torrens p. 340.

4. Torrens p. 328.

5. Melbourne to Grey 23 Jan. 1835, Grey Papers.
Melbourne to Holland 21 Jan. 1835, Add. Mss. 51,558 ff. 68-9.

6. Grey to Melbourne 1 February 1835, MP 5/128.
Melbourne to Grey 6 February 1835, Grey Papers.
Lansdowne to Holland 25 January, Add. Mss. 51,688 ff. 64-6.

7. A. D. Kriegel, 'The Politics of the Whigs in Opposition 1834-35', The Journal of British Studies, Vol. VII no. 2, May 1968 p.90.

8. Close, 'Two party alignment', p. 264.

9. Melbourne to Holland 12 Feb. 1835, Add. Mss. 51,558 f. 80.

10. Ellice to Durham 11 April 1835; A. Aspinall, Lord Brougham and the Whig Party (1939), p. 296.

11. Stanley to Graham 30 Jan. 1835, Graham Papers 29.

12. Melbourne to Holland 10 Feb. 1835, Add. Mss. 51,558 ff. 78-9.

colleagues.[1] This opposition on the Speakership went against Grey's decided opinion[2] and the choice of Abercromby involved the sacrifice of Spring Rice who, though highly eligible as the 'protégé' of Lansdowne, was unacceptable to the Radicals.[3] Another early indication that Melbourne was prepared to lead a Whig-Radical coalition is to be found in his attitude towards Stanley. He was still on good personal terms with him and, indeed, they met socially in December 1834.[4] But Melbourne was well aware of the strong antipathies which many of his potential supporters had for Stanley and Graham.[5] He therefore ignored Grey's opinion, shared by Lansdowne, that he should look to Stanley 'as a necessary card in the formation of a new administration.'[6]

Despite these indications of what he might do, Melbourne on the whole pursued a cautious policy until he could judge the strength of the parties in Parliament. He has been criticised for ineffective leadership in this situation[7] but it was only sensible to await developments when the political scene was so obscure. No one could be sure how many moderates might not attach themselves to the new government; at least forty members had been Reformers in the previous parliament but became Conservatives in the new one.[8] In addition, Melbourne would have to carry the conservative section of the Whigs in anything he undertook. Grey was still a force in the party;[9] Lansdowne and Rice were, if anything, more important than him; and there were sixty or seventy Whigs in the Commons who would not tolerate O'Connell in office and would therefore regard any move towards him with great suspicion.[10] Given these feelings in his closest supporters and given what Stanley called 'the present dislocation of parties',[11] it is understandable that Melbourne should have proceeded warily. Nor would he commit himself to an alliance with the Radicals and Irish merely for the sake of turning out Peel, much though he was otherwise disposed to do that, unless there was some prospect of forming a stable government afterwards. As he told Holland, he feared that such an alliance would be shortlived and followed by 'the most bitter hostility' on the part of the Radicals and Irish.[12] He thought it 'a very desperate plunge' to

evict Peel

> 'when I see so much weakness and contradiction in our own camp, and so much of difficulty that appears to me almost insuperable'. 1

On the basis of the opposition from Radicals and Irish which Grey's government had experienced this was not an unreasonable verdict. It ignored, however, the extent to which both groups were now prepared to come to terms with the Whigs in some acceptable compromise. The Radicals had been chastened by Tory successes in the late elections and O'Connell feared that Orange government was about to be re-established in Ireland. In early February 1835 Melbourne did not appreciate this development. Or perhaps he did not want to recognise the almost inevitable alliance of all those who, in their various ways, wanted to upset the status quo.

Logically, he ought to have tried to reach an agreement with those who, as Holland assured him, aspired to be led by him.[2] But he could not bring himself to negotiate with men like Hume and O'Connell. Melbourne's attitude towards the efforts of his subordinates in the same direction was, however, ambivalent. Such a policy originated with those who had formed the recent Whig election committee: Ellice, Duncannon, Hobhouse, Mulgrave and Thomson, assisted by Parkes. Melbourne had been informed as early as 19 January, by Hobhouse, that they planned to assemble all the Reform MPs for a dinner on 19 February, and, further, had been asked his opinion of such a move.[3] It is not clear what, if anything, he said in reply but at least he did not veto such a meeting. About this time Duncannon seems to have begun overtures to O'Connell, if Russell's later statement to Howick is correct.[4] What else took place in the lower echelons of the party is uncertain. By early February Melbourne had got wind of such communications between O'Connell and those of the party who 'worship him as the savages do the evil Demon'[5] but he did not

1. Melbourne to Holland 12, 10 Feb., Add. Mss. 51,558 ff. 80, 78-9.
2. Holland to Melbourne 9 Feb. 1835, MP 7/12.
3. Hobhouse to Melbourne 19 Jan. 1835, MP 6/78.
4. Howick diary 16 Feb., Grey Papers.
5. Melbourne to Russell 5 Feb. 1835 PRO/RU/141.

interfere directly. Instead he apologised for such occurences to Grey, adding rather disingenuously 'you will not suspect me of countenancing or even of being conscious of them.'[1]

How far Melbourne was deliberately turning a blind eye at this time cannot be known. Similarly it is not certain whether or not he saw the full implications of allowing the whips to 'send out letters for an attendance to oppose Sutton.'[2] This was apparently sanctioned about 1 February with Russell's concurrence. The most Radical of the whips, Warburton, used this permission to send notes of invitation to O'Connell and all his supporters to attend a meeting of anti-Tory M Ps at Lichfield House on 18 February.[3] It must be presumed that since Melbourne had already refused to authorise regular contact with the Irish[4] he did not expect such a move. It is possible that Russell was also misled by the whips. On 11 February he tentatively asked Melbourne's opinion of 'a meeting on the 18th to which Whigs, Radicals, and Repealers should be invited' and from which 'a marked union or discussion between the parties might be expected to follow.'[5] Melbourne replied that any meeting should be postponed till after the 18th and that once the speakership question was settled they could see whether a meeting would be useful.[6]

At the same time, however, Melbourne finally committed himself to a broad Liberal alliance, with or without formal party meetings. He did so in response only to Russell's clear announcement in his letter of 11 February that he would not serve in any government which did not adopt appropriation.[7] This forced Melbourne to make up his mind. He could see that appropriation

1. Melbourne to Grey 6 Feb. 1835 Grey Papers.
2. Grey to Melbourne 3 Feb. 1835 Sanders p. 248.
3. Southgate op.cit. p. 58.
4. Russell to Lansdowne 28 Jan. 1835; J. M. Prest, Lord John Russell (1972), p. 88.
5. Russell to Melbourne 11 Feb., Sanders p. 255.
6. Melbourne to Russell 12 Feb. MML/RU/143.
7. Russell to Melbourne, Sanders p. 255.

was a very dubious policy to take up. From different parts of the country, experienced observers such as Abercromby and Grey warned that such a move would be seen as an alliance with papists and agitators, and that it would be electorally very damaging to the Whigs.[1] But, if he wanted to form a stable government, Melbourne had little alternative except to defer to the mood of the Commons and to the ultimatum of an indispensable colleague like Russell. He therefore made his choice of evils and came out into the open on Russell's side. In doing so, at least Melbourne had the consolation of believing that, as an abstract question, redistribution of Church revenues in Ireland was entirely right.[2]

Reassured on this fundamental matter, Russell was still rather alarmed to receive O'Connell's acceptance of the invitation to the meeting on 18 February. He consulted Duncannon who persuaded him not to rebuff O'Connell and also advised him to consult Melbourne.[3] Assuming that Russell acted on this advice and saw Melbourne when he arrived in London from Hertfordshire on 15 February, it would appear that Melbourne was responsible for allowing the meeting to go ahead as planned. However this may be, it is certainly arguable that the Lichfield House meeting was the almost inescapable outcome of a chain of events starting with Melbourne's original decision to oppose the election of Manners Sutton. It would anyway have been unwise, after the experience of the previous summer, to break this second agreement with O'Connell.

When the Whigs, Radicals and Irish met on 18 February at Lichfield House, Russell restricted the proceedings to agreement on the choice of Abercromby as their candidate for the Chair. As soon as the meeting was over he and Melbourne both agreed that there must be no more such occasions.[4] As a result a second meeting, to discuss the Amendment to the Address in the Commons, which had been projected by the more radical Whig organisers, failed to take place.

1. Abercromby to Melbourne n.d. [early 1835] MP 3/146.
   Grey to Lillice 22 Jan. 1835 Lillice Papers 19 f. 49.
2. Melbourne to Russell 12 Feb., PRO/RU/143.
3. Prest, Russell, p.89
4. Howick diary 18 Feb., Grey Papers.

1. Hansard, 3rd series, xxvii, 997-9.
Melbourne to Bishop of Exeter 7 Dec. 1837, Sanders p. 369.

2. For use of the word see Close 'Two party alignment' p. 264 n.7.

3. Melbourne to Grey 6 Feb., Grey Papers.

4. Howick to Grey 9 March, Grey Papers.

5. Parkes to Durham 3 April, Lambton Papers.
Newbould, 'Cabinets of Grey and Melbourne', p. 247.

6. Stanley to Howick, Graham to Howick, 13 March, Grey Papers.

7. J. Grant, Random Recollections of the House of Commons (1836), p. 152.
Torrens p. 351.

8. Melbourne to Spencer, n.d. [mid April 1835],
Le Marchant, Althorp, p. 538.

9. ibid.
See also Melbourne to Howick 1 June 1836, Grey Papers.

Melbourne always denied that any compact had been agreed at Lichfield House or anywhere else.[1] There was some truth in this but he could hardly evade the fact that for practical purposes a Liberal[2] alliance had been created. In some ways, however, what mattered even more was the actual vote in the Commons on 19 February in which Manners Sutton was defeated by 316-306. This was an impressive result considering that it was an issue where cross-voting favoured the Tories. It demonstrated to Melbourne that a considerable Liberal majority existed and, as he had foreseen, it could not now be stopped once it had tasted success.[3] If Peel's government could not be expected to last long anyway, then the safest course would be for Melbourne and Russell to supply moderate leadership for the opposition attack. The only alternative suggestion came from Howick, in his own way as anti-Radical as Melbourne. His solution was to re-unite with Stanley and, eventually, join Peel.[4] Fears of just such a 'vile coalition' were expressed by Parkes; and it has recently been argued that up to 230 Whigs might have supported such a venture.[5] Such views are, however, unrealistic. They ignore profound differences over the Irish Church, which Stanley and Graham pointed out to Howick.[6] And it was asking too much even of moderate Whigs to stomach an alliance with Peel and the Tories after their recent divisions. When Stanley made his bid for an independent, moderate party he initially attracted 30-40 M Ps (on 25 February), but by the beginning of April he could hold no more than a dozen or so.[7] Howick's campaign in early March therefore came to nothing, in spite of the backing of Grey himself up in Northumberland.

For Melbourne it was not only a question of heading off Radical-Irish excesses; it was also necessary to assert the just claims of what he called 'the Whig and Liberal party'[8] against the Tories. When he was forming his second government in April 1835 he told Spencer that if the attempt failed

> 'that party will most probably sink into insignificance, or be only able to aspire to a share of power in conjunction with, or probably in subordination to its opponents.' 9

Even making allowance for Melbourne's wish to find an argument which would bring Spencer out of retirement, it is a revealing statement. This feeling against the Tories emerges very clearly in Melbourne's speech in the Lords on 24 February.[1] He held Wellington responsible for the change in government, a well-aimed attack since Wellington had had doubts about accepting the king's commission in November 1834. He blamed Wellington and Peel jointly for the dissolution which had enhanced radical feeling and disrupted the country just when it

> 'was approaching to that state of quiet and repose which it is to be hoped, we are some day or other to enjoy.' [2]

He felt bitter against Peel personally. Whilst he regarded most Tories as stupid, uncultivated backwoodsmen,[3] he recognised Peel's intellectual qualities but thought him a disagreeable and deceitful parvenu. He believed that Peel had deserted his liberal convictions of the 1820's for the sake of remaining Tory leader during the Reform Bill crisis. So dominated by the events of 1830-2 was Melbourne that he could never admire Peel again. He regarded Peel's adoption of reforming measures in 1835 as mere hypocrisy; later that year he described them contemptuously as 'a series of clap-traps such as were thought calculated to win and gain over the people.'[4] Accordingly, in February 1835, Melbourne lashed Peel's government as having 'no object in view but a change of men, by a wanton act of power.'[5]

Melbourne clearly intended to remain leader of the opposition to Peel but left it to others to devise tactics. In early March the Radicals applied pressure when Ward gave notice of a motion on appropriation and Hume proposed to limit supplies for three months. Russell then decided to take the initiative into his own hands. A second Liberal meeting at Lichfield House on

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1. Hansard, 3rd series, xxvi. 75-81.
2. ibid. xxvi. 79.
3. Hatherton diary 24 March 1841.
   Lady Longford, Victoria R.I., p. 94.
4. Hansard, xxx. 1,254-6.
5. ibid., xxvi. 80.

1. Kriegel, 'Politics of the Whigs in Opposition', p. 87.
2. Melbourne to Brougham 13 Oct. 1835, Brougham Papers 43,538.
3. Charmcliffe to Peel 13 May 1837, Add. Mss. 40,423 f. 229.
4. Melbourne to Russell 25 March, MEL/RU/146.
5. Howick diary 5 April, Grey Papers.
6. Howick diary 9 April.
7. Cecil, Lord M., p. 121.
8. Littleton diary 16 April 1835, Hatherton Papers.

12 March agreed to try a vote of no confidence if the appropriation resolution passed.[1] Melbourne could see all the disadvantages of this weapon as clearly as ever. As he explained to Brougham later in 1835, such a resolution was 'a piece of great rashness and imprudence. When brought forward I was obliged to act upon my own opinion, but the pressing it forward I much disapproved.'[2] It may be surmised that Melbourne would have preferred to allow Peel to pass the Irish Tithe bill which he had introduced. He certainly told Wharncliffe in 1837, 'I wanted them to have proposed a direct vote to turn you out, but they said they could not carry it.'[3]

As things were, however, Melbourne was caught. A third Lichfield House meeting on 23 March co-ordinated the Liberals' plans; on 28 March, after Russell had given notice in the Commons of his motion on appropriation, Whigs, Radicals and Irish attended a convivial opposition dinner. Melbourne held aloof from such activities but he worked on the wording of the resolution, with Russell and Duncannon, to make it as explicit as possible.[4] On 5 April a meeting of leading Whigs, at Melbourne's house where he was laid up with gout, agreed on a Commons motion that no settlement of Irish tithes without the appropriation principle would be satisfactory.[5] In this way Melbourne was intimately involved in the succession of defeats on the Irish Church which Peel's government suffered in the Commons. On 7 April the appropriation principle was carried for a second time, by a majority of 27. On 8 April Peel resigned.

The next day the King sent for Grey, but only to propose a coalition government. Grey told him this was impossible and advised him to consult Melbourne and Lansdowne: they confirmed Grey's opinion.[6] It has been said that Melbourne used his confidante, Mrs. Norton, to see if any coalition was possible with the moderate Tories.[7] This is an isolated piece of evidence and does not fit in with the rest of Melbourne's behaviour during these months. It directly conflicts, moreover, with Stanley's complaint to Littleton that the Whigs

> 'had not acted with candor and frankness and cordiality towards him, ... had explained to him nothing of our Intentions, nor ascertained how far union was practicable on any point.' 8

Melbourne cannot, therefore, have been surprised when the King asked him to form a government on his own on 11 April. But even then he was reluctant to undertake the task.[1] Despite recent events in the Commons he must still have had doubts about the reliable nature of any understanding with the Radicals and Irish. More immediately, he could foresee great difficulties in the matter of appointments in any new government. He had long been preoccupied with what to do about O'Connell and Brougham, to say nothing of Wellesley, Littleton, and Ellice, whom he also wished to exclude.[2] Some Whigs wished also to exclude Palmerston from the Foreign Office; to deny him the post would not be an easy matter, however. One unexpected personal difficulty presented itself when Spring Rice, discontented at his failure to become Speaker, discovered belated scruples over appropriation and declined to join any new government. Since Rice represented the more conservative Whigs and was a useful debater, Melbourne knew it was important to 'carry him along with us.'[3]

Under these circumstances Melbourne somewhat surprisingly tried to persuade Grey to return as prime minister, or at least as foreign secretary.[4] He cannot have had much hope of the first proposition and it was, perhaps, as a means of containing Palmerston that he issued the invitation. It was backed by the leading Whigs and by the King but made no impression on Grey. The latter was opposed to any association with Radicals and Irish, disheartened by indifference to him on the part of many Whigs, and perhaps piqued that the King had not directly asked him to form a government at the outset;[5] he therefore refused both offers.[6] Even before he received Grey's answer Melbourne was inclined to be pessimistic. To keep him up to the mark required reminders from his brother Frederick, Palmerston, and even the usually faint-hearted

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1. Holland diary 10-14 April, Add. Mss. 51,870 f. 797.
   Melbourne to Lansdowne 11 April, Monteagle Papers 13,380.
2. Melbourne to Grey 23 Jan. 1835 Grey Papers.
3. Melbourne to Lansdowne 11 April, Monteagle Papers 13,380.
4. Melbourne to Grey 11 April, Grey Papers.
5. Howick diary 9, 10 April.
6. Grey to Melbourne 12 April, RP 5/132.

Lansdowne, that it would be discreditable to eject Peel's government and not to form a replacement.[1] Forced to face the logic of the situation which, as in July 1834, left him as virtually the only person both qualified and available to lead a Liberal coalition, Melbourne now proceeded to form an administration with speed and firmness.

In the first place he extracted considerable concessions from the King. He required all the Household Officers who sat in Parliament to give unequivocal support to his government and asked for up to eight new peerages as a mark of royal favour. Melbourne also maintained the principle that no individual should be excluded from office. William raised some objection to these demands but Melbourne successfully insisted on them.[2] When the King objected to the projected reform of the Irish Church, Melbourne made it plain that he stood by the Commons' resolutions on the subject and would not allow William to submit his conscientious scruples to a body of judges.[3] He did not stop William appealing to Lyndhurst for his opinion as Lord Chancellor but that mattered little, for Lyndhurst, as Melbourne foresaw, dared not act as a wrecker at this stage.[4] Late on the evening of 16 April the King gave up all his objections and confirmed Melbourne's appointments.

He had less success when it came to Palmerston. On 14 April he had what must have been a delicate interview with Palmerston in which the latter was informed, as he later recorded,

> 'that it was thought by some that with reference especially to the Maintenance of friendly Relations between us and the Great Powers of the Continent it might be more advantageous to the Government that I should take some other than the Foreign Office.'[5]

Grey's opinion was similar but even stronger.[6] Palmerston, however, defended

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1. Holland diary 10-14 April, Add. Mss. 51,870 f. 799.
   Palmerston to Melbourne 12 April, MP 11/13.
2. Melbourne to William IV 13, 15 April, Sanders pp. 271, 275.
3. ibid. pp. 273-4.
4. Melbourne to Grey 16 April, Grey Papers.
   N. Gash, Reaction and Reconstruction in English Politics, 1832-1852 (1965) p. 17.
5. Palmerston memorandum GC/ML/27/5.
6. Grey to Melbourne 14 April, GC/ML/27/2.

his record as Foreign Secretary with his customary vigour and refused any other position.[1] At this Melbourne had to retreat because his government was anyway barely adequate in Parliamentary and official capacity; Palmerston accordingly resumed his old office.[2]

Melbourne's decision to exclude Brougham was even more painful to him than his attempt to dethrone Palmerston. He admired Brougham's great abilities and his liking for him as a person lasted throughout Melbourne's life. But, as he had already told the ex-Chancellor, his conspiracy over the Coercion Bill in June 1834, his theatrical speaking tour of Scotland later that summer, and his indiscretions to the press, particularly after their dismissal in November, had become notorious in the political world.[3] Added to his general interference with his colleagues' work, these characteristics made Brough/am totally unacceptable as a member of Melbourne's Cabinet. When Brougham heard his fate announced by Melbourne at an interview on 13 April, he became so wildly excited and resentful that Melbourne allegedly had to tell him, 'God damn you, you won't get the Great Seal, and that's the end of it.'[4] It was a bold decision which went against the opinions of other Whigs, including Grey and Holland, whilst Russell thought Brougham's merits were 'great and conspicuous; his demerits vexatious but not vital.'[5]

Less dramatic, because there was no personal confrontation, but just as important was the exclusion of O'Connell from office. As an essential component in the Liberal alliance he had obvious claims to the highest posts, quite apart from his pre-eminence as an Irish lawyer. But the prejudice against him made O'Connell, as Young, Melbourne's Secretary, put it, seem 'the Stumbling Block' to a satisfactory set of arrangements.[6] In fact,

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1. Palmerston to Melbourne 14 April, GC/EM/27/4.
2. Melbourne to Palmerston 15 April, GC/EM/28/1.
3. Melbourne to Brougham 14, 17 February 1835, Sanders pp. 257-63.
4. Cecil, Lord M., p. 126.
5. Russell to Melbourne 9 February, Sanders p. 243.
6. Littleton diary 10 April, Hatherton Papers.

O'Connell had assured Duncannon as early as 10 April that 'he had no wish for office, and that without it he would give his best support to a liberal Govt...'[1] This was not the end of the matter because O'Connell seems to have had an offer of some sort after that date,[2] perhaps an unauthorized one from Mulgrave, but he turned it down for the sake of Melbourne's government and his own reputation in Ireland. A few days after Melbourne became prime minister, Ellice had an interview with O'Connell in which the latter finally swallowed his disappointment and waived his claims to office.[3]

There was also the embarrassment of Wellesley and Littleton, two of the principals in Grey's fall. Melbourne merely gave Wellesley a Household appointment. This led to a violent protest from the late Lord Lieutenant; there was even talk of a duel; but in the end Wellesley was simply left to assert of Melbourne that 'his language was rough, vulgar and such as has never been employed from a person in his station to one in mine.'[4] Littleton, a more amenable person, was fairly easily conciliated by a peerage. The last obvious omission from Melbourne's old government was Ellice. It is unclear whether he was dropped summarily by Melbourne or whether he found it convenient for private reasons not to be in the government.[5]

These exclusions and the refusal of Spencer to return to politics necessitated several important changes compared to the appointments of July 1834. Russell was deservedly promoted to the Home Office and to the Leadership of the Commons. Spring Rice took over what was to become the most unenviable post of Chancellor of the Exchequer. Grant was sent to the Upper House as Lord Glenelg and became Colonial Secretary. Grey was temporarily rendered less miserable by the appointments of several of his family, above

1. Howick diary 11 April.
2. O'Connell to P. V. Fitzpatrick 14 April 1835, O'Connell Correspondence, ed. W. J. Fitzpatrick, II, 11-12.
3. Torrens p. 363-4.
4. Cecil, Lord M., p. 126.
5. The Times 20 April 1835.

all by that of Howick as Secretary at War with a seat in the Cabinet. The Irish office holders were particularly interesting. Mulgrave was made Lord Lieutenant, very much Melbourne's own decision; as the latter said, 'there are objections to him in some respects but personally I hold him to be the fittest man.'[1] Morpeth as Irish Secretary and Thomas Drummond as Under Secretary completed a promising change of regime in Dublin.

With some truth 'The Times' commented unfavourably on a government now bereft of Grey, Althorp, Brougham, Stanley and Graham. There was less justice in its criticism of the Cabinet as too aristocratic when half its members sat in the Commons and a further two had only recently been created peers.[2] More important, perhaps, was the reaction of the Radical 'Spectator' which seemed reasonably well satisfied with the administration, merely regretting the absence of useful Radicals such as Grote, Warburton, and Ward.[3] Holland thought that 'the appointments seem to please exceedingly' and was particularly impressed by the subordinate office holders.[4] Hobhouse told Melbourne that the Cabinet was not as Liberal as he had expected but Melbourne countered by saying 'that some people had told him it was too Jacobinical.'[5] Melbourne himself called it

> 'an arrangement, damn'd bad in many of its parts, but the best that could be agreed upon amidst conflicting opinions and prejudices.' 6

On the whole the new government struck a fair balance between the varying views of those who had ousted Peel, although it was thinner in debating talents and administrative skills than the governments of 1830-1834.

Melbourne remained unhappy about his prospects. In conversation with Wharncliffe, as reported by Graham, he said 'that his difficulties were far greater than he had anticipated, that he did not see his way out of them.' [7]

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1. Melbourne to Grey 18 April, Grey Papers.
2. The Times 20, 21 April.
3. The Spectator 26 April.
4. Holland diary Add. Mss. 51,870 f. 810.
5. Hobhouse diary 17 April; V, 34.
6. Melbourne to Holland 17 April, Add. Mss. 51,558 f.84.
7. Graham to Stanley 25 April, Graham Papers 30.

He continued to curse the impracticable Appropriation resolution which 'was done in haste, and like everything so done it was damn'd ill done; but now it could not be helped.[1] In the Lords, Melbourne was harassed by accusations that he had bought O'Connell's support and was now hopelessly entangled with him. He strenuously denied such reports[2] but there remained the nightmare that he might, in fact, have made himself a prisoner of the Radicals and Irish. In reality, it was rather the other way round. O'Connell was dropping all talk of Repeal in return for tangible benefits in Ireland; the English Radicals had not stood out for further Parliamentary reform as the price of their support. Melbourne might damn the appropriation resolution but it was already proving an inexpensive means of neutralising his left wing. The idea of a moderate leader controlling an apparently unstable Liberal alliance, which he had pursued in some disbelief since January, began to be realised.

This development was clear only in retrospect: at the time Melbourne was slow to appreciate his success. Others also failed to see the signs. Stanley took pleasure in observing, as he saw it, 'a Government in which the seeds of an early dissolution were not only planted, but actually springing up into thriving plants.' Graham shared these feelings[3] and Greville noted that opinion generally predicted an early return to power by Peel, at the head of a coalition.[4] On the ministerial side, Hobhouse was very discouraged at the thought of a Commons majority of 30 against the Court, a majority of 100 in the Lords, the Church, the Law, the squires and the magistracy.[5] Howick and Lansdowne thought that as soon as the Irish Church question was disposed of 'we must ... look to having Peel back again and that with a view to this some communication shd. be had with him.'[6] But, against such expectations, the Liberal alliance took root.

1. ibid.
2. Hansard, 3rd series, xxvii. 997-9.
3. Stanley to Graham 19 April, Graham to Stanley 25 April, Graham Papers 30.
4. Greville diary 16 April, 24 May; III, 264, 265.
5. Hobhouse diary 8 May; V, 36.
6. Howick diary 11 April.

The Irish proved a more loyal contingent than the Radicals but even the latter were noisy rather than dangerous in their attacks upon the administration. The government majority in the Commons was, for most purposes, considerably larger than the thirty or so votes which had carried the appropriation resolutions. In February and March 1836, for instance, it was over sixty on the Irish Corporations bill; Peel thought these were fair divisions.[1]

As his administration held so Melbourne's confidence increased. He came to feel that the existence of his government was thoroughly justified. When in September 1835 he was taunted by the Earl of Wicklow with his alleged dependence on Irish votes, Melbourne proceeded, 'with great animation' as Hansard modestly put it, to ask:

> 'Are, then, the English representatives nothing? ...
> Is the general voice and opinion of the people nothing?'[2]

His government had a clear majority in the English seats as a whole and was particularly strong in the larger towns. Since the latter as a group were still badly under-represented in Parliament, the opinions of those which possessed seats carried additional weight. The elections for the new town corporations at the end of 1835 emphasised their Liberal colour. According to the chief whip, E. J. Stanley, 101 were Liberal, 31 were Tory, and 2 were doubtful.[3] As Ebrington said, 'though the House of Lords with the Hierarchy and Squirearchy' made it difficult for the Whigs to govern, the opposition of the towns would make it impossible for the Tories to do so.[4] Unlike the Earl of Wicklow Melbourne was sensitive to what he saw as 'the general and still increasing feeling of the country.'[5] He challenged his opponents in the Lords to take direct measures for his removal, knowing that they could not. Peel had refused to run the risk of a second election in April 1835; most Tories would

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1. Gash, Peel, p. 146.
2. Hansard, 3rd series, xxx. 1,254-6.
3. Stanley to Durham 11 December 1836, Lambton Papers.
4. Ebrington to Tavistock 10 Jan. 1836; Russell Papers, P.R.O. 30/22/2A ff. 55-6.
5. Hansard, xxx. 1,254-6.

have agreed with Melbourne that they could not appeal against the electorate's decision of January 1835.[1] Peel was only slowly completing his great reconstruction of his party's policy and public standing; the political passions aroused by the Reform Bill crisis were only slowly dying. In such circumstances a reforming government could only be what Melbourne called a Whig-Liberal one. Melbourne was, moreover, well aware of divisions inside Peel's party. According to Sir Henry Hardinge, Melbourne talked of his position as 'worse than precarious' in early 1836 but counted on a bad Tory attendance, Peel's dislike of office, and the strained relations between Peel and Wellington caused by differences over the Municipal Corporations Act.[2] In October 1836 Melbourne similarly wrote to Holland,

> 'I should have thought that Peel was at least as much persuaded as Lyndhurst that the possibility of a Tory ministry was very doubtful.' 3

Even at the end of a particularly trying session in August 1836 Melbourne defied Lyndhurst to pass a vote of no confidence, and ended,

> 'as to holding office I have only to say, that I conscientiously believe that the well-being of the country requires that I should hold it - and hold it I will - till I am removed.' 4

Melbourne was quite often provoked by the opposition in the Lords into impressive anti-Tory speeches. These were perfectly genuine but Melbourne himself would have preferred to emphasise his anxiety for political stability. He could not rid himself of the fear that if his government fell it might be very difficult to form another. He admitted that it was, perhaps

> 'a chimerical fear, and one which vanity and self-opinion very much ministers to ... But I, being somewhat of an alarmist on this side, not having quite the confidence in the stability of popular and constitutional forms of government which others have, and thinking them very likely to break up of their own principles, cannot feel quite free from it.' 5

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1. Gash, Peel, p. 118.
   Hansard, xxvi. 75-81.
2. Hardinge to Peel 7 January 1836, Add. Mss. 40,314 ff. 118-19.
3. Melbourne to Holland 18 October 1836, Add. Mss. 51,558 f. 114.
   This view is confirmed by Ripon who visited Peel in December, 1836:
   Ripon to Stanley 26 Dec. 1836, Graham Papers 32.
4. Hansard, xxxv. 1309
5. Melbourne to Russell 1 April 1837, MEL/RU/320.

It is now difficult to appreciate such apprehensions. At the time, however, Melbourne had to contend with novel political circumstances. Throughout his lifetime, until 1830, a fairly smooth transfer of power had been guaranteed by royal favour. As the events of 1834-5 had shown, this was no longer the case. Ultimately, the problem was largely resolved by a two party system and decisive general elections but these emerged fully only after the second Reform Act. Further, the 1832 Reform Act had created the constant possibility of a confrontation between the Lords and Commons. As Melbourne saw it, the Reform Bill had given the Whigs 'a transient, phrenetic and epileptic strength'[1] but that straightforward situation disappeared as soon as the Bill passed. It is impossible to say what would have happened had Melbourne not provided a reasonably secure government between 1835 and 1837. At that time he seems to have envisaged a political impasse, possibly accompanied by an economic or financial crisis, which might be exploited by extreme Radicals.[2] To avoid creating such a state of affairs, Melbourne was prepared to tolerate the opprobrium of association with O'Connell. For the same reason he endured the denigration of Grey's government by his Radical supporters. He thought the comparison with his own government unfair to the former but he set his face against this injustice and told Russell

> 'it is sufficient for us to receive support and it is not for us either to quarrel with the grounds upon which it is given or to dictate those upon which it shall be given.' 3

After he had been in office for some time another consideration began to weigh upon Melbourne: a fear that if he gave up the government his supporters would feel abandoned and betrayed. He thought this 'very material' and told Russell that if they went out of office they ought to carry 'the feelings of those who have supported us.'[4] Even as a free-lance Whig before 1827 Melbourne

1. Melbourne to Brougham 13 Oct. 1835, Brougham Papers 43,538.
2. Melbourne to Russell 5 June 1836, Russell Papers P.R.O. 30/22/28 f. 148.
3. Melbourne to Russell 28 October 1835, MAL/RU/191.
4. Melbourne to Russell 1 April 1835, MAL/RU/320.

had been susceptible to the call of party loyalty; it is not surprising that he should have become more so as he grew older. He clearly responded to the unexpected degree of support he received from the Commons. In September 1836 he wrote that the government had been maintained 'for a time, which is perfectly incredible, with an unshaken steadiness and with an approbation which was hardly to be anticipated.[1]

These views kept Melbourne in office for the rest of William IV's reign. Frequently, however, they were barely sufficient to prevent him from succumbing to the hostility of the king and the House of Lords and the pressures of the Radicals. He survived 1835 without undue difficulty. The Irish Tithe bill was defeated in the Lords and the Irish Corporation bill had to be abandoned for lack of time; but these were overshadowed by the successful passage of the English Corporations Act. But in 1836 the Irish measures assumed greater importance and when they were virtually thrown out by the Lords the government came close to resignation on several occasions. Melbourne had to resist pressure from Russell for a creation of peers which would have ensured a fatal clash with the King.[2] Next, he had to risk the break-up of his Commons majority which he feared would not tolerate the failure of the Irish Corporation bill.[3] In the event, the Liberal majority remained loyal, though O'Connell was very restive. Above all, there was the question of whether it was honourable and sensible to continue when the Cabinet was thus thwarted. Melbourne admitted to his colleagues at the end of June that ordinarily they should resign in such circumstances but argued that they had known of the likelihood of defeat on the Irish Corporations bill for months and that it was rather late in the day to resign now.[4] Hobhouse recorded Melbourne as saying that 'we ought to go on quietly now, and try a new measure next session.'[5]

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1. Melbourne to Mulgrave 23 Sept. 1836, Mulgrave MM/103.
2. Melbourne to Russell 5 June 1836, P.R.O. 30/22/2B f. 148.
   Russell to Melbourne 5 June 1836, MEL/RU/21.
3. Melbourne to Grey 5 June 1836, Grey Papers.
4. Hobhouse diary 26 June; V, 57-8.
5. ibid.

This was not an entirely convincing argument. By late August, Melbourne was even less inclined to continue. He told his Cabinet that he doubted

> 'whether it was right and becoming to go on with the government in our present conditon ... with nothing but an insignificant majority in the Commons in our favour, and even there it was only on doubtful and unpopular questions that we outnumbered our opponents.' [1]

His reference to 'unpopular questions' was a remarkable admission: even in private politicians tend not to stress the disadvantages of what they have undertaken to do. Melbourne, however, was too honest to ignore the great unpopularity of his Irish policies amongst voters and non-voters alike. He must, therefore, have been fortified by some confidence in the virtues of his government. He himself said that 'a man must have the patience of an ass to stand against such odds.'[2] Amongst the latter had to be included the King himself, who was, as Melbourne put it, 'all but crazy' and quite capable of turning them out again at any time.[3]

The recess brought some relief to Melbourne, but he was impressed by the

> 'strong symptoms of many of our supporters getting tired of it [the maintenance of the government] at which I do not wonder, seeing that I am almost tired of it myself.' [4]

He believed in consequence that some decisive step might be necessary at the beginning of the next session so as to be 'just to ourselves' and 'fair towards our supporters'.[5] Melbourne expanded on this theme when Howick visited him in October. By this time he had seen Parkes and was fairly well informed about the intentions of the extreme Radicals led by Grote and Molesworth. He told Howick that he expected the Radicals to demand secret ballot and triennial parliaments as open questions as the price of their continued support; since neither he nor others in the Cabinet, particularly Lansdowne, could agree to this, it would lead to the collapse of the 1835

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1. Holhouse diary 20 August; V, 59-60.
2. ibid.
3. ibid. p. 61
4. Melbourne to Mulgrave 23 September 1836, Mulgrave MM/103.
5. ibid.

1. Howick diary 25 October.
2. Melbourne to P. Thomson 13 January 1837, Sanders p. 316.
3. Parkes to Durham 24 January 1837, Lambton Papers.
4. Greville diary 13 May; III, 406.
5. Russell to Grey 27 Jan. 1837, Grey Papers.
   Hobhouse diary 7,11 Feb.; V, 65-6.
6. Hansard, xxxvi. 206.
7. Melbourne to Russell 8, 9 Feb. 1837, MEL/RU/305, 306.
   Holland diary April 1837 Add. Mss. 51,871 f. 1013.
8. Howick diary 18 February.
9. Melbourne to Russell 1 April, MEL/RU/320
   Melbourne to Holland 24 February Add. Mss. 51,558 f. 137.
10. Melbourne to Russell 15 March, MEL/RU/315.

coalition.[1] Early in 1837 Melbourne told Poulett Thomson who favoured secret ballot, that he had made up his mind to resist making it an open question:

> 'It may, as you say, be fatal to the Government. It probably will, and that consideration has made me pause so long. But so, I am convinced, would the other course; and with disgrace.' 2

He did not, however, have to act on this resolve. At a meeting of the discontented Radicals on 21 January the moderates, led by Parkes won the day and it was agreed not to break up the government even for the sake of ballot.[3] Nonetheless, when the Westminster by-election of May 1837 took place, Melbourne was glad to see the defeat of the Radical, J. T. Leader, and reportedly said that 'the Radicals are very difficult to manage as it is, and if they had carried the election there would be no doing anything with them.'[4]

The House of Lords proved a greater threat than the Radicals. There was a strong feeling on Russell's part that they should resign if the Irish Corporations bill was again defeated in the Lords.[5] When, however, Russell introduced the bill in the Commons on 7 February he was too precipitate in terming it a 'vital question to the present administration' and thereby apparently staking the government's existence on the bill's success.[6] Melbourne did not like such a commitment nor did he like Russell's apparent move to drop the appropriation clause, which he thought premature and likely to split the Cabinet apart.[7] According to Howick, the Cabinet intended to resign if the Corporations bill was postponed by the Lords for two months, as was expected.[8] Melbourne, however, seems to have had slightly different thoughts. He was opposed to resignation, and still more to a dissolution which, even if it produced a larger majority in the Commons, would not have much effect on the Lords.[9] In order to forestall further suggestions of resignation he said of the controversial English Church Rates bill:

> 'Any majority will I think do... If we are beat, I am clear that it is not a point to resign upon.' 10

Outwardly he kept up a stout front, declaring that nothing in the state of the country called for a change of administration, and attacking Peel's efforts as

1. Hobhouse diary n.d. [April 1837]; V, 69.
2. Hatherton diary 24 April.
3. ibid.
4. Greville diary III, 405.
5. N. Gash, Politics in the Age of Peel, 1830-1850 (1953), p. 441.
6. Hatherton diary 16 June.
7. Gash, Reaction and Reconstruction, p. 168; (my interpretation of the figures cited there).
   Close, 'Elections of 1835 and 1837', p. 467, estimates the Radicals at 82 but uses a wider definition of 'Radical' (p. 210).
8. Gash, Peel, p. 195.
   Russell to Melbourne 13 August P.R.O. 30/22/2F f. 9.
   Russell to Queen Victoria 15 August P.R.O. 30/22/2F f. 12.
9. Southgate, op.cit., p. 71 n.5.
10. Melbourne to Frederick Lamb 4 September, Panshanger 28.
    Melbourne to Russell 7 September, MEL/RU/396.

'the humble labour of a low and creeping policy.'[1] When Hatherton assured him that if the government resigned it would soon be brought back, Melbourne agreed and said 'I don't see the use of popping in and out like a Rabbit.'[2] He also apparently agreed with Hatherton's view that

> 'he was deeply pledged to the country to stand firm, and that Johnny should not be allowed to upset the coach again.'[3]

On 5 May the Irish Corporation bill was postponed by Wellington till 9 June. The Cabinet decided to compromise with the Tories. In the Commons on 8 May Russell withdrew his threat to resign, provided he had the confidence of the House.[4] Then the death of William IV on 20 June supplied the government with a way out of its Parliamentary difficulties. Parliament was prorogued on 17 July and a general election followed.

The party activists in the Reform Association, led by Parkes, expected considerable gains in the elections after their lengthy preparations. 251 seats were contested as against 227 in 1835;[5] they had the new town corporations mainly on their side; and some advantage was hoped for from the invocation of the Queen's name on behalf of government candidates. Melbourne himself was sceptical of such forecasts.[6] Events proved him right. In England the Whigs lost twenty two county seats overall and with difficulty maintained their preponderance in the boroughs. This meant that they lost their English majority as a whole. They still had a majority, however, in Scotland, and, thanks to O'Connell, an even larger one in Ireland. The extreme Radicals suffered severely, half a dozen well known figures losing their seats, and their total strength being cut to little more than a dozen.[7] The Tory organiser Bonham and Russell agreed in crediting the government with about 340 seats.[8] This left Melbourne with a maximum majority of 25-30 on most issues, and less than 20 on appropriation.[9] Melbourne himself went on a figure of 30 but was well aware of his dependence on the Irish and on the forebearance of the remaining Radicals; as he wrote to Russell, 'if there are Rats, we are done.'[10]

1. Lansdowne to Holland 6 Aug., Add. Mss. 51688 f.82.
Mulgrave to Russell 9 Aug., P.R.O. 30/22/2F ff. 5-6.
Ellice to Grey 15 Aug., Grey Papers.
Hobhouse diary 10 Aug., V, 93.

2. Melbourne to Howick 8 August, Grey Papers.
Melbourne to Holland 22 Sept., Add. Mss. 51,558 f. 158.

3. ibid.

4. Russell to Howick 16 August, Grey Papers.
See also Greville diary 25 August; IV, 19.

5. Melbourne to Holland 22 Sept., Add. Mss. 51,558 ff. 158-9.

6. E. J. Stanley to Howick 18 August, Grey Papers.
Parkes to Melbourne 30 August, HP 33/19.
Sir R. Heron, Notes, p. 231.
Russell to Queen Victoria 15 August, P.R.O. 30/22/2F f. 12.
Close, 'Elections of 1835 and 1837', p. 461, notes that the Liberals' registration efforts were successful in the towns but not in the counties.

7. Melbourne to Russell 10 Sept., W.I./RU/398.

8. Russell to Melbourne 13 August, P.R.O. 30/22/2F. ff. 9-10.
Spencer to Brougham 1 August, Spencer Papers.
See also Sir R. Heron op.cit., p. 231 on the £50 voters in the counties.

The Whig leadership held a lengthy inquest into what had gone wrong. The commonest reaction was to blame the alliance of squires and parsons in the counties and to ascribe their hostility to the Church Rates bill of the previous session.[1] Melbourne was initially puzzled because he had been told that such opposition had been just as fierce in 1835 but, after hearing from 'Le Marchant, Lansdowne and many others,' he decided that it had been worse in 1837.[2] He reflected that

> 'the Church rates measure, however good in itself and necessary for us, was the first that could be represented as being directed against the Church in England.' 3

Tory exploitation of popular feeling against the Poor Law was also frequently used to explain Whig losses. Russell thought it had been a disgraceful feature of the campaign.[4] Melbourne was less outraged by it but wrote to Holland,

> 'I have no doubt that it lost us many votes, but it did a great deal more; in many places it gave them the whole body of the non-electors and in all divided them. It gave them a popular cry which they never had before and we all know well enough what that does in elections.' 5

Finally, it was agreed that Tory organisation, particularly in the crucial matter of the registration of voters, had been much superior. Ministerial deficiencies in this area had been lamented in 1835 but the complaints were now a great deal stronger.[6] Electoral organisation was expensive so this explanation receives some confirmation from what Melbourne heard from leading Tories, reliably as he believed, that they attributed their success to the Whigs' lack of money.[7]

All of these are plausible explanations, although it is difficult to say what were the precise effects of such factors. It is important, however, to consider the generally conservative nature of the reformed electoral system as created in 1832. Russell and Spencer noted with regret the increased influence of the landed interest in the 1830's as the result of more rural constituencies and more dependent voters under the Reform Act.[8] This tends to ignore the natural deference and spontaneous Toryism of much of the county electorate but, either way, the Whigs steadily lost ground as the excitement of 1831-2 passed. Much the same picture could be found in the

smaller boroughs. Even in the larger urban areas most new voters were concerned to protect their property, including their new political privileges; they were averse to renewed agitation which would disrupt trading conditions; and they were content to accept aristocratic influence.[1] Beyond such instincts lay an economic structure which was still very largely non-industrial in many parts of the country. In such a mixed society elections tended to have close, uncertain results; those of 1831 and 1841 were the exceptions until the 1860's. It was therefore a distortion for Ellice to assert that had the 'middle classes' been left to free and independent action no Tory would have been returned in Scotland or any large town in England or any of the northern counties.[2] Melbourne himself had long seen the Tories as inherently 'the strongest party in the country - strong in property ... strong in prejudice, strong in union.'[3]

There is little doubt that Melbourne's government had done much to arouse the prejudices of this electorate. In England ministers were branded as enemies of the Anglican Church. Worse, their Irish policy earned for them a hostility which went far beyond the appropriation clause. Melbourne reported his steward in Hertfordshire as blaming their defeats on

> 'the cry against O'Connell, and the notion of England being governed by Irishmen and Roman Catholics.' 4

If this was a straw in the wind, Ellice and Baring contributed others by singling out the hostility of English opinion to liberal government in Ireland.[5] The bitter and unscrupulous campaign waged by 'The Times' against O'Connell and the Whigs was both a cause and effect of anti-Catholicism amongst the electorate.[6] The defence of the Church and hatred of Irish Catholics gave the

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1. Brock, GRA, p. 319-20.
   J. Hamburger, Intellectuals in Politics (1965), p. 262.
2. Ellice to Grey 26 August 1837, Grey Papers.
3. Melbourne to Brougham 13 Oct. 1835, Brougham Papers 43,538.
4. Melbourne to Russell 24 August 1837, MEL/RU/392.
5. Ellice to Grey, 13 August, Grey Papers.
   Baring to J. B. Mallet 16 Aug. 1837, Journals and Correspondence of F. T. Baring, ed. Lord Northbrook (1905), I. 128.
6. A. Aspinall, Politics and the Press (1949) p. 330-1.
   Macintyre, The Liberator, p. 155.

Tories a cause to fight for whilst the Whigs and their allies lacked any countervailing cry. As Parkes expressed it, with his usual slight exaggeration, 'it was life or death with the Tories.'[1] Only Russell disagreed with such a general interpretation but his opinion was coloured by his reluctance to admit that government policy might have been wrong and that the Tories had won seats except by underhand means.[2]

Whatever the detailed causes, Melbourne was clear that the Whigs had lost ground as the representatives of liberal opinions 'and that our adversaries have in some degree gained.'[3] Russell was loth to concede this but Melbourne wrote to him that

> 'we cannot ... conceal from ourselves that there has been alteration of opinion or as it is now scientifically termed reaction to a certain degree.' 4

In any case, as he told his brother Frederick,

> 'we must take the result of the elections as a proof of the feeling and disposition of the country. Else what is the use and object of elections?' 5

Even so there were signs of regret on his part that he should have suffered this set-back. With some discernment he wrote to Spring Rice:

> 'Public opinion does make a progress, but it is not by a steady onward course. It is like the tide, it comes on with great violence and then recedes as violently in an opposite direction. It gains ground perhaps with every wave, but it is far from always keeping the ground which it temporarily occupies.' 6

Melbourne contrasted his opinion of 'the people' with that of Althorp;

> 'I may think too ill of the people; he thinks too well of them. I may think them less steady and more capricious than they are; he thinks them more steady and less capricious.' 7

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1. Parkes to Melbourne 30 August 1837, MP 33/19.
2. Russell to Melbourne 2, 4 August MEL/RU/34, 35.
   Russell to Queen Victoria 15 August, P.R.O. 30/22/2F f.12.
3. Melbourne to Russell 8 August, MEL/RU/389.
4. Melbourne to Russell 7 September MEL/RU/396.
5. Melbourne to Frederick Lamb 7 Oct., Panshanger Papers 28.
6. Melbourne to S. Rice 30 August, Monteagle Papers 13,386.
7. Melbourne to Russell 7 September, MEL/RU/396.

At the same time, he was, characteristically, sufficiently detached to think the near parity of Whigs and Tories 'quite a novel state of things and therefore piquant and interesting.'[1]

Once the dust of the elections had settled, Melbourne surveyed his position. He expected Peel to make a bid for power and gave Russell the unwelcome opinion that

> 'if I were a Tory I should not be deterred from undertaking the Government by the state of Ireland.' 2

Otherwise, however, Melbourne was ready to continue in office. He still had a majority in the Commons and, as he regretted to Lansdowne, party differences 'are not the less violent because there is little to differ about.'[3] Without self-flattery he could write to Abercromby:

> 'In spite both of Tories and Radicals, I believe there is a very large number of persons in the country who advocate the continuance of the present Government, and I think we owe it to them to fight the battle with as much courage and as much discretion as we can command.' 4

As in 1835 it could be reasonably argued that if he did not continue a political deadlock would result, with unforeseeable consequences.[5] The Tory 'Quarterly Review' noted the 'surprising and unprecedented' balance between the parties and how 'precarious the existence of anything like a Government must under the present circumstances be.'[6] (The Quarterly's objectivity was diminished by its eagerness to prove its previous allegations of the dangerous consequences of the Reform Act; but its self-congratulations had to have some basis in fact.) Such considerations were doubtless reinforced by the pleasure Melbourne took in acting as the Queen's adviser but they had been present in his mind long before her accession and were shared by others on

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1. Melbourne to Russell 11 August, PRO/RU/384.
2. Melbourne to Russell 7 September, PRO/RU/386
3. Melbourne to Lansdowne 21 August, Torrens p. 440.
4. Melbourne to Abercromby 27 December 1837, Sanders p. 370.
5. Lansdowne to Holland 6 August, Add. Mss. 51,688 f. 83.
6. 'Quarterly Review' Vol. 59 no. 118 p. 554.

the government side. By October he had made up his mind

> 'to stand as we are, to make no change either of men or of measures - to maintain the ground, which we have taken up, that is necessary for our own character, but not to take up fresh ground in advance without great consideration and a certainty of success.' 1

Parliament met in November 1837. Some of the Tories showed an impatience for office but Peel pursued his own Fabian course. When he was forced to take action, divisions such as that over Canada on 6 March 1838, which the government won by 316 - 287, showed that the opposition were still in a minority. Indeed, the advent of the Canadian crisis and the beginnings of Chartism strengthened the Whig position as the only possible administration and inhibited the Tory opposition.[2] For their part the Radicals proved reasonably docile, agreeing with Parkes that it was preferable to keep the Whigs in than to permit a Tory ministry.[3] They were greatly angered by Russell's 'finality' speech against further Parliamentary reform but, as Howick said,

> 'they will vent their anger in abusive speeches, for which I do not care one farthing, and continue to vote with us against the Tories.' 4

Melbourne and Russell refused to make ballot an open question. They had some difficulty persuading sufficient ministerialists to vote against or abstain on Grote's motion for ballot on 15 February 1838. But the Radicals made no serious attempt to defeat the government even when Molesworth had a chance to do so over Canada in March 1838.[5] Had they done so they would have encountered Melbourne's belief that

> 'when we do break up, we should do it upon a question in some degree satisfactory to our supporters and that we should not appear to have deserted them or to have given up their interests upon light grounds.' 6

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1. Melbourne to Frederick Lamb 7 October, Panshanger 28.
2. Gash, Peel, p. 211.
3. Parkes to Stanley 3 August 1837, Parkes Papers 25.
4. Hansard, xxxix. 65-73 (20 November 1837).
   Howick to Grey 24 November 1837, Grey Papers.
5. Gash, Peel, p. 204
6. Melbourne to Russell 7 February 1838, PRO/RU/450.

He did not think the ballot or the Canadian difficulties constituted such grounds. Hobhouse reported Melbourne as wanting to stay in office

> 'if we had a majority of one. He preferred being charged with tenacity of office, than with a readiness to abandon the government.' 1

Whatever the objective reasons for such an attitude it is significant that Hobhouse also attributed it to 'the partiality manifested by the Queen for Lord Melbourne's Administration and general management.'[2]

Fairly secure from Tories and Radicals in the Commons, Melbourne could afford to write to Russell:

> 'Equality of parties makes government doubtful and difficult, but it cannot be helped; it is a contingency which may happen, and which has happened.' 3

Other observers might feel that this showed complacency on his part. In the course of the 1838 session the government had been forced to accept a diluted Irish Tithe Act and to relinquish altogether yet another Irish Corporation bill. Durham's rule in Canada had been a constant embarrassment and had culminated in the disaster of his illegal Bermuda ordinance. Whigs who were not at the centre of power began to take a harsh view of the Cabinet. Mulgrave (now promoted to Marquess of Normanby) wrote to Russell that except for Melbourne and himself, there was no one in the government for whom the country cared a straw; Bedford judged that except for Russell, and perhaps Melbourne and Howick, there was no one fit to be called a minister; Ellice thought the whole concern was 'déconsidéré.'[4] Howick and Parkes, from their different vantage points, both thought that the government could not begin another session without changes.[5] Howick was much impressed by reports from Le Marchant that the government was losing the

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1. Hobhouse diary March 3 1838; V, 122-3.
2. Ibid.
3. 22 August 1838, Sanders p. 375.
4. 29 July 1838, P.R.O. 30/22/3D f. 634-5; Bedford to Russell 24 August, P.R.O. 30/22/3B f. 663; Ellice to Lady Durham 11 August, Prest Russell p. 133. See also Charles Villiers to George Villiers 19 Sept. 1837, Life and Letters of Earl of Clarendon ed. Sir H. Maxwell (1913) II, 135-6.
5. Howick to Grey 16 August, Grey Papers.
Parkes to Durham 16 August, Lambton Papers.

respect of its supporters in and out of Parliament; Ellice warned Melbourne of precisely this development at the end of the 1838 session and again in April 1839.[1] On the Tory side Greville's remark that

> 'never did a Government hold office by so frail and uncertain a tenure, and upon such strange terms'

may be quoted as one of the milder views prevalent.[2] Against this background it was hardly justifiable for Melbourne to describe the prospect of the ministry's fall as 'this catastrophe.'[3] His motivation is, perhaps, revealed by his remark to the Queen in March 1839: 'I never thought we should have carried you on as far as we have done.'[4]

But even when oppressed by difficulties, Melbourne found that the old reasons for staying in office continued to assert themselves. On 22 March 1839 the Lords voted for a committee to inquire into the whole state of Ireland since 1835. Since this amounted to a vote of censure on the government there was a strong move, led by Russell, Normanby, and Morpeth, to resign immediately and challenge Peel to face the consequences.[5] Melbourne, however, preferred to stay on and it was agreed to try for a vote of confidence in the Commons. This was carried by 318 - 296 on 20 April. Admittedly, Melbourne wanted to please the Queen, who wrote in her diary on hearing of the success in the Commons, 'I feel that I can breathe again. Thank God! '[6] But his decision was also influenced by his belief in the justice of his Irish policy and was consistent with his declaration of 1836 that he would hold the government so long as he possessed the confidence of the Commons.

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1. Howick diary 24 October.
   Ellice to Melbourne n.d. [20 April 1839], MP 5/24.
2. Greville diary 10 February; IV, 167.
3. Melbourne to Ellice 29 October 1838, Ellice Papers 28 f.96.
4. Q.V. diary 22 March 1839; II, 137.
5. Howick diary 22 March.
   Russell to Holland 22 March, Add. Mss. 51,677 ff. 192-3.
6. Q.V. diary 22 March, 20 April; II, 137, 154.

He could not, however, withstand the Radicals' change of tactics. In 1839 they began to move into open opposition in the Commons, starting with Duncombe's amendment to the Address which attracted 84 votes.[1] Melbourne recognised the signs of revolt and told the Queen on 9 April that although the Radicals 'couldn't stand alone ... they like a general shuffle, as they think they may gain by it.'[2] Later in April the Cabinet decided to suspend the constitution of Jamaica. Melbourne seems to have expected this to bring on a crisis because, two weeks before the fatal vote of 6 May, he consulted Holland on whom to recommend to the Queen if the government had to resign over the Jamaica bill.[3] He did not share the false hopes of some of his colleagues about Tory divisions and, somewhat obliquely, had been trying to prepare the Queen for a change of ministry.[4] For reasons which have not been adequately explained Peel decided to oppose the government's Jamaican policy. He may not have foreseen that the Radicals would desert the government. Anyway, he did not expect the government to resign over the issue. The result, however, was that the government had only a majority of five for the crucial second reading on 6 May. Ten Radicals voted with Peel and several ministerialists abstained.

The Cabinet quickly resigned. Only two or three ministers wanted to try for a better result on the third reading.[5] There was probably an underlying feeling of disillusion and tiredness on their part but, more immediately, they seem to have acted on feelings of indignation and anger. They had a good case for their Jamaica bill and they were not prepared for the wholesale opposition to it.[6] Melbourne himself may have been reconciled to resignation in the abstract but the circumstances which forced it on him

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1. Hamburger, Intellectuals in Politics, p. 243.
2. Q.V. diary II, 149.
3. Holland diary 7 May, Add. Mss. 51,872 f. 1115.
4. Q.V. diary 22 March, 9 April; II, 137, 149.
5. Howick diary 7 May.
6. Holland diary 7 May, Add. Mss. 51,872 f. 1112.

seem to have upset his equanimity. Hatherton met him on 7 May going to see the Queen and thought he 'looked very much annoyed.'[1] His abrupt resignation certainly contrasts with his previous efforts not to desert the Queen, especially as the Jamaica bill was less important than the Irish issue which had nearly wrecked the government in March. Nonetheless he and his colleagues seem to have regarded it as a final decision.

The Queen's subsequent misunderstanding with Peel over the Ladies of her Household and Melbourne's return to power on 9 May have been well described and analysed by Ziegler.[2] He shows how Melbourne bowed to the wishes of his Cabinet colleagues and resumed office against his better judgement. Of course, his own regard for the Queen and enjoyment of the premiership eased his decision. But, allegedly, he also thought of 'the poor fellows who have to put down their broughams.'[3] If he did so, he was refounding his government on a narrow basis. Ellice thought their supporters in the Commons were disenchanted with the ministry.[4] Hatherton, on the day of their resignation, noted that

> 'the non-official portion of the Whigs seem all glad of the Event. A general consciousness has long pervaded the body of the mischief of a weak ministry.' 5

It is remarkable, however, how the Whigs in the Commons rallied to Melbourne's government once it was renewed. In spite of the questionable grounds for its existence, it received faithful support for two years. In the end it lost its Commons majority only through by-election defeats and the controversial budget of 1841.[6]

The government's resignation and rapid return to power had important effects upon both the Radicals and the Tories. The Radicals were shaken by what they had done and were very willing to return to the ministerial camp

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1. Hatherton diary 7 May.
2. Melbourne, pp. 292-6.
3. Sanders p. 399.
4. Ellice to Melbourne n.d. [20 April 1839], MP 5/24.
5. Hatherton diary 7 May.
6. Close, 'Two party alignment', p. 276.

even before Melbourne finally agreed to make ballot an open question in June, 1839.[1] On their side, Peel and Wellington retreated to their cautious, waiting policy. Peel had probably not intended to take office in May and he certainly felt personally rebuffed by the Queen. In the Lords Wellington observed that Melbourne need not have resigned at all in his opinion and promised the government his support so long as moderate Whig principles were upheld.[2] The ill-temper of some of their followers was distressing to the Queen but it had no political results.

Melbourne was not deceived by the superficially favourable conditions which he enjoyed for the rest of 1839. Knowing that he could not hope to survive for long, he continued his efforts to soften the Queen's attitude towards the opposition. When she said she would never apply to the Tories, he told her she must 'in some shape'; when she said she would never submit about the Ladies, he told her simply 'that must be arranged.'[3] He acknowledged his anomalous position later when he told his ex-secretary Anson that 'nothing but the forebearance of the Tories had enabled himself and his colleagues to support H.M. at that time.'[4] But until Peel staged a successful attack Melbourne was bound to do what he could to strengthen the government. This accounts for the considerable Cabinet changes which took place in August, 1839. Russell insisted on becoming Colonial Secretary in place of Normanby, who went to the Home Office. Spring Rice retired to the House of Lords and a reluctant Baring took over serious financial problems at the Exchequer. Macaulay was brought in as Secretary at War to strengthen the government in the Commons. Howick, disgruntled at his failure to achieve a higher office, left the government. Finally, when Duncannon resigned in October (for obscure reasons), Clarendon became Lord Privy Seal.

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1. Hamburger, Intellectuals in politics, p. 246.
2. Gash, Reaction and Reconstruction, p. 40.
3. Q.V. diary 28 August 1839; II, 241-2.
4. Anson memorandum 4 May 1841, Letters of Queen Victoria ed. A. C. Benson and Lord Esher (1908) I, 268.

These changes gave the government a more respectable face but could not alter its basic weakness.

Before the 1840 session started the Whigs won six by-elections, an important fact in a situation where, as Lady Holland put it,

> 'without croaking, there is really much to fear. The want of numbers make the Govt. gradually sink ... every nose tells.'[1]

Melbourne could not have survived, however, had it not been for Tory mistakes and dissensions. The opposition miscalculated a vote of no confidence at the start of the session, lost it by 308 - 287, and never recovered from this bad start. Peel then found himself seriously at odds with some of his party, including Wellington, over the Hansard libel case in which he strenuously upheld the privileges of the Commons against the Law courts. The Tory leadership failed to concert tactics against the government over its China policy and its Canadian Clergy Reserves bill, although in both cases the Whigs were highly vulnerable.[2] Their plight was clearly revealed by the success of Stanley's Irish Registration bill which, from February to July, played havoc with their nominal majority in the Commons, until stifled in committee. From the sidelines Grey commented loftily that Melbourne's government continued 'only in a state of weakness and discredit which to me would be intolerable.'[3] Greville had long concluded that

> 'Melbourne seems to hold office for no other purpose but that of dining at Buckingham House, ... he is content to rub on from day to day, letting all things take their chance.' 4

It is pertinent to ask what sustained Melbourne in a position which was much condemned at the time - and since. As his own remarks show he was uneasy about it himself.[5] He did not like the concessions to the Radicals

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1. Lady Holland to Henry Fox 26 May 1840; Lady Holland to her son ed. Ilchester, p. 185.
2. Gash, Peel, p. 244-5.
   Greville diary 11 Aug. 1840; IV, 302.
3. Grey to Princess Lieven 12 April 1840; Lieven-Grey Correspondence III, 316.
4. Greville diary 25 March 1839; IV, 184.
5. See above p.190

which he had made in 1839. He wrote to Ebrington in November, 1839 that 'for the sake of pleasing some people and of keeping the Party together' he had offered places 'to men in whose opinions I do not concur and for whose characters I have no great respect.'[1] Loyalty to the Queen certainly did much to counteract such feelings but it cannot have been the whole story.

It can only be suggested that Melbourne, after nearly a decade in office, had acquired a certain confidence in his ability as politician and minister. He may well have felt that he could guarantee political stability at least as well as Peel since he had largely neutralised the threat from the Radicals and survived the Chartist danger. The ordinary interests of government were well enough looked after, as Greville admitted,[2] and Melbourne did not see it as his duty to provide a stream of far-reaching legislation. Such a view would have to minimise the failures in Canada, and perhaps Jamaica, but Melbourne was not primarily interested in colonial affairs. It is also true that Melbourne ignored the critical state of national finances for too long. He had few illusions about how long he could continue to enjoy his official duties, as he told Hobhouse in April 1840, 'the odds are ten to one we shall not be in office next year.'[3] But in the absence of a determined push for office by Peel, Melbourne was content to stay as prime minister. Hobhouse recounts a characteristic incident: 'on my remarking that Sir Robert Peel had more than once signified his readiness to take the government' - "True" remarked Lord Melbourne, "and I had resolved to notice it; but I had forgotten it. I shall, however, do it."[4] Melbourne's reply indicates an untroubled conscience and considerable condescension towards the leader of the opposition. Like a number of prime ministers who have been in office for a long time, such as Asquith or Churchill, he had come to think his retention of power more

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1. Melbourne to Ebrington 4 Nov. 1839, Fortescue Papers 1262 M/LI f. 114. (He was referring to Ward and Buller.)
2. Greville diary 14 January 1840; IV, 261.
3. Hobhouse diary V, 259
4. Hobhouse diary 13 April 1840; V, 259.

1. Melbourne to Frederick Lamb 11 Feb. 1841, Panshanger 28.
2. For a recent account of the 1841 budget, see R. H. Cameron, 'The Melbourne Administration, the Liberals and the Crisis of 1841', Durham University Journal, Vol. lxix 1, Dec. 1976, pp. 83-102.
3. Baring to Melbourne 19 Jan., 8 Feb. 1841; MP 1/61, 64. Russell memorandum 9 February, P.R.O. 30/22/4A f. 81.
4. Morning Chronicle 12 Jan. 1841; Edinburgh Review (1841) 72 p. 411.
5. Prest, Russell, p. 173.
6. Hansard, xxxviii, 58 (7 May 1841)
7. Lansdowne to Russell 24 April, P.R.O. 30/22/4A f. 251.
8. Hatherton diary 6 May.
9. See below, p.292
10. Hobhouse diary 8 May; VI, 19-20.

necessary than in fact it was.

By 1841, however, Melbourne knew that he no longer had a role to play, his brother assured him that, after Palmerston's foreign policy triumph, they were fixed in office. Melbourne disagreed:

> 'This goes upon the supposition that the success of affairs has an effect upon parties in Parliament and in the Country, which it has not. I think it impossible that the present session can pass over as the six last have without some change of some sort taking place.'[1]

By the time of this letter he knew that radical changes were likely in the coming budget, which would probably cause the government's downfall.[2] Baring had suggested a reduction of the sugar and timber duties in order, on the lines of free trade theory, to meet the serious financial deficit. Russell had added the idea of a lower sliding scale of import duties on corn.[3] Baring was interested purely in the fiscal aspects. His colleagues, however, hoped for political gains from a popular free trade budget. Four by-elections had been lost since December 1840 and the one at Walsall had been notable for an impressive performance by an Anti-Corn Law League candidate. The reform of the Corn Laws had also been taken up by the Liberal press.[4] For his part Russell may also have wished to find a means of eclipsing Palmerston's successful Eastern policy or, in his role as Colonial Secretary, to conciliate the Canadians.[5] Cabinet discussions of the Budget are ill-documented but they seem to have been hurried and the issues settled before 11 March, according to Russell.[6] Lansdowne later complained of the lack of discussion.[7] The only change was that Russell's proposal was modified to a small fixed duty on corn. Labouchere, President of the Board of Trade, told Hatherton that Melbourne was much embarrassed by the Budget and 'did not half like it, that was the truth.'[8] This may have been the result of his scruples about altering the Corn Laws.[9] It may, on the other hand, have been the result of practical considerations. Hobhouse reported Melbourne as saying,

> 'you are bringing forward three great measures and raising all the great interests against you without being sure of carrying either of them.' 10

Melbourne's principal concern, however, was for the unity of the Cabinet so that his government could at least fall with dignity.

The budget was introduced on 30 April. Just before it, Russell gave notice of a resolution to introduce the fixed duty on corn, announced on 7 May as 8/- per quarter. This ensured that the three interest groups would join forces and on 18 May ministers were defeated on the sugar duties by 36 votes. The Government was deserted by 9 county members and 6 borough ones; 9 more county members stayed away.[1] By this time it was clear that the government could not last anyway. It had suffered serious defeats on its Irish registration bill, which had to be abandoned on 29 April. Melbourne therefore had to decide whether to resign immediately or fight a general election on the free trade proposals. He came down clearly on the side of the former course. Early in May the Duke of Bedford talked to Melbourne and thought his objections to an election

> 'personal to himself on account of the very decided declarations he has made more than once in the House of Lords against agitating the country on the corn question without a much stronger feeling in favour of change than he now possesses.' 2

Melbourne was convinced that, on the evidence of 1835 and 1837 and the recent 'single elections', especially the Nottingham one, and with electoral feeling against a change in the Corn Laws, 'we shall be greatly beat at a general election.'[3] He would therefore not lend his name to any campaign which might embarrass Peel's entry into office. Just as strong was his belief that to advise a dissolution would be to set the Crown in opposition to both the existing and the prospective Parliament. Clarendon reported him as saying that

> 'the Crown ought never to make an appeal to public opinion unless there were solid grounds for believing that it would be responded to by the public voice.' 4

Melbourne's respect for the monarchy as an institution and his anxiety for the Queen's personal position were equally behind this declaration.

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1. Gash, Reaction and Reconstruction, pp. 214-15 n. 3, 4.
2. Bedford to Russell n.d. [early May], S. Walpole, Life of Lord John Russell (1889) I, 373.
3. Melbourne to Russell 14 May 1841, PP 15/37.
   Melbourne to Queen Victoria 28 April 1841, Letters of Queen Victoria; I, 264.
4. Greville diary 7 May; V, 2.
   See also Hobhouse diary 13 May; VI, 22.

1. Ebrington to Melbourne 6 May, MP 101/80.
Parkes to Melbourne 5 May, MP 33/25.
Palmerston to Melbourne 14 May, Sanders, p. 419-20.
Russell to Melbourne 14 May, P.R.O. 30/22/4A f. 315.
Duncannon to Melbourne 16 May, MP 3/103.

2. Russell to Melbourne 16 May P.R.O. 30/22/4A f. 319.

3. Q.V. diary, 17, 18 May; Letters of Queen Victoria, II.278-80

4. Hobhouse diary 19 May; VI, 27.

5. Greville diary 19 May; V, 9.

6. Cecil, Lord M, p. 290; Torrens p. 521;
Ziegler, Melbourne, p. 330.

Initially, most of the Cabinet also favoured resignation if they were beaten on the sugar duties. But during May they became impressed by the alleged increase in public support for the free trade measures and by the argument that to resign without attempting an election would be to abandon their supporters in the Commons and outside. There was little evidence for either claim but Melbourne came under great pressure from all sides on these grounds.[1] Moreover, he learnt that if he resigned the Tories would dissolve Parliament themselves. An election was therefore anyway inevitable and a Tory request for a dissolution might provoke a clash with the Queen.[2] He also discovered that the Queen herself wanted to try the result of an election.[3] Melbourne put off a final decision until 19 May, the day after the defeat on the sugar duties, when Russell positively demanded action of some sort. A cabinet was held in the afternoon at Lansdowne House. Melbourne took the opinion of its members individually around the table; with varying degrees of enthusiasm all favoured a dissolution and election. Hobhouse relates how Melbourne spoke last, 'slowly, and with great earnestness.' He said

> 'he disliked an appeal to the people when their passions were raised on any subject; but more especially on such a subject as food.'

He expressed deep scepticism about any favourable result from the election but

> 'finding that the party ... and that the majority of his colleagues wished for it, he should not oppose his opinions to theirs.'

It was noticed that he said this 'with much and serious, expression of feeling, and almost in tears.'[4] Melbourne was criticised for inconsistency and weakness in this final decision of his political career.[5] It may be that he was ageing fast by this time[6] and less willing to set his friends at defiance in the way he had done twenty years earlier. But it was also fitting that he should have ended his ministry, as he had begun it, in response to the feelings of his party.

The Cabinet agreed to continue the sugar duties debate in the Commons until they could discuss their Corn Law proposals there and thereby, it was hoped, place Peel in a great dilemma. Peel forestalled them, however, by

moving a vote of no confidence which he won, on 5 June, by 312 - 311. On 7 June Parliament was dissolved. The Queen had already noted that 'Lord Melbourne don't think so much of the feeling in the country.'[1] As in 1837 he proved more perceptive than the party experts such as Parkes and Duncannon. The Tories gained, in net terms, 22 English county and 15 English borough seats; they even gained 8 Irish seats. The extreme Radicals all but disappeared. Peel won an overall majority of at least 76.[2] When Parliament met again the government was in a minority of 91 on an amendment to the Address and on 28 August Melbourne and his colleagues resigned, this time conclusively.

All the factors which had operated against the government party in 1837 could be found in the 1841 election also. In addition the corn law issue did great harm to the Whigs in the counties; Melbourne, indeed, expected to lose all the county seats.[3] Worse still, from the Liberal point of view, the free trade proposals failed to evoke a response from the towns. The Anti-Corn Law League was not wholeheartedly in favour of the Whigs and their tepid budget; it was anyway unable to intervene powerfully in more than six constituencies.[4] Wood and Morpeth both reported the indifference of the Yorkshire manufacturers.[5] Not surprisingly, Russell later admitted that their policy had been 'an error'.[6] Even more significant was Hatherton's prediction of losses in Lancashire 'where all the Capitalists are Tories.'[7] Peelite Conservatism made conquests in the towns, including Liverpool, Leeds, and the City of London. As Professor Gash states,

> 'without the forty four Conservative MPs returned for the larger boroughs of over 1,000 electors, there would have been no victory.'[8]

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1. G.7. diary 19 May; Letters of Queen Victoria I, 281
2. Southgate, op.cit., p. 122.
   Gash, Peel, p. 265.
3. Melbourne to C. Cowper 14 July, Broadlands Papers M/L/C0/38.
4. N. McCord, The Anti-Corn Law League(1958), p. 93.
5. Wood to Baring 22 July 1841, Correspondence of F. T. Baring, I. 181.
   Morpeth to Russell 9 July, P.R.O. 30/22/4B f. 21.
6. Lord J. Russell, Recollections and Suggestions, 1813-73 (1875) p. 236.
7. Hatherton to Granville 28 May, P.R.O. 30/29/6 f. 478.
8. Gash, Peel, p. 265.

In general terms it is clear that conservative instincts continued to assert themselves; and that the Tories successfully exploited their local influence. They could also hardly fail to profit from the impression of financial and administrative incompetence and general weakness which the government had given since 1839.

It has recently been suggested that Melbourne ought to have led his party much further in pursuit of liberal doctrines than in fact he did.[1] He would then have restored harmonious relations with his followers and have enabled them to fare a great deal better in electoral terms. The adoption of ballot and the drastic reform of the Corn Laws are the principal moves recommended, as it were, to Melbourne. Yet throughout this chapter it has been argued that he had a very sensitive nose for party and public opinion. Did he, therefore, badly err in his judgement of the mood inside and outside the Commons in the later 1830's?

The voting figures in the Commons provide some evidence for the popularity of the two main issues. Grote won increasing support for his motions in favour of ballot, reaching 198 in February 1838. Villiers received 195 votes for his motion against the Corn Laws in March 1838. The minority of ministerialists voting against the motions were 69 and 79 respectively. These are impressive figures but their importance can be over-rated. In 1839, after both issues had been made open questions, Grote's motion attracted 216 votes, an increase of 18 only, whilst Villiers actually won less support with only 172 supporters. There were, therefore, limits to the popularity of these issues with Liberal MPs. This becomes even clearer when it is noted how they rallied to the government on any vote of confidence, and how the great majority also supported ministers

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1. Nash, Reaction and Reconstruction, pp. 168-9;
Newbould, 'Cabinets of Grey and Melbourne', passim, but especially pp. 295-6, 313-15, 359.

on a wide range of secondary issues.[1] Neither ballot nor reform of the Corn Laws became a burning article of faith as Catholic Emancipation had been before 1829; for most MPs it was a matter of indulging an intellectual preference and staking a claim for the future.

On both issues Liberal MPs were well in advance of public opinion. Ballot was given a great push by MPs who believed they had suffered from open voting in the 1837 election. But even an ardent party man like Ellice thought the question was not popular enough.[2] There was not enough public interest to prevent Hobhouse and Spencer from losing their earlier belief in ballot.[3] In January 1838, Melbourne wrote to Russell: 'I rather doubt its being so greatly popular as is supposed.'[4] Grote himself was so discouraged by public apathy that he did not seek re-election in 1841. The cause he had championed languished for three decades, perhaps tainted by association with Chartism.

Opposition to the Corn Laws did not similarly fade away but it was slow to increase whilst Melbourne was prime minister. The National Anti-Corn Law Association formed in London in 1836 proved ill-assorted in membership and ineffective in action. The Anti-Corn Law League itself emerged only in January 1839; its famous crusade was therefore still in its infancy when Melbourne had to assess its importance. Even at its height, the League's electioneering activities enjoyed very limited success.[5] Spencer, who was opposed to the Corn Laws, told Russell in 1841 that

> 'in the present state of feelings of the country, any system of representation which ... could possibly be adopted would give an overwhelming majority to those who support what is called Protection to the land ...' 6

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1. Close, 'Two party alignment', p. 275.
2. Ellice to Durham 8 October 1837, Lambton Papers.
3. Hobhouse diary 15 February 1838; V, 120-1.
   Spencer to Russell 14 November 1837, Early Correspondence of Lord John Russell, ed. R. Russell (1913) I, 209.
4. 8 January 1838, MML/RU/288.
5. McCord, op.cit., pp. 158-60.
6. Spencer to Russell 2 May 1841, Life of Russell ed. Walpole, I. 372.

It needed Peel's initiative in 1845-6 to break the Corn Laws. Melbourne's judgement some time previously had been that

> 'there is but one party in the country that can create a real feeling and agitation and that is the government.' 1

In writing this, he overlooked what he had felt about the strength of Reform feelings just before Wellington's fall in 1830. But even then it was the proposals of Grey's government which converted into a full-blown agitation what had been merely a series of alarming events. Melbourne's assessment was certainly applicable to the quieter times prevalent from the later 1830's.

Ballot and repeal of the Corn Laws occupied approximately the same position that Parliamentary Reform had done in the mid-1820's: they were supported by a progressive minority in Parliament but they were not politically profitable. If Melbourne had embraced these ideas he would infallibly have split his party, with no guarantee of electoral success. The future might lie with a proper Liberal party, in the mid-Victorian sense, but that future was a long way off even in 1841. Much more was involved in the creation of such a party than the acceptance of the Radicals of the later 1830's at their own evaluation. In 1834 Macaulay had defined the strongest party as

> 'the Centre Gauche, the party which goes further than the majority of the present ministry [Grey's], and yet stops short of the lengths to which Hume and Warburton go.' 2

It can be argued that it was precisely this party which Melbourne led whilst prime minister. If they suffered defeat then perhaps that was because Macaulay had misread the times or failed to anticipate what Peel could do, given favourable circumstances.

It is difficult to know what Melbourne thought of the end of his government since he spoke very little of it. It is quite likely that he regretted Peel's success and felt that his own efforts had been undervalued by the electorate.

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1. Melbourne to Russell 5 Jan. 1843, RP 15/64.
2. Macaulay to S. Rice 11 Aug. 1834, Torrens p. 296.

1. Torrens p. 526.
2. Hobhouse diary 14 August; VI, 36-7.
3. Parkes to Melbourne 5 May 1841 MP 33/25.
4. The Times 25 November 1848.
5. Hatherton diary 25 November 1848.

This is certainly the impression conveyed by part of his reply to an address from Derbyshire Liberals in September 1841. Melbourne dwelt on the need for unity and praised the reformers of Derby and Melbourne for their firm and constant support, observing that

> 'if the same consistent line of conduct had been pursued by other constituencies, the result of the late political contest would have been different from that which has taken place.' 1

On the whole, however, he accepted his defeat philosophically. Hobhouse has described the last Cabinet dinner, on August 14th 1841 at Melbourne's own house in South Street:

> 'We had very little politics at dinner; and when, afterwards, Lord John Russell asked Lord Melbourne whether he had anything to propose, the latter smiled, and said, "No, nothing." ... I could not say that we had a mournful meeting ... Lord Melbourne himself behaved much in his ordinary manner, perhaps with a little more freedom than at other times' 2

Melbourne seems to have tacitly recognised that Peel had supplanted him as the guarantor of political stability and moderate reforms.

It is doubtful if Melbourne in his old age derived much satisfaction from the knowledge that he had helped to contain the aftermath of the Reform bill cataclysm. Others, however, appreciated his role. The Radical organiser, Joseph Parkes, succinctly described him as 'a statesman, anxious for monarchy and the gradual descent of popular power.'[3] When the Times gave Melbourne a contemptuous obituary in 1848, it was sharply rebuked by 'An Old Whig' who wrote that Melbourne

> 'was wise enough to know that to conciliate sympathies, to strengthen friendships, and to acquire confidence whilst exercising authority are among the best methods of governing a free people.' 4

At the same time his old colleague Hatherton praised his services as prime minister

> 'when time was required for Party Passions to subside, the Country during the two or three years that preceded his Resignation being prepared neither to give a decided support to those who were for farther Reform, nor to those who would withold it. I believe the Country is indebted largely to him for the decided support he gave in Lord Grey's Cabinet to much that was indispensable at that time for the public satisfaction and to the discouragement he afterwards gave to the demands for "constant Progress".' 5

Chapter Four

Ireland 1830-1841

'if you entertain any doubt, it is safest to take the unpopular side in the first instance. The transition from the unpopular is easy and prosperous travelling. But from the popular to the unpopular the ascent is so steep and rugged that it is impossible to master it', Melbourne to Russell, 6 Aug. 1842; MP 15/61.

(1) November 1830 - November 1834

As Home Secretary in Grey's government, Melbourne was the Cabinet minister charged with overall responsibility for Ireland. His performance in this capacity has been the object of much criticism on the grounds that he failed to formulate policies which would satisfy O'Connell's party and alleviate the condition of the Irish peasantry.[1] Modifications to this picture are needed, especially for the last year of Melbourne's time at the Home Office; but it is not proposed to reject it completely.

An attempt must also be made to explain why this period should contrast with, on the one hand, his year as Irish Secretary in 1827-1828, and, on the other, the general success of his own governments from June 1834, above all after April 1835. Even his sympathetic biographer, Torrens, was obliged to write of the period 1830-34:

> 'The sound principles advocated by him when previously filling subordinate [office] and destined to be developed fully when he afterwards gained supreme executive power, were forgotten during the next three years, and the result was in every way disappointing.' 2

During these years Melbourne faced, as he himself later ruefully reflected, a situation far worse than that which he had encountered in 1827.[3] The fundamental ills of Ireland were unchanged. The peasantry's long war against their conditions intensified as they embarked upon a violent campaign against tithes. In 1832 over 9,000 agrarian crimes were recorded, including 242 murders and 568 cases of arson.[4] To Melbourne this was a frightening state of lawlessness. Just as alarming was the new wave of agitation, led by O'Connell, for a complete repeal of the Act of Union of 1800. Until the first elections after the Reform Act, O'Connell's Parliamentary following was limited, but in Ireland he seemed to be more powerful than the Dublin government.

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1. A. D. Kriegel, 'The Irish policy of Lord Grey's Government', Eng. Hist. Rev., lxxxvi (1971), pp. 22-45.
   Macintyre, The Liberator, chapter 2.
2. Torrens p. 229.
3. Melbourne to Wellesley 8 Sept. 1833, Add. Mss. 37,306 ff. 71-2.
4. Macintyre, op.cit., p. 45.

Melbourne and other Whig ministers compounded the seriousness of the situation for themselves by tending to associate the economic grievances of the peasantry with the political movement dominated by O'Connell. This was a mistaken interpretation but the effect was a widespread fear that there would be a general erosion of property rights in Ireland and an end to the unity of the Empire. Melbourne was dismayed but not altogether surprised that Ireland should be in this condition despite the passage of Catholic Emancipation. As he put it,

> 'it is too bad that when the right thing was done it was done so tardily and insincerely as to falsify every reasonable anticipation, and to realise every evil augury. What all the wise men promised has not happened; and what all the damned fools said would happen has come to pass.' 1

Melbourne's reaction to the Irish people in general was much as it had been in 1827: critical but not unsympathetic. He thought them 'the most conspiring people on the face of the earth' and told Archbishop Whateley that 'none but an Irishman can be a match for an Irishman. No other can detect their deceit.'[2] As the catalogue of agrarian crimes rose endlessly, Melbourne was inclined towards an even more pessimistic view. He doubted the wisdom of the Jury bill of 1832 which would make jurors of

> 'persons totally unfit for the discharge of that duty, unable to speak English, and in short half or rather whole Barbarians.' 3

But, at bottom, Melbourne knew that many Irish problems

> 'might be traced to the violence with which the laws and religion of England had been attempted to be forced on that country without any previous preparation of the minds of the people.' 4

More immediately he blamed O'Connell or the Catholic priests for the disturbances and murders, and not 'the miserable wretches upon whom the sword of the law falls.'[5] Such remarks do not seem to justify a recent view

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1. Torrens p. 234.
2. Melbourne to Anglesey 30 June 1832, MP 94/17, copy
   Melbourne to Whateley 7 Dec. 1833, MP 76/148, copy
3. Melbourne to Plunket 31 May 1832 MP 102/47, copy
4. Hansard, xvii. 675-6 (26 April 1833)
5. Melbourne to Grey 15 September 1832, Grey Papers.

that Melbourne was 'bored by the demands of Irish politics and angered by the endemic violence of the countryside.'[1] Melbourne was serious and responsible, if greatly perplexed, about Ireland. In October 1833 he asked Wellesley:

> 'Which of the ancient philosophers was it, who upon some deep metaphysical question being proposed to him by some king, first asked for a day, then for a week, then for a year and at the end of that period declared his inability to reply at all. How we are to conciliate the repose of Ireland, with the feelings and the interests of the Empire at large I do not perceive.' 2

In June, 1834 he told Brougham it would be 'eternity' before the disturbances in Ireland terminated. [3] Such remarks may suggest despair, but not boredom or anger.

Melbourne's most severe condemnation was reserved for O'Connell and his allies. He described him to Grey as the man responsible for 'outrage and violence', using methods of 'perfect and compleat villainy.'[4] He thought O'Connell was behind the Irish agrarian crimes which were comparable to 'what one reads both of the guile and the ferocity of the Hurons and the Iroquois' and that

> 'never was there a more wanton, a more unprovoked, a more unjustifiable recommencement of sedition and treason, than that which has been set on foot by O'Connell ...' 5

But he did not go so far as Grey, who came to have almost an obsessive hatred of O'Connell, or Stanley, who challenged O'Connell to a duel. By contrast, Melbourne recognised both his opponent's abilities and his genuine political stature. He made amends for his inaction in 1827 by helping to secure for O'Connell a patent of precedency at the Irish Bar in 1832.[6]

In January, 1834 Melbourne wrote a reluctant appreciation of O'Connell which

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1. G. Broeker, Rural Disorder and Police Reform in Ireland 1812-1836 (1970), p. 202.
2. Melbourne to Wellesley 22 Oct. 1833, Add. Mss. 37,306 f. 137.
3. Melbourne to Brougham 24 June 1834, Brougham Papers 43,501.
4. Melbourne to Grey 10 June 1831, Grey Papers.
5. Melbourne to Anglesey 9 Jan. 1832, MP 94/2.
6. Torrens p. 254.
   Hansard, x.743 (27 Feb. 1832)

cannot have been gratefully received by Wellesley. He told the Lord Lieutenant that

> 'we cannot conceal from ourselves that we have to deal with a man of a very extraordinary and unusual character, with a man who possesses permanently, I fear it may now be said, and throughout the greater part of a populous country that unquestioned power and unbounded influence, which has been enjoyed temporarily and in single cities by Tribunes of the People and Demagogues heretofore, and who uses that authority in the most reckless and unscrupulous manner, but at the same time with a degree of cunning and precaution, which make it necessary that he should be encountered with the same weapons.'[1]

Such an attitude was rather different from that of Wellesley himself who wrote a little later:

> 'O'Connell's vituperation is the passport to public fame, and the crowning glory, which I trust will attend every step of my Government in Ireland.' 2

Melbourne's powers of objective and dispassionate analysis took him some way towards a correct view of O'Connell personally. These same qualities made him even more reluctant to condemn the Roman Catholic population as a whole when compared with the Protestants of Ireland. After a year's experience of Ireland in turmoil, Melbourne informed Anglesey:

> 'I have no doubt that both of the parties in Ireland are equally outrageous, but O'Connell and the Roman Catholics are most at fault at present. Those who begin work of this kind, those who strike the first blow, are in my mind responsible not only for their own excesses, but for those of their opponents ...' 3

This was, however, a conclusion to which he felt himself driven, just as he expressed the fear to Anglesey that

> 'we shall either lose Ireland, or hold her by means of the Protestants, and I hardly know which alternative opens to us the most melancholy and appalling prospect.' 4

There was a certain bias on Melbourne's part towards the Irish Protestants.

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1. Melbourne to Wellesley 7 Jan. 1834, Add. Mss. 37,306 ff. 311-12.
2. Wellesley to Melbourne 25 February 1834, MP 98/30.
3. Melbourne to Anglesey 9 Jan. 1832, MP 94/2.
4. 25 October 1832; Marquess of Anglesey, <u>One Leg</u> (1963), p. 263.

He wrote to Wellesley that he greatly regretted any

> 'necessity of taking strong penal and coercive measures against the Protestants of Ireland. We should if possible manage their feelings and even respect their prejudices, as far as we can do so without sacrificing to them the rights of their fellow believers and the authority of the law.' 1

But, as the last part of this quotation reveals, Melbourne was out of sympathy with the mentality of the Ascendancy and not prepared to countenance Protestant extremists.

He also took action to enforce these views. In 1832 he helped carry an act prohibiting party processions in Ireland, clearly aimed at Protestants since it was not a habit of the Catholics.[2] Melbourne had doubts about the measure but these stemmed from the difficulties of enforcement and not from the principles involved.[3] Similarly, when the Orange Lodges staged a revival under the Duke of Cumberland's patronage, Melbourne contemplated proclaiming them illegal as dangerous assemblies under 3 William IV c.4.[4] In the event, reports of Orange activity turned out to have been exaggerated and the question of the Lodges' existence was postponed till 1835-6.[5] Melbourne had no illusions, however, about the nature of Ulster Protestants. He believed, somewhat quaintly, that

> 'the settled opinions and immoveable determination of that part of the country are always more difficult to deal with than the fervour and vivacity of the south.' 6

Melbourne felt he had to rely on the Irish Protestants for military assistance in the last resort but it was not a policy which he liked.[7]

It can be argued, therefore, that Melbourne thought his hand was being forced by the unreasonable behaviour of the Catholic population and that he was being made to relinquish a basic wish to govern Ireland in the spirit of

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1. 19 October 1833, Add. Mss. 37,306 f. 134.
2. Hansard, xiv. 1137-8 (13 August 1832)
3. Melbourne to Wellesley 19 September 1833, Add. Mss. 37,306 f. 104.
4. Melbourne to Wellesley 11 October 1833, Add. Mss. 37,306 ff. 115-17. Melbourne to Grey 11 October 1833, Grey Papers.
5. Melbourne to Wellesley 19 October 1833, Add. Mss. 37,306 f. 134.
6. Melbourne to Wellesley 11 October 1833 Add. Mss. 37,306 ff. 115-17.
7. See below p. 215

1829. In November 1832 he termed the conduct of the Catholics since 1829 as

> 'abominable ... as if they had no other object than that of discrediting their friends and vindicating their enemies'. 1

Russell was to pay tribute to Melbourne's original intention when, years later, he wrote to him:

> 'I remember you were the first person in 1829 by whom I heard it said that Ireland would henceforth claim to be treated according to its importance as a branch of the United Kingdom.'2

Melbourne tried to lay down such a policy in his instructions to Anglesey in December 1830. He stressed the need of a conciliatory spirit and impartial government since only 'the lapse of time ... will efface the effect of civil distinctions.' Anglesey was told to follow this course in the administration of justice and the distribution of office and honours.[3] The new Lord Lieutenant had not, however, been given an inspiring lead in this respect by the English government. The latter initially retained in the all-important Irish legal offices those appointed by Wellington's government. Even their successors, Blackburn and Crampton, were conservative Protestants whose selection was seen by O'Connell as a deliberate anti-Catholic move.[4] As Torrens put it, how Melbourne could have reconciled himself to such a selection must ever remain an enigma.[5] Partly under the influence of these advisers, Anglesey was to decide on the ill-fated attempt to prosecute O'Connell in January, 1831.[6] Their appointment was symptomatic of Melbourne's early decision that, in the state of Ireland then existing, measures of conciliation must take second place to the enforcement of the law. He explained

1. Melbourne to Stanley 18 November 1832, Derby 117/7.
2. Russell to Melbourne 9 September 1839; Early Correspondence of Lord John Russell, II, 264-5.
3. 18 December 1830, H.O. 100/235 ff. 142-7.
4. Macintyre, op.cit., pp. 21-22.
5. Torrens, p. 231.
6. See below p.210

his position clearly to Brougham in 1832:

> 'If we could but previously re-establish the authority of the law, conciliatory measures might have a chance of producing ... an effect. If not, depend upon it they will only lead to further demand.' 1

As late as September 1833, by which time cracks were appearing in the policy of coercion, Melbourne maintained that

> 'the spirit of combination, violence and encroachment will neither be satisfied nor mitigated by the concessions which have been made to it nor by any which may be made.' 2

If Melbourne favoured a policy of the firm hand in Ireland primarily because he thought it the best means of dealing with political agitation and rural anarchy, there were, nonetheless, other forces pushing him in the same direction. It was the policy which most commended itself to the majority of Grey's Cabinet, including the prime minister himself. Even the liberal element of Althorp, Russell, Brougham, Durham and Holland was not prepared to embark on a purely conciliatory policy for Ireland.[3] Melbourne had to respect the strongly conservative instincts of Richmond or Lansdowne and, above all, to prevent any breach in the Cabinet's unity whilst the Reform Bill was being passed and afterwards whilst it was being assimilated. As Melbourne reminded Russell in February 1835, he had always exhorted the members of Grey's government to shuffle over differences of opinion.[4] In the process, however, Melbourne's more liberal impulses were submerged and, arguably, the interests of Ireland were sacrificed. In taking this line, Melbourne was probably influenced by one member of the Government above the rest. This was Lord Stanley, Irish Secretary from November 1830, whose unusual abilities and forceful personality were rewarded with promotion to the Cabinet in June, 1831. Melbourne liked Stanley personally, responding to his self-confident, aristocratic spirit. He respected the younger man's intellectual

1. Melbourne to Brougham 20 Sept. 1832, Brougham 43,492.
2. Melbourne to Littleton 24 Sept. 1833, MP 96/26, copy.
3. Holland diary 5, 8 Feb. 1832, Add. Mss. 51,868 ff. 328-9, 333-4.
4. Melbourne to Russell 12 Feb. 1835, MEL/RU/143.

gifts and his administrative drive. Above all, Melbourne admired his skill as a debater in the Commons. He seems to have been fascinated by Stanley's display of just those oratorical powers to which he himself had once vainly aspired. On one occasion Melbourne said of Stanley,

> 'I heard him the other night in the Commons, when the party were all divided and breaking away from their ranks, recall them by the mere force of superior will and eloquence: he rose like a young eagle above them all, and kept hovering over their heads till they were reduced to abject submission. There is nothing like him.' 1

Stanley was in no way sympathetic to the Irish Catholics and he seems to have done much to ensure that Melbourne's divided mind would usually come down on the conservative side.

It would be a mistake, however, to bracket Melbourne and Stanley together as though they were one. Melbourne made some effort initially to check Stanley's prejudiced conduct and beliefs. As early as December, 1830 Stanley apologised to him: 'I believe you will think I shall end in being an Orange-man.'[2] In January 1831 the Home Secretary advised his nominal subordinate to consult the English government and law officers before initiating political prosecutions.[3] Equally, Melbourne advised him to retain moderate Catholics in official positions.[4] Then, when Stanley enthusiastically adopted the dramatic reports of 'Z', an informer, Melbourne dampened his ardour with 'Sift your intelligence well'. He went on:

> 'I cannot believe that the question of Doherty's murder was referred to the Bishops, nor that the County (sic) clergymen were ... aware of the plans, nor that the Agents are paid ten guineas a day ... nor that there are twenty Irishmen prepared to assassinate the King ...' 5

Such admonitions and rebuffs had little effect on the authoritarian and headstrong Irish Secretary. Taking Anglesey with him in the matter, Stanley had O'Connell arrested on 18 January 1831 only a week after Melbourne had

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1. Torrens p. 275.
2. Stanley to Melbourne 30 Dec. 1830, H.O. 100/234 ff. 380-1.
3. 10 January 1831, H.O. 122/15 f. 62.
4. 11 January 1831, Derby Papers 117/7.
5. 3 January 1831 Derby Papers 117/7.

warned against such precipitate action. O'Connell had laid himself open to charges of conspiracy, seditious libel and unlawful assembly but it is by no means clear that his prosecution could not have been delayed whilst the Cabinet was consulted. Althorp and other ministers were very doubtful even of the legality of the prosecution.[1] Officially Melbourne approved the action of Stanley and Anglesey and even when the trial ran into difficulties he thought that the question of

> 'whether O'Connell or the King's Lieutenant is to govern Ireland ... is worthwhile to try at any risk which can possibly be apprehended from bringing it to a decision.' 2

He expressed such a view, however, only after his mind had been made up for him and there must remain lingering doubts about his attitude. There is certainly a considerable gulf between Melbourne's hesitancy and Stanley's talk of being able to transport O'Connell and thus tranquillize Ireland.[3] In the event Stanley lost that round. O'Connell mounted a political campaign against the English government as well as exploiting all the legal loopholes open to him. Needing his support in the Commons over the Reform Bill, the Cabinet took advantage of a legal technicality to drop the case against O'Connell at the end of May, 1831.[4]

Stanley continued to outpace Melbourne in the summer of 1831. On 17 May Melbourne told him that he had learnt only from newpapers that Stanley had issued proclamations to increase the police force and had sent out special commissions for certain counties. Melbourne had also heard rumours of martial law being proclaimed in Co. Clare. He was so disturbed that he curtly asked to be told 'what you are about.'[5] This incident was but the prelude to a much more public furore over Stanley's Arms Bill. Earlier in 1831 the Cabinet had agreed to renew the existing, temporary act for the registration

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1. Althorp to Spencer 22 January 1831, Torrens p. 231.
2. Melbourne to Stanley 19 January 1831, Derby 117/7.
   Melbourne to Anglesey 31 March 1831, MP 93/122.
3. Stanley to Melbourne 25, 26 January 1831, H.O. 100/236 ff. 38-42, 23-26.
4. Macintyre, op.cit., p. 23-24.
5. Melbourne to Stanley 17 May 1831 Derby 117/7.

of firearms in Ireland. Assisted by the Irish law officers, Stanley drafted and published a much more draconian measure which would have made anybody found with unregistered firearms in a proclaimed district liable to transportation. Stanley's amended bill would also have become a permanent act. When it was announced early in July 1831 it was attacked so bitterly by O'Connell and was so unacceptable to liberal ministers (including, on this occasion, Grey) that it was hastily altered. Grey thought that Melbourne had known of Stanley's alterations and blamed him therefore for concealing them from the Cabinet. On the strength of this assertion Melbourne has been much criticised for his repressive policy.[1] In fact, the evidence is not straightforward. Grey merely stated to Anglesey: 'I suspect Melbourne was a little negligent in not bringing it before the Cabinet.'[2] Neither Althorp nor Holland singled out Melbourne in this way[3] and in view of the latter's previous difficulties with the Irish Secretary there is some reason to credit Torrens' story that Melbourne heard the news himself only 'when he read the Morning Chronicle early next day in his dressing room' and that he was duly angered by it.[4] It is, of course, possible that the bill had arrived at the Home Office and that Melbourne had failed to check its provisions but there is no surviving correspondence between Stanley and Melbourne to cast light on this matter. Melbourne may have been careless or over-trusting but he does not seem to have been more guilty than that.

To some extent Melbourne's problems arose from the ill-defined structure of Irish government. Lord-Lieutenant, Irish Secretary, Home Secretary and Prime Minister had parts to play but it was never entirely clear what they should be. A determined individual like Stanley could easily achieve a dominant position. As a result it was the Irish Secretary whom O'Connell saw

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1. Macintyre, op.cit., p. 46.
   Kriegel, 'Grey's Irish policy', p. 28 n. 6.
2. Grey to Anglesey 19 July 1831; Anglesey Papers, P.R.O. Northern Ireland, D619/28F, p. 128.
3. Althorp to Spencer 2 July 1831, Torrens p. 239.
   Holland to Anglesey 11 July 1831, Anglesey Papers, P.R.O. N.I., D 619/27G, p. 208.
4. Torrens p. 239.

1. Macintyre, op.cit., p. 25.
2. Anglesey to Holland 20 April 1831, P.R.O.N.I. D619/27C, p.10. Anglesey's Paper on Tithes 18 January 1832; Kriegel, 'Grey's Irish policy', p. 29.
3. Holland diary n.d. [summer 1832] Add. Mss. 51,869 ff. 568-9. The Creevey Papers ed. Sir H. Maxwell (1903) II, 265.
4. Melbourne to Brougham 4 Sept. 1832, Brougham 43,489.
5. Melbourne to Frederick Lamb 8 Sept. 1832, MP 106/13.
6. Melbourne to Grey 11 January 1833, Grey Papers. Holland diary n.d. [Feb. 1833] Add. Mss. 51,869 f. 573.
7. Melbourne to Anglesey 8 April 1833; P.R.O.N.I., D619/29B, f. 159.
8. Holland diary n.d. [Feb. 1833] Add. Mss. 51,869 f. 573.

as his main enemy and characterised as 'the Saxon' or 'snappish, impertinent, over bearing high Church Mr. Stanley.'[1] Even more serious from the government's point of view was the strained relationship between Stanley and Anglesey. The latter was inclined to be as much of an alarmist as Stanley where O'Connell or peasant outrages were concerned, but he also had a genuine concern for the Irish people and advocated direct, radical legislation to deal with tithes and rural poverty.[2] When Stanley successfully blocked all of Anglesey's suggestions, the two men virtually ceased to communicate with one another.[3] By September 1832 Melbourne could see that a change in the Dublin government was badly needed. He was apparently disposed to let Stanley leave his office except that it would look like a triumph for O'Connell.[4] Even so, Melbourne had to admit to his brother Frederick that Stanley had about him 'both the faults of great spirit, of haste, and of rashness, and those of being discontented and disgusted.'[5] Early in 1833 both Anglesey and Stanley were close to resignation. With great difficulty, and only at the second attempt, Grey persuaded Melbourne to replace Anglesey as Lord Lieutenant in February, 1833.[6] Melbourne's reluctant consent was obtained because he foresaw a complete break-up in the government if the difficulties at Dublin were not resolved.[7]

But then the debates in the Commons on the Coercion bill altered everything. In the first place, Stanley scored a victory over O'Connell; secondly, many government supporters, led by Ebrington, voted for the bill only on condition that Anglesey administered it.[8] Consequently, Stanley could retire with credit and in March he became Colonial Secretary. Anglesey remained in Dublin and was given a more suitable Irish Secretary in the person of J. C. Hobhouse, shortly succeeded in turn by E. J. Littleton. When Anglesey finally resigned in September 1833, on the grounds of ill-health, Wellesley was recalled as his successor. Melbourne thus narrowly escaped the potential political grave-yard of the Lord-Lieutenancy, a fate which he might be considered to have brought upon himself through failing to control Stanley. Seen in a wider context, Stanley's

departure from Dublin was the prerequisite of any new policy for Ireland, even if such a change was still at least a year away.

In conformity with Melbourne's own priorities, the government's coercive policies towards Ireland will be examined before its attempts at remedial legislation.

In attempting to combat rural disorder Melbourne quickly discovered the severely limited effectiveness of the powers at his disposal. The ordinary police force was regarded as an anti-Catholic body and was anyway inefficiently organised by local magistrates. It might, moreover, be defeated by sheer numbers: infuriated peasants at Carrickshock, Co. Kilkenny, in December 1831, killed seventeen policemen who were enforcing tithes.[1] A separate constabulary force, raised under the Peace Preservation Act and controlled directly from Dublin, proved more effective. By 1833 detachments operated in nine counties proclaimed under the Act. But the expense was excessive and agrarian crime was still far from stamped out.[2] Melbourne considered increasing the strength of the army in Ireland but could not see where the troops were to be found.[3] In any case the army was not entirely reliable because of the presence of Catholic soldiers. At best, it was a clumsy, emergency expedient. Finally, it was very difficult to secure convictions in Irish courts when evidence was withheld and witnesses were intimidated.[4] Even the lenient Holland thought that evasion of the law necessitated coercive measures.[5] By mid-1832 Melbourne was reduced to writing to Grey:

> 'I really know not what to say about Ireland. The suspension of the Habeas Corpus would not meet the present evil, which is a general system of determined combination and intimidation...' [6]

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1. Broeker, op.cit., p. 212.
2. ibid. pp. 211-12.
3. Melbourne to Grey 12 June 1832, Grey Papers.
4. Melbourne to Grey 20 June 1832, Grey Papers. Macintyre, op.cit., p. 45.
5. Holland diary n.d. [August 1832] Add. Mss. 51,869 ff. 534-5.
6. 12 June 1832, Grey Papers.

Before the Coercion Act of 1833, Melbourne made only one attempt to strengthen the government's repressive powers. This was the recall of the Protestant Yeomanry corps in Ireland which was decided upon soon after the Whigs took office in 1830. In December Melbourne reminded Anglesey that

> 'if things really become serious, recollect that there is no body in Ireland like the Protestant Yeomanry of the North.' 1

Melbourne was inclined to be sceptical of fears of a general rebellion but he could not afford to dismiss such a possibility out of hand. When Anglesey expected a rising in Kilkenny in January 1832, Melbourne told Grey, 'these things hardly ever take place, but it is of course necessary to be prepared.'[2] Even though O'Connell in fact discountenanced the rural outrages,[3] Melbourne always believed that there was a close connection between the Repeal agitation and the peasantry. He therefore justified his action by writing to Stanley:

> 'It is a ticklish matter the raising Volunteer corps in Ireland, but the conduct of O'Connell and the Roman Catholics renders it indispensable. It is their fault not ours if we are obliged to throw ourselves into the arms of the Orangemen.' 4

The prospect of 29,000 loyal Yeomanry was too tempting to ignore when the Irish government was so hard-pressed.

Melbourne tried to restrict the use of the Yeomanry, telling Stanley that

> 'the actual employment of them should certainly not be resorted to except in case of absolute necessity.' 5

He failed, however, to exercise sufficient control over them. In June, 1831 yeomanry were involved in a serious clash with the peasantry over tithes at Newtownbarry, Co. Wicklow, in which 12 people were killed. In July, a local corps marched in an Orange procession in Co. Cavan, and precipitated another riot. Such experiences had been common before 1830 and their renewal

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1. Melbourne to Anglesey 22 Dec. 1830, MP 93/47, copy.
2. Melbourne to Grey 26 Dec. 1831, Grey Papers.
3. Macintyre, op.cit., pp. 181-2.
4. 3 January 1831, MP 95/14.
5. 10 January 1831 MP 95/31.

showed how ill-advised Melbourne's decision had been. The Yeomanry were denounced by O'Connell's party and by the English Radicals. By January, 1832 Anglesey also wanted to be rid of them.[1] Not until October 1833, however, was there any sign that the government might withdraw the permanent staff which sustained the Yeomanry.[2] Then in January 1834 Melbourne instructed Wellesley to withdraw the staff and by March the Yeomanry were once again officially abandoned.[3]

The government's failure to enforce law in the Irish countryside was heavily underlined when, by the Tithes Arrears Act of 1832, it took upon itself to collect the arrears due to the Irish clergy. Stanley optimistically forecast, according to Holland, that 'on the arrest and imprisonment of some rich and leading recusants of tythe, the others will come in.'[4] Within a few months, however, Melbourne told Stanley he judged that

> 'by showing a sufficient force of military you are enabled to enforce the payment of tithes or the distraining and selling for them in that particular place, but otherwise no progress has been made towards re-establishing the rights of the clergy.' 5

Melbourne knew, moreover, that the available military force was already 'fatigued and harassed'.[6]

It was not, however, the failure to enforce tithes so much as the increasing level of agrarian crimes which made Melbourne finally decide that full-scale coercive powers were necessary. He was appalled by the level of violence by late 1832, and especially worried by nocturnal crimes and the peasantry's acquisition of firearms.[7] Even at this stage he did not go as far as

1. Anglesey to Stanley 14 Jan. 1832, H.O. 100/241.
2. Melbourne to Grey 2 October 1833, MP 5/110, copy.
   Grey to Melbourne 24 September 1833, MP 5/108.
3. 9 January, H.O. 122/15 f. 194.
   Wellesley to Melbourne 7 March 1834, H.O. 100/245 f. 196.
4. Holland diary 21 June 1832, Add. Mss. 51,869 f. 532.
5. Melbourne to Stanley 13 September 1833, Derby 117/7.
6. ibid.
7. Melbourne's comments on Gosset's reports 25 Oct., 14 Dec. 1832, H.O. 100/242 ff. 148-155, 100/243 ff. 89-96.
   Melbourne to Stanley 18 November 1832, Derby 117/7.

Stanley who was given to allegations that all land in Co. Clare 'was virtually held in common, subject to the insurgents' or that the Catholic priests were 'making a desperate struggle upon which they have staked everything, to obtain an ascendancy for the Catholic religion.'[1] It should also be noted that Stanley (and Anglesey) had pressed for special powers at least a year before Melbourne finally came to the same conclusion.[2] But, by December 1832, they were in agreement and Melbourne actually went further than Stanley in suggesting the use of martial law,[3] thus following his usual principle of acting decisively if action had to be taken.

During the latter part of 1832 Melbourne also concluded that O'Connell's political agitation could no longer be tolerated. He had long thought that

> 'If Mr. O'Connell, Mr. Steele, Mr. Costello, or anyone who thinks proper, is to possess the power ... of making circuits of the whole country, and of convoking ... public meetings upon any subject in every city, county, and district ... I do not see how the public mind can ever be expected to subside into contentment, or how any other result is to be looked for but perpetual disquietude, increased political violence, and ultimately revolt and civil war.' 4

Melbourne was well aware of the difficulties in the way of action against O'Connell. The Insurrection Act was not designed to stop daylight meetings. The suspension of Habeas Corpus could only be a temporary measure. The Seditious Meetings Bill could be circumvented by O'Connell obtaining the necessary local signatures for any meeting.[5] It was not easy to enact new legislation without removing the constitutional rights of discussion and petition which, as Melbourne wrote to Stanley, 'none of us wish to infringe upon or restrict.'[6] Measures against the Repeal party were subject to the same proviso which Melbourne made to Lansdowne when writing of legislation

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1. Stanley to Melbourne 19 May 1831, MP 95/88.
   Stanley to Melbourne 12 November 1832, MP 95/108.
2. Anglesey to Melbourne 18 April 1831, Derby 117/7.
   Stanley to Melbourne 6 June 1831 H.O. 100/239 ff. 229-30.
   Holland diary 18 Dec. 1831, Add. Mss. 51,868 ff. 256-61.
3. Melbourne to Stanley 20 December 1832, MP 95/113, copy.
4. Melbourne to Anglesey 26 February 1831, MP 93/112, copy.
5. Melbourne to Anglesey 26 February 1831.
6. Melbourne to Stanley 13 January 1831 MP 95/41.

to repress agrarian crime:

> 'You must carry along with you the public feeling and the general conviction. The evil must be so glaring as to be seen even by the blind.' 1

To a considerable extent, therefore, Melbourne shared the scruples of the liberal element in the Cabinet, led by Althorp.[2] But from June, 1832 Melbourne's patience began to run out, as can be seen from the new policy of dismissing magistrates who attended O'Connell's meetings.[3] His attitude cannot have been softened by the discovery of extremists on the fringe of the Repeal party constructing links with working class agitators in London.[4] For Melbourne the case against O'Connell was proved when the latter summoned Irish MPs to a 'National Council' in Dublin and created a new society, the Volunteers of Ireland of 1833.[5] This seemed to indicate a policy of Irish independence by force of arms. Melbourne even contemplated a further prosecution of O'Connell but this time Anglesey and his law officers would not take the risk.[6]

The result of the pressures exerted by O'Connell and the Irish peasantry upon the Irish government was the Coercion bill of February, 1833. It empowered the Lord Lieutenant for one year to proclaim disturbed areas where no meetings at all could be held, to suspend Habeas Corpus, to set up courts martial for civil offences, and to ban all meetings to petition Parliament unless due notice was given and his permission obtained. The scope of the bill amazed even the Tory Ellenborough.[7] It was passionately denounced by O'Connell in the Commons and received noticeably lukewarm support from Althorp.[8] Many government supporters were also unhappy about its provisions

1. Melbourne to Lansdowne 28 September 1832, MP 8/77, copy.
2. Althorp to Brougham 7 January 1832, Spencer Papers.
3. Melbourne to Anglesey 10, 12 July 1832, H.O. 79/9 ff. 115-17, 117-18.
4. Melbourne to Stanley 15 September 1832, Derby 117/7.
5. Melbourne to Anglesey 16 January 1833, H.O. 100/244 ff. 502-5.
6. Anglesey to Melbourne 19 January 1833, H.O. 100/244 ff. 179-83.
7. Ellenborough diary 15 February 1833, Three Early Nineteenth Century Diaries, ed. Aspinall, p. 302.
8. Macintyre, op.cit., pp. 47, 49.

so that the majority in its favour fell steadily. Ministers therefore conceded that political offences could not be tried by courts martial and that no district would be proclaimed for refusal to pay tithes. Melbourne was satisfied because, as he wrote to Anglesey,

> 'the two great points are obtained - the putting down illegal seditious bodies and the making it actually unlawful to be out by night in a proclaimed district.' 1

The Coercion Act probably did help the Irish government maintain order for a while, but there was also much truth in O'Connell's contention that the severest aspects of the bill had been removed.[2] In the longer term the Act meant that the government had exhausted its means of ruling Ireland with a strong arm. If coercion did not work, other policies would have to be tried.

Until its last few months, Grey's government was not notable for its attempt to solve the problems of Ireland by conciliatory legislation. There was virtually no interest shown in the conditions of land tenure in Ireland although these were at the bottom of the agrarian crimes. Quite apart from the vested interests of Whig landed families, contemporary economic orthodoxy made such an approach almost impossible. Melbourne had no estates in Ireland but that did not lessen his anxiety that the peasantry's campaign against tithes might be extended to rent also. As late as October, 1833 he described the rural disorders to Littleton as

> 'of a White Boy and Insurrectionary Character, all connected with the letting of land, the rate of Wages, the hireing of Servants etc.' 3

To blame O'Connell for the state of rural Ireland was therefore a convenient, if sincerely held, belief. Not until July, 1834 was Melbourne prepared to admit that the speeches and meetings of the Repeal party did not cause the lawlessness of peasant Ireland.[4] It is significant that when he took office

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1. 2 April 1833, MP 94/99, copy.
2. Macintyre, op.cit., p. 50.
3. Melbourne to Littleton 18 Oct. 1833, MP 96/48, copy.
4. Hansard, xxv. 655-9 (29 July 1834).

he thought reform of the grand juries the most urgent of problems 'as affecting the most deeply and extensively the property of the Country.'[1] It is also noticeable that the one undisputedly successful Irish reform of the early 1830's, the creation of a system of primary education, was in a sphere safely outside the realm of property relationships.[2]

With a rampant tithe war on its hands, the government could not, however, avoid the question of the Irish Church for long. Melbourne did not take the initiative here, doubtless foreseeing the inherent difficulties, but by June 1831 even Stanley thought that ministers should grapple with the Church issue.[3] On Stanley's suggestion, select committees in the Lords and Commons were appointed to investigate the tithe question. The Irish Secretary managed to exclude Catholics from these committees despite objections from liberals in the Cabinet.[4] Even Charles Grant raised a voice in protest at Stanley's manoeuvre but Melbourne silently acquiesced in it. Stanley then successfully manipulated the Commons committee whilst the one in the Lords proceeded on broadly similar lines, probably under the guidance of Lansdowne.[5] The Commons committee first reported in February, 1832, recommending that the government advance the tithe arrears of 1831 to the Irish clergy. Its second report, in June 1832, recommended that tithe composition (voluntary under an 1823 Act) become permanent and compulsory and be made the responsibility of the landlords.[6] The clergy would thus be saved direct confrontation with the tenants whilst the latter still had to pay tithes indirectly with their rent. This became the basis of the Tithe Composition Act of 1832. As Stanley was at pains to emphasise, tithes were in no way abolished under the Act. Indeed, he had made it clear to the Cabinet

1. Melbourne to Stanley 7 January 1831, H.O. 122/15 f. 60.
2. Macintyre, op.cit. pp. 28-9.
3. Stanley to Melbourne 8 June 1831, H.O. 100/239 ff. 247-8.
4. Littleton diary 12 December 1831, Hatherton Papers.
   Holland diary 8-10 Dec. 1831, Add. Mss. 51,868 f. 242.
5. Kriegel, 'Grey's Irish policy', p. 30.
6. See Macintyre, op.cit., p. 186-7.

1. Le Marchant diary 26 Jan. 1832, Three Early Nineteenth Century Diaries, ed. Aspinall, p. 125.
   Holland diary 2 Dec. 1831, Add. Mss. 51,868 f. 239.
2. Macintyre, op.cit. p. 187,
3. Melbourne to Grey 12 June 1832, Grey Papers.
4. Melbourne to Anglesey 30 July 1832, MP 94/38, copy.
5. Holland diary 24 June 1832, Add. Mss. 51,869 ff. 534-5.
   Macintyre, op.cit., p. 188.
6. Melbourne to Brougham 4 September 1832, Brougham 43,489.
7. 15 September, Brougham 43,491.
8. 20 September, Brougham 43,492.

that he would resign rather than allow Church property to be confiscated or appropriated.[1] The furthest he was prepared to go, though this was not included in the 1832 Act, was to commute tithes for a single money payment which the Church could then invest in land. His Act, moreover, did not accomplish its aim. The intermediate landlords, on whom Stanley had been depending, were reluctant to co-operate, even when offered a rebate of 15% of the composition.[2]

Melbourne seems to have been indifferent to the Tithe bill, believing that no good would come of either changing things or leaving them as they were.[3] There were signs, however, that he would go beyond Stanley's position. He told Anglesey, who had advocated a very radical settlement of tithes, that he agreed

> 'the question of the established Church requires to be settled in such a manner as is likely to be final, and I also agree that a provision should be made for the Roman Catholic clergy. But it appears to me that in the present state of parties and of the Houses of Parliament, no reasonable expectation either could or can be entertained, that measures for these purposes can be adopted easily and expeditiously.' 4

In theory, this statement places Melbourne fairly close to Grey and Holland, who wanted a commutation of the tithe into a land tax, and to O'Connell, whose idea it was to tax all property for the maintenance of all three religions in Ireland.[5] Further evidence comes from a correspondence between Melbourne and Brougham in September, 1832. Melbourne said he thought

> 'something more decisive ... about tithe to be necessary, and not only about tithe, but about the Church Establishment. However these are matters still of great difficulty.' 6

One minor difficulty arose from the character of Grey himself. Melbourne pointed out that

> 'in anything about Tithe we must make a great effort to force Grey to communicate with the Bishops and try as much as possible to carry the Church along with us. He dislikes too much talking to People, who differ from him and contradict him ...' 7

More significant was Melbourne's letter of 20 September in which he wrote:

> 'in any measures respecting the Church you will agree with me in the great importance of having Stanley with us',

especially as Stanley had, in Melbourne's revealing phrase, 'some peculiar prepossessions upon the subject.'[8] Together with his opinion on the collection

of tithes in Ireland by mid-1833,[1] these letters seem to show Melbourne edging towards a new appreciation of the need for important changes in Irish policy.

If this is a correct interpretation, it has to be admitted that Melbourne did not obviously take the liberal side when the Cabinet decided on further reform of the Irish church late in 1832. But, if he did not join Althorp and Russell in urging the principle of appropriation, equally he did not support Stanley and Richmond who wanted Church property declared inviolate. With opinions so evenly balanced it was understood, as Holland put it, that the Cabinet merely waived the question of appropriation for the present.[2] Moreover, Melbourne could hardly have failed to notice that the House of Commons elected in December 1832 was, as leading liberals observed, disposed to more radical action against the Irish Church than anything undertaken so far.[3]

The Irish Church bill, introduced in February 1833, was supposed to be the concomitant of the Coercion bill, but, with two exceptions, its provisions offered little to Catholic feeling. For the most part, it implemented an overdue internal reform of the Irish Church, notably the abolition of ten superfluous bishoprics and the suspension of any parishes where there were no Protestants to attend church. There was one minor concession to Catholics in the abolition of Church Cess (the equivalent of Church Rates) which was replaced by a tax on higher clerical incomes. Clause 147, however, seemed to promise considerably more. This created a fund of £2-3,000,000 derived from the sale of bishops' lands to existing leaseholders, which would be used to pay the bishops and the residue of which would be at the disposal of Parliament.

1. See page 223
2. Holland diary n.d. [autumn 1832] Add. Mss. 51,869 ff. 569-70.
3. Althorp to Grey 1 January 1833, Spencer Papers.
   Duncannon to Holland 6 January 1833, Add. Mss. 51,724 ff. 13-16.
   Ellice to Graham 9 January 1833, Graham Papers 21.

This aspect was well received by ministerial supporters in the Commons and by O'Connell's party.[1] Although the clause did not directly appropriate Church property, by mid-June 1833, the Cabinet were not at all sure that it would be passed by the Lords. However, on Althorp's advice, it was left in the bill. Then, at a very late stage, Grey and Stanley decided on their own initiative to abandon the clause so as to get the bill through the Lords.[2] This volte-face provoked the anger of English liberals as well as O'Connell's party. No fewer than 149 voted against the omission of the clause.

Melbourne had not favoured pressing this early appropriation clause.[3] But, equally, he was not in favour of collecting tithes in full measure at the price of bloodshed. In June 1833 he informed Anglesey that, as a result of Althorp's promise to the Commons that the Coercion bill would not be used for the collection of tithes, the government would have to abandon its attempts to extract tithe arrears.[4] Instead, the government passed the Million Act to advance one million pounds to the indigent clergy. In August, after consulting the Cabinet, Melbourne instructed Littleton not to lend troops and police to assist tithe owners who insisted on trying to exact their full legal rights. As he put it, the tithe owner

> 'cannot in justice expect that aid should be afforded with the same ease and readiness, as it has been of late, when it has been granted in fact upon general political principles, and for the purpose of putting down a movement so general and so combined as to amount almost to insurrection.' 5

Melbourne remained gloomy about the prevalence of rural crimes[6] and the likelihood that a movement which had 'succeeded in practically abolishing the tithe by force' would soon turn against 'other pecuniary claims and charges.'[7]

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1. Macintyre, op.cit., pp. 39-40.
2. Littleton to Anglesey 23 June 1833, P.R.O.N.I., D619/31F, pp. 222-3.
3. Holland diary 25 July, Add. Mss. 51,869 ff. 658-61.
4. Melbourne to Anglesey 3 June 1833, MP 94/125, copy.
5. Melbourne to Littleton 29 August, MP 96/7.
6. Melbourne to Littleton 24 September MP 96/26, copy.
   Melbourne to Littleton 27, 30 December MP 97/16,23, copies.
7. Melbourne to Wellesley 8 September 1833, Add. Mss. 37,306 ff. 71-2.

Such feelings made his progress towards a fresh understanding of the problems of Ireland a tortuous affair. But his attitude was, perhaps, now similar to that of Russell, who wrote to Melbourne from Ireland in September, 1833:

> 'I have little doubt from all I hear that with the Coercion Act, and a strong military force, the composition for tithes may be collected for two or three years more. The question is how much force you will apply, and how much bloodshed you will incur, to inflict upon these people a clergy they have no need of.' 1

By November, Littleton was preparing a new Tithe bill, the main feature of which was the conversion of tithes into a crown rent or land tax. The Cabinet accepted his proposals,[2] despite doubts about the likely reception in Parliament of a compulsory tax. Melbourne thought the tax might be justified 'by the perilous and urgent circumstances in which we are placed.'[3] As proposed in the Commons in February, 1834, the new bill provided for a crown rent lasting for five years, redeemable at any time by a money payment or land. After five years any rent unredeemed was to become a rent charge, also redeemable, to be paid by the head landlord at 80% of the tithe composition. The crown rents would be invested by Ecclesiastical Commissioners who would pay the tithe owners out of the proceeds. The bill was strongly attacked by O'Connell and the Irish members because it transferred the odium of tithes from the clergy to landlords.

Soon after the bill's second reading in the Commons in May, 1834 it was overtaken by the breaking of a full-scale crisis over appropriation. This had been predicted for some time. In January, 1834 Althorp had confided to Littleton that

> 'this Church Question in Ireland must, either in this session or at no very distant period, dissolve the present Cabinet. It can be postponed but for a very short time, and whenever it is really forced on, we shall be obliged all of us to take our own line...'4

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1. Russell to Melbourne 18 September 1833 MP 13/30.
2. Melbourne to Littleton 23 November 1833, MP 96/96.
3. Melbourne to Littleton 23 Nov. 1833, MP 96/96.
4. Althorp to Littleton 5 Jan. 1834, Add. Mss. 37,306 ff. 308-9.

On 2 May Althorp and Littleton had some difficulty in resisting an Irish motion for appropriation.[1] On 6 May Russell impetuously declared in the Commons that he was prepared to appropriate the surplus revenues of the Irish Church.[2] This provoked a three week crisis in which Grey was finally unable to patch up the differences within his Cabinet. With Ward's motion on appropriation the immediate cause, Stanley resigned at the end of May, taking with him Graham, Richmond and a somewhat reluctant Ripon.[3] Lansdowne, too, might have resigned but Grey prevailed on him to stay by promoting his nominees , Spring Rice and Auckland, and excluding Durham.[4] Despite Lansdowne's influence, the crisis resulted in a triumph for the liberal element in the government. Althorp and Russell were reinforced by Ellice and Abercromby, now promoted to the Cabinet. Stanley's departure potentially changed the whole relationship between the government and O'Connell. The latter all but offered his services as Attorney General and his help in pacifying Ireland if his tithe plan was adopted.[5] This was a premature move, to which Grey would not respond, but it heralded a new political climate.

Melbourne's behaviour at this critical juncture is of interest more for what he did not do than for what he did. Earlier in 1834 he had given only slight indications of a change in his Irish policy. Correctly anticipating the approaching defeat of O'Connell's Repeal motion in the Commons, Melbourne told Wellesley that after it he hoped there might be

> 'the bare possibility of the People of Ireland at last opening their eyes to their true interest.' 6

Subsequently he dissuaded Wellesley from using the Coercion Act to prohibit the discussion of Repeal at public meetings, thinking it

> 'a false step, which might lose us the sympathy of the People of England, might hurry the Country into a situation of greater peril, than that in which it is placed at present.' 7

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1. Littleton to Wellesley 2 May 1834 Add. Mss. 37,307 f. 26.
2. Holland diary n.d. [June 1834] Add. Mss. 51,870 f.714.
3. ibid. f. 714.
4. Greville diary 1 June 1834; III, 92-3
5. Macintyre, op.cit., pp. 132-3.
6. Melbourne to Wellesley 7 Jan. 1834, Add. Mss. 37,306 ff. 311-12.
7. Melbourne to Wellesley 4 May 1834, Add. Mss. 37,307 ff. 13-14.

Then, faced with the great political watershed of May, 1834, Melbourne had no hesitation in staying in the government. He thus, by implication, committed himself to the course desired by Althorp, Russell, and the majority of the House of Commons. In taking this decision he was heavily influenced by what he saw as the overriding need of stable government for England. But it is reasonably clear that this dovetailed with his appreciation of the need for a new approach to Irish problems. His one active intervention in the events of May certainly points to such a conclusion. When Grey reshuffled his government it was felt, as Holland put it, out of, if not in the Cabinet, that it required more reformers if it was to retain the support of the Commons.[1] One of the most obvious candidates in this respect was Duncannon, a liberal in general and known to be sympathetic to the Irish party. Melbourne joined Althorp in recommending Duncannon to Grey but the latter refused to include him in the Cabinet, a decision fully supported by Lansdowne.[2] Melbourne's efforts are particularly interesting because Duncannon had earlier been critical of Melbourne's illiberal principles in Irish affairs.[3] Such criticism showed a misunderstanding of Melbourne's basic attitudes, although it took Russell's dramatic challenge to bring them into the light of day.

In June, 1834 Grey's resignation, after Littleton's indiscretions to O'Connell,[4] presented the Whig ministers with an even more clear and far-reaching decision to make than that of May. Once again, Melbourne remained in office for the sake of a stable government. In the process he gave up the stringent meetings clauses in the new Coercion bill. It is difficult to judge his attitude to these clauses. His general policy towards Ireland was changing. After becoming prime minister, he told the Lords that the

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1. Holland diary n.d. [June 1834] Add. Mss. 51,870 f. 722.
2. ibid.
3. Littleton diary 10 August 1833, Three Early Nineteenth Century Diaries, p.356.
4. See page 148

efficacy of the clauses must not be exaggerated and that he was ready 'without these powers to be responsible for the peace of Ireland.'[1] But what proved decisive were the facts that Althorp would not remain in office unless the clauses were omitted,[2] and that without Althorp no government was possible. Thus, although Melbourne's opinion of the necessity for the meetings clauses was already weakening, in the end that opinion became irrelevant even to Melbourne himself. Shorn of these clauses, and without the provision for courts-martial which had been dropped before the Littleton-O'Connell storm arose, the renewed Coercion Act did not look a very formidable instrument. This meant that Melbourne was committed to conciliation as the primary means of governing Ireland. Further indication of this could be found in the appointments to Melbourne's Cabinet, especially that of Duncannon as Home Secretary. As O'Connell wrote, 'we are on the way from a half Whig, half Tory Government to one half Radical, half Whig.'[3]

In practice, however, the change of direction proceeded erratically. In July, Melbourne's government accepted a modification of the tithe bill proposed by O'Connell which had been rejected so long as Grey was prime minister. This reduced the rent-charge from 80% to 60% of the composition and provided an extra 17½% for tithe owners from the Consolidated Fund.[4] With considerable justice Melbourne argued to the Lords that this was really 'not a bad arrangement' for the clergy;[5] but O'Connell's intervention damned the bill in the eyes of vengeful Tory peers and it was rejected by 189-122 on the second reading. Thereafter the Whigs moved too slowly for O'Connell. He called Melbourne 'incompetent' and 'inefficient', and Lansdowne 'hostile'.[6] In November he was

1. Hansard, xxv. 655-9 (29 July 1834).
2. Le Marchant, Althorp, p. 518.
3. O'Connell to Barrett n.d. [July 1834], O'Connell Correspondence I. 451.
4. Macintyre, op.cit., p. 191.
5. Hansard, xxv. 1143.
6. O'Connell to Duncannon 2, 11 October 1834, O'Connell Correspondence I. 486, 491-2.

not displeased at the dismissal of 'the humbuggers'.[1] In particular, he was frustrated in his wish to see a thorough purge of central and local government in Ireland. The appointment in October of O'Loghlen as Irish Solicitor General, the first Catholic to hold high office since 1688, was an apparent exception but the Whigs made the move on their own initiative and not out of deference to O'Connell.[2]

Melbourne defined his policy and defended the slowness of its execution in a letter to his nephew, William Cowper, in November 1834:

> 'I do not see how we or any other Government could have begun to put the Roman Catholic relief bill into actual operation more easily than has been done. We must wait for vacancies to occur. O'Connell demands ... a general turn out of every person employed from the highest to the lowest, which would neither be just nor wise. Nothing can be done, that will be admitted to be right, but that is not the case in Ireland only.' [3]

So far as giving office to O'Connell himself was concerned, Melbourne told Russell that he strongly believed 'nothing can be done with him.'[4] O'Connell would demand the highest offices such as that of Attorney General and, even if he were given such a post, Melbourne thought it would not shake his influence with the people of Ireland one jot. The people of Ireland are not such damned fools as the people of England.'[5] No attempt was therefore made to repeat the fruitless offers of 1830 and 1831.[6]

Melbourne was, indeed, very much feeling his way towards any reorientated Irish policy. In September 1834 Russell pressed for a meeting of Parliament early in November so as to restore the Coercion Act to full strength, and thus counter O'Connell's latest plans for a Repeal agitation based on corresponding clubs throughout Ireland.[7] Melbourne refused to be hurried into such action, even though Lansdowne was thinking on the same lines

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1. O'Connell to Fitzpatrick 17 November 1834, ibid. I, 503.
2. Melbourne to Wellesley 7 October 1834, Add. Mss. 37,307 f. 198.
3. 3 November 1834, Broadlands MEL/CO/2.
4. Melbourne to Russell 23 August 1834, Sanders p. 210.
5. ibid.
6. See Macintyre, op.cit., pp. 21, 26-7.
7. Russell to Melbourne 2 September 1834, MP 13/35.

as Russell.[1] But Melbourne also thought premature Russell's plans for a tithe and church bill, and a poor law for Ireland, in the same projected November Parliament. He told Russell bluntly,

> 'With respect to the Church I do not believe that many of you know what you mean or intend, or what can be done and I apprehend that those who have some conceptions of this sort will be found to differ considerably.' 2

He also reminded Russell that the Irish Church and Poor Law Commissions had not yet made their reports. But his Irish policy was sufficiently well-defined to frighten William IV out of his wits and shipwreck the whole government in November 1834. Nor did Melbourne show any inclination, during his confrontation with the King, to relinquish his reforming intentions.[3] Having boxed the compass of Irish policies, he was at last back at the position he had occupied seven years earlier.

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1. Lansdowne to Melbourne 11 September [1834], MP 8/85.
   Melbourne to Russell 8 September 1834, MP 3/38, copy.
2. ibid.
3. See above p. 157

Ireland (2): November 1834 - August 1841

When Melbourne had to consider Irish policy in February 1835, he did so in the wider context of British politics and with that realism which he had shown in July 1834.[1] He saw better than anyone else, though even then not with total clarity, that whatever the long term disadvantages - and they were great - of taking up the Irish Church issue, there was no other way to govern Britain, given the prevailing mood of the Commons. Russell's virtual ultimatum of 11 February forced Melbourne to recognise this state of affairs or at least to make known his recognition.[2] Melbourne replied that Russell was

> 'right to be explicit about the Irish Church. ... this is really an important moment, and a fresh start, and it is nonsense now not to understand one another at least upon matters so important and so urgent.' 3

Moreover, although he thought that appropriation as a policy would eventually destroy any government he formed, he agreed entirely with Russell about the question in the abstract. From any point of view his action was based on principle. Russell was gratified by Melbourne's decision and they sealed an alliance on a policy of 'justice for Ireland' which lasted for the rest of the decade.[4]

On their return to power in April 1835, Melbourne and Russell indicated their intentions by installing an obviously liberal government in Dublin. As Lord Lieutenant, Mulgrave was very much Melbourne's own choice.[5] He replaced Wellesley who, whatever his merits, was not flexible enough to come to terms with O'Connell. Mulgrave had, as Melbourne later wrote to him,

> 'a very difficult task, no other than that of carrying the Roman Catholic Relief Bill into actual practical effect.' 6

He carried out his mission with considerable success, although his expansively liberal gestures often disturbed Melbourne's peace of mind. The new Irish

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1. See above p.164
2. Russell to Melbourne 11 Feb. 1835, MP 13/41.
3. Melbourne to Russell 12 Feb. 1835, MEL/RU/143.
4. Russell to Melbourne 13 Feb. 1835, MEL/RU/3.
5. See p.172
6. 7 February 1837, Mulgrave Papers MM/145.

Secretary was Lord Morpeth who came of an eminent Whig family and whose reliable, unexciting talents were a useful counterfoil to those of Mulgrave. The real day to day strength of the Irish administration lay in the appointment of Thomas Drummond as Under Secretary.[1] Melbourne hesitated before removing the previous Under Secretary, Sir William Gossett, who had been a reasonably neutral figure, even though Drummond was highly recommended by Spencer. His doubts were removed by the new Attorney General, Louis Perrin, who said of the Secretary, 'My Lord, he will be your right eye, and if we have to spend our time plucking old beams out of it, your Government will not go straight.'[2] Perrin himself was a sign of the new regime, not a Catholic but a liberal Protestant, perhaps preferred to O'Loghlen because Melbourne said of Perrin that he had less of the Irishman about him than anyone he had ever known.[3] O'Loghlen would have been O'Connell's choice as Attorney General but, on the whole, O'Connell was satisfied with the legal arrangements which returned O'Loghlen to his post as Solicitor General. They were certainly in contrast to those of 1830, as could be seen from the almost immediate dismantlement of the anti-Catholic practices which had built up in the courts.[4] Even Howick, usually the most loyal of sons, had to emphasise to Grey that these officials compared all too favourably with those unfortunately appointed in 1830.[5] With Russell in the pivotal position of Home Secretary, those responsible for Ireland formed a strong and harmonious team.

Almost as soon as Melbourne had formed his second government he was accused of having bought political office by a disgraceful alliance with agitators and Papists. Such attacks became commonplace in the House of Lords. In replying to them, Melbourne developed the broad principles of his Irish policy, and, indeed, became more ardent in defence of them the harder he was

1. See Macintyre, op.cit., p. 158.
2. Torrens pp. 367-8.
3. ibid., p. 368.
4. Torrens p. 366.
5. Howick to Grey 2 March 1836, Grey Papers.

pressed by his opponents. In particular his belief in political liberty and religious toleration led to some notable clashes with Lyndhurst and Dr. Phillpotts of Exeter. In July 1835, for instance, he sat through one and a half hours of a speech from Phillpotts which was devoted to abuse of the Catholics. When Melbourne's turn came, Holland recorded how he spoke with

> 'indignation of ... the years of persecution the Roman Catholics had undergone in Ireland. The tone and temper of his speech was excellent, in a high strain of confidence. It will do him great good in Ireland ... He is manifestly somewhat nettled at the aversion of the Court and the hostility of the Aristocracy and his manly defiance of them ingratiates him with the popular party ...' 1

Hatherton also praised Melbourne's speech:

> 'No one is so effective when he is roused. His tone is so fervent and sincere ... his spirit so elevated and generous ...' 2

In August 1835 he delivered another such speech which Hatherton again applauded and which was favourably reported even to Howick's wife.[3] In this Melbourne characterised previous rulers of Ireland as either malign or mad for insulting and outraging the religious feelings of the majority, adding

> 'it is not fitting to treat the Roman Catholics with insult ... as if they were worshippers of Juggernaut, or the votaries of any other barbarous superstition.' 4

The nub of his argument was that, if a different course from previous repression was to be adopted, it was only logical to abandon the latter entirely and adopt its precise opposite.[5] The whole speech was a virtual manifesto for his government.

Melbourne returned to this theme in June 1836 in a debate on the Irish Corporations bill when, according to Hatherton, Phillpotts thought him

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1. Holland diary 16 July 1835, Add. Mss. 51,871 ff. 892-3.
2. Hatherton diary 16 July 1835, Hatherton Papers.
3. Hatherton diary 20 August 1835.
   (Lady) Howick diary 20 August.
4. Hansard, xxx. 727 (20 August)
5. ibid. 726.

'too far enfeebled with Gout and a long illness to rise and reply. But he [Phillpotts] received a facer which silenced him.'[1] Melbourne told the bishop that the remedy for the 'evils' of Ireland was to be 'found in other measures than in a return to anything like those exclusive principles which prevailed before 1829.'[2] He then attacked the Lords for

> 'the manner in which you have tried to do everything that is unpopular, and abstained from doing anything that has in it the elements of generosity and popularity.' 3

Melbourne ended with the words:

> 'The way for you to act is to trust the people of Ireland ... It is the only way to govern ... under a popular form of government.' 4

At the end of June it was Lyndhurst's turn to be put down after he had delivered his notorious speech describing the Irish Catholics as 'Aliens in Blood, Aliens in language, Aliens in religion. Aliens whom we had conquered.' 5 Hatherton thought that subsequently 'Melbourne spoke with great fire and animation, and attacked Lyndhurst with effect.'[6]

Melbourne's sustained defence of the government's Irish policy in the Lords did much to encourage the other Whig peers, even when they saw their bills devastated by the Tories. In April, 1837 Melbourne made another notable speech against Lyndhurst, on the Irish Corporations bill, which he concluded with the almost unanswerable question, if the religious opinions of Catholics could not be changed, why interfere with their liberty, feelings, and communities?[7] Hatherton thought it one of his best speeches, writing in his diary that Melbourne

> 'seemed to speak under more than ordinary excitement ... and hesitated a good deal. But his is always the hesitation of earnestness and haste ... We cheered him loudly.' 8

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1. Hatherton diary 10 June 1836.
2. Hansard, xxxiv. 880.
3. ibid. 884.
4. ibid. 963.
5. Hatherton diary 27 June 1836.
6. ibid.
7. Hansard, xxxviii. 260-71 (25 August 1837)
8. Hatherton diary 25 April 1837.

Hatherton's verdict was that the tone of the evening's proceedings would have made anyone think the Whigs the triumphant majority and the Tories the defeated minority. Three days later, on the presentation of a great petition from Irish Protestants, Melbourne asked again:

> 'Is it possible, my Lords, that you can ever expect peace or tranquillity in Ireland whilst you continue to attack the religion of so large a majority of its population?' 1

This may, perhaps, stand as his final rhetorical justification of what he was attempting to do in Ireland. Melbourne's speeches on Ireland are probably less impressive than comparable ones from, say, Russell in the Commons;[2] but they served their purpose and were certainly inspired by the same feelings. To excite praise from Holland and Hatherton was not a foregone conclusion: they were partisan but not blindly so; and both had experienced much fine speaking.

It is not certain that Melbourne changed his attitude towards O'Connell himself, though there are some signs of a thaw. He found no difficulty in recognising the quality of the Irish leader. As he told Mulgrave,

> 'the rent is after all a strange thing. People may call him [O'Connell] a beggar, an extortioner, a robber of the poor, but still it is a wonderful and irresistible proof of the confidence of a great mass of the population. The Roman Catholic Bishops discountenance it; it is evidently contrary to the pecuniary interests of the Roman Catholic Priests, yet it not only continues to be collected, but it increases every year. There is nothing to be said against this.' 3

Melbourne also readily acknowledged the advantage of O'Connellite votes in the Commons for the purpose of maintaining a strong government.[4] When Mulgrave provoked an uproar in Tory circles by inviting O'Connell to dinner at his official Dublin residence in October 1835, Melbourne stoutly defended the action. He told an enraged William IV that no other course was possible

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1. Hansard, xxxviii. 310 (28 April 1837)
2. See Prest, Russell, p. 143.
3. Melbourne to Mulgrave 23 October 1835, Mulgrave MM/50.
4. Melbourne to Mulgrave 19 September 1835, Mulgrave MM/41.

'unless Lord Mulgrave intended to sacrifice his own influence with the majority of the people of Ireland.'[1] Likewise when O'Connell was received by Whig society in London, Melbourne's shock was severely muted to judge from his remark, reported by Lady Salisbury, 'Why, you know, after one has had O'Connell, one may have anybody.'[2] By contrast, one of Lansdowne's oldest Whig friends refused to enter Lansdowne House for fear of meeting O'Connell.[3]

Even so, Melbourne found it difficult to trust O'Connell personally or to tolerate his tactics. In the autumn of 1835 he asked Mulgrave secretly to inform O'Connell of the deep impression produced in England by his violent speeches and the

> 'general conviction that he is an irreclaimable blackguard, and that it is unfit for any gentleman to associate with him. It hinders one from saying a single word in his defence.' 4

Melbourne himself was less concerned with O'Connell's moral character than with his usefulness as a political ally. He therefore thought it O'Connell's

> 'duty not to render himself unnecessarily odious and detestable. If he does he will bring everybody to be of the opinion of the House of Lords, that a measure is to be rejected at once merely because he is for it. I think his great acuteness must perceive how much he stands in the way of his own success.' 5

At least as long as William IV lived, Melbourne feared he would see 'a flourishing state of things interrupted by the blundering of this fellow [O'Connell]' Melbourne gave some indication of perceiving that O'Connell was forced to maintain a belligerent image lest his hold over the Irish should be weakened[7] but that did not lessen the inconvenience of O'Connell's campaigns. In December 1835 Melbourne complained to Mulgrave

> 'this cursed O'Connell has lost us the Northamptonshire election. I told you that he would do for us, and I still believe it. ... He saw how clean Brougham upset us last year and was determined he should not have the better of him.' 8

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1. Melbourne to William IV 19 October 1835, Sanders p. 296. See also Melbourne to Mulgrave 19 September 1835, Mulgrave MM/41.
2. Macintyre, op.cit., p. 157.
3. Torrens p. 363.
4. Melbourne to Mulgrave 16 October 1835, Mulgrave MM/48.
5. ibid.
6. Melbourne to Mulgrave 19 October 1835, Mulgrave MM/49.
7. Melbourne to Mulgrave 12 December 1835, Mulgrave MM/59.
8. Melbourne to Mulgrave 19 December 1835, Mulgrave MM/63.

Even in September 1837, when the Whig-Irish alliance had been well tried and tested, Melbourne could still be annoyed by what he called O'Connell's foolish effusions from Derrynane. With the general election results before him, Melbourne wrote of O'Connell to Spring Rice:

> 'Any letter of his does us harm in England. I know not whether they do us good in Ireland. ... we are not so superdamnably strong as to make it prudent to insult Grey, Anglesey and Stanley as he does, in one and the same paragraph.' 1

Knowing that his Irish policy was unpopular in England, Melbourne tried to minimise the connection with O'Connell's party. In September and November 1835, he rejected suggestions from Mulgrave and Ebrington that there should be a more formal union than that established at Lichfield House in February 1835. In Melbourne's opinion, the slightest hint of such an approach

> 'would produce an instant breaking up both within and from without, and would be the signal for a new struggle.' 2

At the same time Russell informed Mulgrave that there must be no co-operation between the Castle and O'Connell in the matter of elections.[3] O'Connell seems to have respected the government's difficult position and did not insist on a public junction of parties. As Russell wrote of him to Holland, 'he knows that if he has not us, he must have worse.'[4] This did not, however, prevent O'Connell from summoning sympathetic MPs and peers to Dublin in October, 1837. Melbourne strongly disapproved of such a step which he described to Mulgrave as

> 'exactly the worst course that could be taken. It is bringing prominently forward the very fact which tells the most against us viz. the great proportion in which our majority consists of Irish members. This is a fact ... which it is not our business to blazon forth.' 5

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1. 9 September 1837, Monteagle Papers 13,386.
2. Melbourne to Mulgrave 8 September, 5 November 1835, Mulgrave MM 39, 53.
3. Russell to Mulgrave 24 October 1835, Mulgrave M/802.
4. 28 September 1835, Add. Mss. 51,677 f. 153.
5. Melbourne to Mulgrave 21 October 1837, Mulgrave MM/176.

Government supporters were therefore to be discouraged from assembling in Dublin, so far as this could be done discreetly.[1]

Doubts about the political tranquillity of Ireland deepened in the last few years of Melbourne's government as O'Connell showed clear signs of wishing to resume his Repeal agitation. In August 1838, O'Connell formed the Precursor Society as the vanguard, it seemed, of a new nationalist campaign. In November 1838, Melbourne feared that O'Connell would seize upon Normanby's imminent departure from Ireland as 'an additional pretext for a rupture',[2] though in fact all remained quiet when Normanby was actually transferred in 1839. To put pressure on O'Connell, the government announced in August, 1839 that no Repealer would be given office.[3] In September, 1839 he assured Ebrington, Normanby's equally liberal successor, that he was still loyal to the government and that Repeal would be held out only as a distant prospect.[4] The Precursor Society itself was dissolved, though Melbourne thought it would probably be soon resurrected in another form and warned Ebrington to beware of O'Connell's schemes.[5] In April 1840 the Repeal Association was revived but made little practical difference to O'Connell's support for the government. Despite Melbourne's occasional alarms, it was Peel who had to worry seriously about resurgent Irish nationalism.

The reduction in rural crime after 1835, which Mulgrave proudly reported as early as February 1836,[6] did not go as far as the government would have liked but was still a notable achievement. When the Tory peers investigated the crime figures in 1839 they found that nearly all the outrages peculiar to Ireland had considerably diminished in four years of liberal government.[7]

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1. Melbourne to Mulgrave 23 October 1837, Mulgrave MM/177.
2. Melbourne to Russell 29 November 1838, MP 13/100.
3. Macintyre, op.cit., p. 163.
4. Ebrington to Russell 8 September 1839, P.R.O. 30/22/3D ff. 23-6.
5. 9 April 1839, Fortescue Papers L1/35.
6. Mulgrave to Melbourne 23 February 1836, MP 99/121.
7. Prest, Russell, p. 144.

Primarily, this can be attributed to the government's decision tacitly to allow tithes to remain unpaid. In May 1835 Melbourne informed Mulgrave of the Cabinet's decision on the enforcement of tithes. Taking Perrin's advice, they laid down a policy of heavily discouraging applications from tithe owners for military or police assistance by asking so many questions that assistance need rarely be granted.[1] Melbourne added on his own initiative that where troops had to be employed, a stipendiary magistrate should also attend because ordinary magistrates were prejudiced in favour of tithe collection.[2] The old system, which, as Melbourne wrote to Russell, 'has led to nothing but abuse and bloodshed without in the least answering its own object,'[3] was thus left moribund. It was extinguished altogether in October 1835, apparently on the decision of Melbourne and Russell alone.[4] Melbourne's reasoning to Mulgrave was both grim and simple:

> 'The French Dragonnades extirpated one half of the Protestants and forced the rest to conceal their religion, but they converted nobody. Our Dragonnades in Ireland have been still more ineffectual. They make no one pay, and we could not push them to the length of extirpation.' 5

Henceforth the Irish government formally discontinued all extraordinary assistance for the collection of tithes. Melbourne had doubts about the consequences, fearing that rents would become harder to collect and that tithes would cease to be paid even where they still existed.[6] He particularly dreaded widespread attempts to collect tithes by clergy inspired by passion or want, whereupon, as he put it, 'murder will ensue.'[7] In the event, the clergy acquiesced in the situation and most contrived to exist, as Archbishop Whateley

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1. 28 May 1835, Mulgrave MM/18.
2. ibid.
3. 24 May 1835, Mulgrave MM/17.
4. Melbourne to Russell 13 October 1835, MEL/RU/186.
5. 5 October 1835, Mulgrave MM/43.
6. Melbourne to Mulgrave 9 October 1835, Mulgrave MM/44.
   Melbourne to Russell 9 October 1835, MEL/RU/184.
7. Melbourne to Mulgrave 9 October 1835, Mulgrave MM/44.

1. 16 October 1835, Sanders p. 298.
2. Queen Victoria diary 12 July 1838; I, 366.
3. Broeker, Police Reform, pp. 219-26.
4. Torrens p. 393.
   Broeker, Police Reform, pp. 226-7.
5. Hansard, xliii. 11 (21 May 1838).
6. Parl. Papers 1839, Select Committee Reports, xii. 1386.
7. Hansard, xxxix. 271-2 (27 November 1837).
8. 5 September 1838, MP 13/71.
9. Prest, Russell, p. 157.
10. Torrens p. 471.
11. Melbourne to Russell 1 July 1837, MEL/RU/361.

reported to Melbourne, 'in an intermediate state'.[1] So long as the Irish clergy did not provoke tumults, Melbourne did not much care about their condition. In 1838 he told Queen Victoria that the proposal to use the money left over from the 1833 Million Act to pay arrears of tithes was 'rather a lavish way of bestowing the Public Money.'[2]

A secondary reason for the better order in rural Ireland was the reformed police system created by Drummond. In 1836 he established the Royal Irish Constabulary which was efficiently controlled from Dublin and, having a large majority of Catholics in its ranks, was much more acceptable than its partisan predecessors.[3] Even the entrenched Irish habit of faction fights, irrespective of religion, was brought under control.[4] Melbourne once candidly remarked to the Lords that there was still so much crime even with the new police that Ireland 'must have been perfectly uninhabitable without them.'[5] This was to take an unduly pessimistic view. The army in Ireland was reduced by one third between 1833 and 1839[6] and in 1837 Melbourne himself justified the lapse of coercive powers by reference to the falling crime figures.[7] But he could never rid himself of the belief that the rural outrages arose, as he told Russell in September 1838,

> 'from a natural disposition of the people, and a natural state of society which would have been much the same under any dispensation.' 8

He may have been making fun of Russell on this occasion, as has been suggested recently,[9] but, underneath, Melbourne was being serious. In January 1839 there occurred the sensational murder of Lord Norbury on his Irish estate. Discussing the murder with R. L. Sheil, Melbourne said,

> 'it is terrible; and no one can tell me what is to be done. As one of the severest judges said to me when in Ireland, if hanging would do it, it ought to have been done long ago. I do not believe in exceptional measures; and yet, I suppose, Stanley and Peel will put us in a minority if we don't take them.' 10

Melbourne probably exaggerated the problem and his own dilemma; it is certainly ironic that, unlike Russell and Mulgrave, he was very reluctant to take any credit for the unusually peaceful state of Ireland in the later 1830's. [11.]

The existence of a liberal government in Ireland ensured that the Catholic population would be fairly quiet but it increased the risk of trouble from the extreme Protestants. Indeed, as Melbourne pointed out to the Lords as early as May 1835, agitation in Ireland was coming to be a Protestant monopoly.[1] The principal threat came from the revival of Orange Lodges. By July, 1835 Melbourne was contemplating the enforcement of the act against their party processions.[2] Any spontaneous desire on his part to curb Orange activities was bound to be increased by the pressure which the Radicals in the Commons, led by Hume, had begun to exert in the spring of 1835.[3] They obtained a select committee which investigated Orangeism in both England and Ireland. Its reports came out from July-September 1835 and showed, if anyone needed proof, that Orangemen 'controlled the Irish yeomanry, had lodges in the army, enjoyed a certain immunity from justice in Ulster and were frequently engaged in civil disturbances.'[4] In August, Hume moved resolutions in the Commons against the Orange Lodges, emphasising their existence in the army. Despite this campaign, the order remained in existence and its allegedly sinister grandmaster, the Duke of Cumberland, refused to resign. During the parliamentary recess, Russell, inspired by Hume, raised the question of dismissing Orangemen from office.[5] Melbourne admitted that action might have to be taken but, in October, told Russell to warn Mulgrave

> 'not to stir that very difficult and hazardous question of the Orange Lodges without great caution and previous consultation.' 6

Melbourne had to move especially carefully because William IV was still incensed by Mulgrave's recent invitation to O'Connell. Russell complied with Melbourne's

1. Hansard, xxviii. 348-50 (2 June 1835).
2. Melbourne to Russell 13 July 1835, MEL/RU/164.
3. H. Senior, Orangeism in Ireland and Britain 1795-1836 (1966), p. 267.
4. ibid. p. 268.
5. Russell to Melbourne 3 October 1835, MEL/RU/8.
6. 6 October 1835 MEL/RU/182.

1. Russell to Melbourne 9 October 1835, MEL/RU/11.
2. Howick diary 16, 20 November 1835.
3. 21 December 1835, Grey Papers.
4. Senior, Orangeism, p. 269.
5. Hatherton diary 26 February 1836.
6. 3 March 1836, Mulgrave MM/77.
7. Broeker, Police Reform, p. 226.
8. Hansard, xxx. 1277-80 (7 March 1836)
9. Russell to Grey 13 December 1835, Grey Papers.

See below p. 314

request, although his own opinion of the Orange Lodges was that 'nothing but their want of power can excuse our standing still.'[1] In November the Cabinet consulted the law officers and decided not to prosecute the Lodges.[2] Howick told Grey that Melbourne was strongly influenced by Drummond's view that

> 'the system was fast sinking into insignificance in Ireland and that the only thing which could prevent it from doing so would be the adoption of any strong measures against it.' 3

The Radicals, however, would not leave the matter alone. Hume obtained some fresh, if rather unconvincing evidence of a military conspiracy by the Orange Lodges and renewed his attacks when Parliament met in February 1836.[4] He moved an address to the King for the removal of all Orangemen from office, both civil and military, although Russell managed to moderate it to refer to all secret societies. The royal reply on 25 February made it clear that measures would be taken against Orangeism and the following day the Duke of Cumberland, who 'looked very ill and crestfallen', according to Hatherton,[5] announced the dissolution of the lodges to the House of Lords. Melbourne cheerfully assured Mulgrave, 'I have not the least expectation that the Orange Lodges will really dissolve themselves', but he was content with the formal victory.[6] When the more plebeian Orangemen staged demonstrations on 12 July in 1836, and again in 1837, they were simply arrested in large numbers by Drummond's new police.[7] Moreover, as Melbourne elliptically explained to the Lords in March,

> 'the Lord Lieutenant might not think it his duty to employ men who conceived themselves so bound by their former character as Orangemen, that they must act in complete conformity to that character.' 8

Melbourne dissuaded Mulgrave from his reckless attempts actually to dismiss existing Orange Lords Lieutenant and magistrates, but new appointments could be withheld from the Order.[9]

Apart from its legislative programme (discussed below), the Whig government demonstrated its conciliatory attitude to Ireland by practical administrative actions, such as those over tithe enforcement or Orange Lodges already described.

Another very important part of this approach was the distribution of offices to Irish Catholics, especially if they were connected with O'Connell's party. In June 1837 indeed, Melbourne could write to Russell,

> 'the fact is the Government of Ireland has not been very different from any other in point of principle. The great difference has been in the distribution of Patronage.'[1]

Melbourne seems here to be shying away from the genuinely radical nature of the rest of his Irish policy; but it is certainly true that deliberately favouring Catholics for office was a great novelty. Hatherton even complained that it was a policy which he and Wellesley had urged in 1833-4 and which had been blocked by Melbourne himself; when he challenged Melbourne with this, the latter apparently agreed with Hatherton's contention.[2] Even after 1835 Melbourne set limits to such patronage. As he told Mulgrave in October 1835,

> 'in promoting Roman Catholics you must keep as near to something resembling a Gentleman as you can and you must also avoid those who have been very prominent on Hustings meetings.' 3

He would not therefore grant a baronetcy to Raphael, who had merely been an unsuccessful carpet-bagger in Carlow, and who was recommended by O'Connell largely because he had given £2,000 to party funds.[4] Melbourne also had to avoid any outburst from William IV which patronage of Catholics might provoke. In January 1837 he warned Mulgrave that the King was alarmed at the number of Catholics on the bench and that 'we must be careful upon this head, and not prefer too many RCs with too much precipitation.'[5] The King particularly disliked Sheil, who had attacked William's brother, the Duke of York, in 1826. Melbourne, on the contrary, got on well with Sheil who seems to have been the only O'Connellite invited to Melbourne's own house, but he did not like to offer even him promotion as a Serjeant at law whilst the King lived.[6]

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1. 28 June 1837, MEL/RU/357.
2. Hatherton diary 5, 14 February 1837.
3. 28 October 1835, Mulgrave MM/51.
4. Melbourne to Mulgrave 9 September 1835, Mulgrave MM/39. See Macintyre, op.cit. p. 123.
5. 23 January 1837, Mulgrave MM/132.
6. Hobhouse diary 10 December 1837; V, 113. Melbourne to Russell 9 October 1836, MEL/RU/270.

Some sensitive offices were also barred to Catholics. In 1840 Melbourne dared not appoint More O'Farrell to the Admiralty because public opinion would not tolerate a Catholic involved in national defence; Normanby and Duncannon agreed with his reasoning.[1]

Within these bounds much could still be done. Catholics were given 'judgeships, paid and unpaid magistracies, legal posts in Dublin and assistant-barristerships ... in the provinces, posts under the Irish Poor Law Commission after 1838 and ... in the army and in the rapidly growing police force.'[2] (Conversely, Church of Ireland clergy were quietly omitted from new Commissions of the Peace.[3]) Mulgrave was almost too willing to distribute this stream of favours. On at least one occasion Russell brought to his attention the disquiet of Lansdowne and Rice at reports of 'the last four Assistant Barristers all being of the Repeal Party.'[4] The only opposite reservation came from Morpeth who thought that the Irish received too few offices in England itself.[5] Whatever his former objections Melbourne himself now considered that it was 'prudent and desirable to employ the violent and the active, if justified by talents and character.'[6] O'Connell himself was not offered anything until June 1838, by which time office was more in the nature of a just reward for his abilities and political loyalty than a hasty attempt to buy him off as in 1830 or 1831. Mindful of his reputation in Ireland, however, he refused even the tempting offer of the Mastership of the Rolls in Ireland.[7] This must have been greatly to Melbourne's relief for he had feared that the appointment would arouse an outcry and told his Cabinet, 'I know

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1. Melbourne to Russell 23, 26 April 1840, MP 14/116, 117.
2. Macintyre, op.cit., p. 159.
3. Russell to Mulgrave 1 Sept. 1837, Melbourne to Mulgrave 5 Oct. 1837, Mulgrave M/877, MM/172.
4. Russell to Mulgrave 6 Jan. 1836, Mulgrave M/818.
5. Morpeth to Melbourne 23 December 1837, MP 98/79.
6. Melbourne to Russell 9 January 1836, MEL/RU/210.
7. O'Connell to Fitzpatrick 18 June 1838, O'Connell Correspondence II, 144.

nothing worse than a clamour.'[1] But at least places were found for O'Connell's son, Morgan, two of his sons-in-law and the editor of his pocket newspaper, 'The Pilot'.[2] In addition, O'Connell was flattered by the Irish government consulting him about appointments beforehand, even where the Lord Chancellorship of Ireland was concerned.[3] Ten of his followers in the Commons were gratified with offices, places or titles; the Repealers also received a good number of local offices and magistracies.[4] Melbourne took little direct part except, in all probability, to secure Sheil's advancement as Commissioner of Greenwich Hospital (1838), Vice President of the Board of Trade (1839) and Judge Advocate (1841). When Sheil had to seek re-election on his appointment in 1839, Melbourne said to him, 'now mind what you say when you get down into your county of Tipperary, for your election; mind not to get into any scrapes', to which Sheil replied that Melbourne could rely on him to be discreet.[5] It is a conversation which, perhaps, typifies the softening effect of patronage upon the Irish party as a whole.

The overriding legislative problem which the Whigs faced was the reform of the tithe system. This had been made much more difficult by the appropriation resolution of April 1835. As Melbourne wrote to Russell in September 1835:

> 'I am much rejoiced to hear that you have some notions respecting the Irish Church; but you must be a clever fellow, if you can hit upon a plan, to which the Tories will agree, and which will be in any respect satisfactory to our supporters.' 6

Soon afterwards Melbourne confessed to Mulgrave that the tithe question

> 'does what Brougham said in the House of Lords it was almost impossible to do - it disturbs my repose.' 7

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1. Howick diary 12 June 1838.
2. Macintyre, op.cit., p. 161.
3. ibid.
4. ibid.
5. Q. V. diary 29 August; II, 243.
6. 26 September 1835, MEL/RU/174.
7. 9 October 1835, Mulgrave MM/44.

In a world without the built-in Tory majority in the Lords and the inflammable prejudices of William IV, Melbourne might have undertaken some very radical changes in the Irish Church. In May 1835 Holland thought him favourable to

> 'a plain and intelligible measure for rendering the Protestant clergy in Ireland stipendiary in future, for providing for the general education of that people and for entirely abrogating tythes compositions arrears lands etc. etc. and meeting the expenses by a new and equitable valuation and tax on Irish land.'[1]

The idea of a land tax originated with Duncannon but was killed by Lansdowne and Spring Rice, who were anxious for the interests of Irish landlords.[2] Holland's account is entirely consistent with what Melbourne said in the Lords in August 1835 when he called tithes

> 'a mode of payment belonging to earlier times, and preserved to the present by extraordinary and accidental circumstances.' 3

Nor would Melbourne have stopped at a land tax and appropriation: his mind was also concerned with the fundamental question of an established Catholic Church in Ireland. He told William IV that

> 'one mode of faith being established by law, and another professed by the large body of the people was a state of things contrary to reason and to common sense.
>
> It is no answer upon the subject to say that, though the population is Roman Catholic, the property is possessed by Protestants. Religious establishment is eminently for population, not for property. Its existence is for the benefit of the poor and the needy, not of the opulent ...' 4

It was commonly suggested that a state endowment for the Catholic clergy would be the answer. Melbourne was in favour of this, but, as he wrote to Howick in 1837,

> 'it would not remedy the evil; it would not remove the great anomaly of the Protestant Church in Ireland, and therefore I fear would hardly be more effectual, than our appropriation scheme, which might have produced some temporary satisfaction, but in the end would have done little or nothing.' 5

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1. Holland diary 19 May, Add. Mss. 51,871 f. 833.
2. ibid.
3. Hansard, xxx. 719 (20 August 1835).
4. Melbourne to W. IV, 16 June 1835, Sanders p. 285.
5. 21 January 1837, Grey Papers.

He favoured a Catholic establishment in Ireland as the only way to secure 'permanent quiet in that country' but did not see how it could be done.[1] He told Lord Cloncurry that Protestant prejudice would prevent even the augmentation of the grant to the Catholic college at Maynooth.[2] Any scheme to pay the Catholic clergy would also be strongly opposed by the Catholic hierarchy, as Mulgrave discovered on Russell's behalf in 1837.[3] Ultimately the only solution was the disestablishment and disendowment of the Irish Church by Gladstone in 1869, when political circumstances were very different from those of Melbourne's day.

In 1835, however, the Whig government had hastily to prepare a tithe bill which would accord with the appropriation resolutions on which it had taken office. According to Howick, the Cabinet met several times in May on an unsuccessful search for any surplus at all from the Irish Church.[4] Eventually a theoretical sum of £58,000 was found, to be raised from benefices worth over £300 p.a. which had less than 50 parishioners, and to be used 'for religious and moral instruction.'[5] The lack of an obvious surplus remained, however, an embarrassment after 1835, as Melbourne explained to Queen Victoria in 1838.[6] The new tithe bill also fixed the rent charge at £68 5s. per cent of the tithe composition compared with £75 per cent as proposed in Peel's abortive tithe bill of March 1835.[7] In other respects it was remarkably similar to the Conservative measure. The bill passed the Commons by 319 - 282 but the Lords threw out the appropriation clauses by 138 - 41. They passed the rest of the bill, however, and Melbourne would have accepted this but for the refusal of the Commons to compromise.[8]

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1. ibid.
2. Melbourne to Cloncurry 4 June 1835; Lord Cloncurry, Personal Recollections (Dublin, 1849), pp. 346-7.
3. Russell to Mulgrave 9, 25 December 1837, Mulgrave M/890, 892.
4. Howick diary 15 May 1835.
5. Macintyre, op.cit., p. 193.
6. Queen Victoria diary 12 May 1838; I, 322-3.
7. Macintyre, op.cit., p. 192-3.
8. Hatherton diary 7 July 1835.

From the summer of 1835 Melbourne was inclined to bury the issue of appropriation altogether. When Howick asked in a Cabinet meeting in November 1835,

> 'if we were not to assert it [appropriation], what right we had to turn Peel out, Lord Melbourne said "Oh that's done!" '[1]

The principle, however, remained in the Tithe bill of April 1836. This was drawn by Russell so as to offer generous terms to the Irish clergy, including a rent-charge of £70 per cent, and yet to increase the projected surplus.[2] The bill passed the Commons but the Lords predictably diverted the surplus funds back into the pockets of the Anglican clergy and so the bill was lost. It was noticeable, however, that others besides Melbourne were losing their enthusiasm for appropriation. After a majority of only 26 for it in the Commons on 9 July, Melbourne told Mulgrave that ministerialists were 'growing very slack, the Irish members particularly so.'[3] Russell's brother, Tavistock, informed Greville that several government supporters in the Commons simply wanted tithes settled so as to end the violent resistance in Ireland.[4] O'Connell was more interested in a satisfactory reform of municipal corporations in Ireland than in appropriation, as he announced in May 1836 at Brookes's Club.[5] Even Russell admitted that

> 'many of our own friends in the Commons are of opinion that the surplus is too small, and even too doubtful to fight about.'[6]

But the question of principle still stuck in the throat of the Radicals and, indeed, of Melbourne himself. The former, led by Hume and Buller, prevented any compromise with the Lords at the end of July and the beginning of August 1836.[7] Whilst Melbourne was reported as saying of the appropriation clause, 'my

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1. Howick diary 28 November 1835.
2. For details see Prest; Russell, pp. 106-7, where the surplus is put at £65,000. Macintyre, op.cit., p. 193, gives a figure of £92,000.
3. 13 July 1836, Mulgrave MM/93.
4. Greville diary 18 July 1836; III, 362.
5. Col. L. G. Jones to Durham 3 May, Lambton Papers.
6. Russell to Melbourne 24 August [1836], MP 13/52.
7. Greville diary 24 July, 7 August; III, 364,366.

Administration was founded upon it and I would rather cut off my right hand than swerve the least from it.'[1] He probably exaggerated for the sake of public effect on this occasion, even if considerations of honour as well as of expediency were involved in any surrender on appropriation.

Away from the public gaze, Melbourne felt free to suggest that the government give up appropriation plainly and openly.[2] During the parliamentary recess Duncannon admitted that the policy 'would not pacify' and O'Connell made it clear to Warburton that he would support the Whigs if they dropped appropriation.[3] Tavistock summed up the matter when he asked Russell in December 1836 whether the government could again bring before Parliament

> 'a measure which you know positively that one branch of it will reject, and to connect it with another measure which you are in duty bound to settle if you can? Is it not almost criminal to persist in such a course - if not criminal, is it statesmanlike?' 4

Despite the drift of such thoughts, the Cabinet had not agreed to drop appropriation when Parliament met in February 1837.[5] It was therefore indiscreet of Russell to announce the postponement of the Tithe bill in a speech on the Irish Corporations bill. On 9 February Melbourne had to write to him,

> 'What you said at the end of the debate is understood to indicate pretty distinctly the giving up of appropriation. Is it necessary to bring that question now again before the Cabinet? I rather fear the wrong-headedness of some of them.' 6

It was clear, however, that such a concession from the government would result in co-operation from Peel and Wellington, at least, on the Irish Corporations and Poor Law bills. On 8 April most of the Cabinet therefore apparently approved Howick's suggestion that the appropriation clause be omitted and the

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1. Col. Jones to Durham 14 June 1836; Newbould, 'Cabinets of Grey and Melbourne', p. 278.
2. Melbourne to Lansdowne 26 Dec. 1836, Torrens pp. 425-6.
3. Stanley to Graham 10 November 1836, Graham Papers 32.
   O'Connell to Warburton 29 December 1836, P.R.O. 30/22/2D f. 274.
4. 12 December 1836, P.R.O. 30/22/2D ff. 163-7.
5. Howick Journal 3 February 1837.
6. MEL/RU/306.

Tithe bill laid on the table before the Corporations bill came on.[1] But the following day this incipient compromise was wrecked by the opposition of Duncannon, Glenelg and Hobhouse inside the Cabinet and by two junior ministers, Vernon Smith and Lord Seymour, threatening to resign.[2] Since this turn of events was precisely what Melbourne had foreseen in February, it is somewhat mysterious that he should have allowed Howick's proposal to develop as far as it did. In his account of the Cabinet meeting of 8 April, which is the only record available, Howick probably exaggerated the degree of support he received. But his idea was clearly congenial to Melbourne's way of thinking and the latter therefore ignored what his political nose told him.

In May the government introduced a Tithe bill with appropriation included. This was rendered a formality, however, by the King's illness and death in June. It was also the last such Tithe bill. In May, Melbourne had confided to Wharncliffe:

> 'I can't help thinking that things are <u>soothing</u> down ... and as to the appropriation Clause I can't say so publicly yet, but we should give that up without much difficulty.' 3

On the Tory side Wellington made it plain in June that he was anxious to agree to any reasonable measure for a final settlement of Irish legislation.[4] In August Melbourne informed Russell of his opinion that they should accede to the Lords' wish to take the Irish Poor Law and Corporations bill before the Tithe bill in the next parliamentary session.[5] A month later Russell agreed that Wellington's compromise was 'in principle a fair one' and that they ought to settle the three Irish questions 'unless the details were very unfair, and unequal.'[6] Cautioned by his experiences in April, 1837, Melbourne made the surrender of appropriation dependent on 'the feelings of our supporters',

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1. Howick diary 8 April 1837.
2. <u>ibid</u>. 9 April.
3. Wharncliffe to Peel 13 May 1837, Peel Papers Add. Mss. 40,423 ff. 227-9.
4. <u>Hansard</u>, xxxviii. 1682 (June 1837)
5. 13 August 1837, MEL/RU/387(1).
6. Russell to Melbourne 13 September 1837, P.R.O. 30/22/2F f. 113.

whilst Russell thought the clause simply could not be carried and would no longer have beneficial results anyway.[1]

These deliberations set the stage for what proved to be a final tithe bill in 1838. In early March 1838 Melbourne wrote to Russell, noting that 'the eagerness about the Church property in Ireland has a good deal passed away in both countries.'[2] He favoured a bill including appropriation, but, he added significantly,

> 'we might determine ourselves, if it should again be rejected to agree to a settlement of the Tithe without it.' 3

This was, in fact, very much what happened. Later in March, Russell introduced a bill to turn Irish tithes into a rent-charge at £70 per cent of the composition. Appropriation was smuggled in by a provision to use this tax to pay the Irish constabulary and other secular charges, while the Consolidated Fund paid an equal amount to the clergy and tithe-owners.[4] This was not yet enough of a compromise for the Tories. Peel had to allow Acland's resolution to remove from the records the original resolution of 1835, which was defeated by only 19 votes on 15 May 1838. But the government made its intentions clear by defeating a Radical motion to re-insert appropriation into the tithe bill by 270 - 46, with O'Connell and most of his party voting against the Radicals. In committee in July the government gave up the substitute appropriation clauses and accepted an increased rent charge of £75 per cent of the composition. With these main amendments the bill passed both the Commons and the Lords with considerable ease.[5]

Melbourne has recently been criticised for the allegedly unprincipled way in which he took up and then readily abandoned the idea of appropriation.[6]

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1. Melbourne to Russell, 13 August 1837, [illegible].
   Russell to Mulgrave 9 December 1837, Mulgrave M/890.
2. 11 March 1838, MEL/RU/465.
3. ibid.
4. Macintyre, op.cit., p. 197.
5. ibid., pp. 197-8
6. Newbould, 'Cabinets of Grey and Melbourne', p. 324.

He himself much resented such suggestions, even when put in the form of a joke by a friendly colleague,[1] and there are good reasons why he should have done so. As was noted earlier, Melbourne genuinely believed in the principle of appropriation and, indeed, in a more extensive reform of the Irish Church. Beyond this, appropriation had been the only means by which he could have formed a viable government in April 1835. His belief in the absolute necessity of such a government was as principled as anything in contemporary politics. Through appropriation Melbourne had also created a new understanding with the Irish party. By 1838 the Whigs could discard the idea because, as Russell was to write later, 'we had established such a character for good government in Ireland, that we could still govern.'[2] It was also Russell who provided the best public defence of the government's decision to drop appropriation. In his 'Letter to the Electors of Stroud' he explained that it had been the result of a weak majority in the Commons, the hostility of English public opinion, and the indifference of the Irish people.[3] If all these factors are taken into account, it can be argued that Melbourne and Russell had at worst suffered an honourable defeat.

The Tithe Act itself has been accounted a mixed success.[4] The rent charge met with little resistance: the poorest peasants were exempted from actual payment and the intermediate landlords benefitted from more moderate charges. The Irish Church was shielded from the worst forms of popular hostility and survived another thirty years. But, in the longer term, the landlords came to take the place of the Church as the target for peasant hostility. This was hardly the intention of the Whigs who had throughout shown a great respect for lay property. Such a settlement, so little acceptable to the Radicals, was, however, probably inevitable. For his part, Melbourne's certainty that this

1. Hobhouse diary 8 August 1838; V, 161.
2. Russell to Palmerston 24 July 1843; Prest, Russell, p. 116.
3. quoted Macintyre, op.cit., p. 200.
4. ibid. pp. 199-200.

would be the outcome was equalled only by his underlying conviction that it could not be a permanent solution.

It is unnecessary for the purposes of this study to discuss the rest of the government's Irish legislation.[1] The reform of Irish municipal corporations suffered at the hands of the Lords even more than did the tithe bill. The new poor law hardly touched the problems of land tenure. In both cases the inadequacies of the legislation were accepted by O'Connell's party. Melbourne did not greatly influence either reform. Over municipal corporations his main aim was the realistic one of getting some compromise bill through the Lords. From an early stage he was impressed by the unpopularity of the issue in England, even amongst liberals, and by the lack of interest shown by Irishmen outside the ranks of the Repeal party.[2] As for social reform, he admitted to Mulgrave that 'the great evil of Ireland is its hopeless and squalid poverty', but, he added, 'a Poor Law does not appear to be at first sight a remedy for this evil.'[3] He therefore merely acquiesced in the act of 1838. With the passing of a mutilated Irish Muncipal Corporations Act in the summer of 1840, the government's Irish legislation effectively ceased. When it tried to reform electoral registration and the county franchise in 1841, it could no longer command majorities in the Commons.

These ultimate failures should not, however, obscure the achievements of the Whigs' Irish policies. If Melbourne's only object had been to keep Ireland quiet, he had certainly been remarkably successful. He came to realise - the precise point at which he did so is not clear - that the Irish party paid a high price for the Liberal alliance. Referring to damaging rumours of Whig subserviency to Irish Catholics in the 1837 election, Melbourne asserted to Mulgrave that 'nothing can be more ill-founded, as we have done more

1. See Macintyre, op.cit., chapters 6, 7.
2. Melbourne to Mulgrave 13 July 1836, Mulgrave MM/93.
3. Melbourne to Mulgrave 18 April 1837, Mulgrave MM/100.

to weaken the power of O'Connell, than any Government that preceded us, but this we cannot well say and the contrary impression prevails.'[1] As O'Connell's frequent and sizeable concessions on Irish legislation show,[2] Melbourne's analysis was essentially correct. The Whigs could also congratulate themselves on the Irish leader's refusal to exploit the Chartist troubles in 1839.[3] Furthermore, rural Ireland was sufficiently quiet for troops to be sent to England during that emergency and for Ebrington to offer to send even more.[4]

In return, however, Melbourne's government offered considerable benefits to Ireland. O'Connell himself recognised this in generous fashion. As early as October 1835 he wrote to Cloncurry:

> 'every man who loves his native land should ... give efficient support to the government which has ... disclaimed faction, and preferred the people of Ireland.' 5

A year later he described it as

> 'a Ministry who are for the first time in History conquering the Anti-Saxon spirit of Ireland and adding Eight Millions to the King's subjects.' 6

To Melbourne himself O'Connell wrote:

> 'Few know how deep has been and still is the conviction of the Irish people that the dominion of England works only for mischief. Your ministry is the first to lessen that conviction ...' 7

What the Whigs were actually able to do for Ireland fell short of what they intended and still shorter of what O'Connell's party hoped for, but, as Melbourne had noted back in 1828, in politics impressions are everything.[8]

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1. 21 August 1837 Mulgrave MM/165.
2. Macintyre, op.cit., p. 260.
3. ibid., p. 165.
4. Ebrington to Russell 2, 23 May, 26 June 1839; P.R.O. 30/22/3C ff. 249-50, 310-13, 357-62.
5. 12 Oct. 1835, O'Connell Correspondence II, 40.
6. O'Connell to Warburton 29 Dec. 1836, P.R.O. 30/22/2D f. 274.
7. 10 May 1838, MP 32/73.
8. See above p. 4

It may also be objected that O'Connell's attitudes had severe limitations when seen through the eyes of his contemporary Irish critics,[1] let alone subsequent Irish nationalists. There can be little doubt, however, that throughout the 1830's he represented, to all intents and purposes, the great majority of the Irish people. His verdicts on Melbourne's government are, therefore, important.

There remains the problem of establishing the precise role in Irish affairs of Melbourne himself. He took little part in shaping the details of Irish legislation, even when they were under discussion in the Lords. In March 1838 he wrote to Russell about Irish tithes:

> 'there have been so many bills that I hardly recollect one from the other and have no very distinct remembrance of that of last year' 2

In April 1836, with the Irish Corporations bill approaching, Melbourne told Holland he relied on him 'for giving me a lift, particularly about the pith of the question viz. the advantages of Municipal Government.'[3] He was admittedly recovering from illness at that time but he went on to reveal his preferred tactics when he reminded Holland that Fitzgerald was

> 'after all a far more awkward customer than Lyndhurst, and knows much more about the question, and never gives an opening, as Lyndhurst does, by beginning personal attacks.' 4

Hatherton witnessed the results of this approach when Melbourne and Lyndhurst bargained over amendments to the Irish Corporations bill in August 1838. He was amused by

> 'Lyndhurst standing on oneside the table with his spectacles on, and Melbourne holding his Glasses to his eyes on the other, talking over the matter of each Amendment from a printed paper, which Melbourne seemed never to have read (I believe his Counsel had talked them over with him this morning) and disposing of each as they thought best. Lyndhurst had to be sure two Aide de Camps in Ellenborough and Redesdale, but Melbourne had none and had solicited none.' 5

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1. Macintyre, op.cit., pp. 152, 194.
2. 11 March 1838 MEL/RU/465.
3. Melbourne to Holland 25 April, Add. Mss. 51,558 f. 105.
4. ibid.
5. Hatherton diary 7 August 1838.

These casual habits can probably be attributed to the fact that Melbourne had never served a really rigorous apprenticeship in the Commons; perhaps ultimately they can be traced to his erratic, undisciplined university education. Whatever their origins, they excluded him from serious participation in the finer points of legislation.

It must be remembered, however, that new legislation was only one half of what Melbourne's government was able to do for Ireland. O'Connell himself impressed on Melbourne that the fall of his government would

> 'deprive Ireland of the practical and most useful protection that country enjoys by the impartial administration of the existing laws.' 1

Further, as was described earlier, Melbourne more than played his part in the House of Lords by virtue of his consistently defiant speeches on the fundamental principles of his Irish policy. Nor was he much assisted there by his colleagues: Duncannon's opinion was that, apart from Lansdowne, Melbourne had no Cabinet minister who could speak effectively; and Hatherton thought that Lansdowne was too idle to stir himself.[2] Above all, Melbourne could be said to have underwritten the whole liberal policy for Ireland by his willingness to form his governments and to keep them in existence despite the difficult odds against the enterprise. At times his actions were not very heroic but they had an underlying strength of purpose which made him a deceptively effective and not unworthy prime minister.

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1. 10 May 1838 MP 32/73.
2. Duncannon to Melbourne 20 October 1838, MP 3/53.
   Hatherton diary 31 August 1835.

Chapter Five

Reform 1834-1841

'I doubt whether shaking out another reef in our topsails would not send as many from us, as it would rivet to us.'

Melbourne to Mulgrave, 20 Dec. 1836, Mulgrave Papers MM/124.

Melbourne had always known that the Reform Bill would necessitate further great changes.[1] This was the essential difference between his and Grey's attitude to it. In Melbourne's opinion Grey knew nothing of the inevitable consequences of the Bill and 'thought it just a measure to satisfy the people at the moment and nothing more.'[2] By contrast, Melbourne accepted these consequences. He did so primarily because he felt responsible for the demands for change unleashed by the Reform Bill. But he also acknowledged 'the restless spirit of the time' and even admitted to Holland that 'our measures did not create it; on the contrary, it produced our measures.'[3] Either way, Melbourne felt obliged to preside over a series of further reforms.

An element of genuine liberalism as another possible motive in Melbourne's support of reform has usually been discounted. Melbourne himself openly agreed with Stanley that he had 'concurred in all the great liberal measures of late years not from choice but from necessity.'[4] Recent opinion has held that Melbourne either had no principles at all[5] or was dominated by 'philosophic nihilism'.[6] It is possible, however, to take a slightly different view. Melbourne's own admission cannot be taken at absolute face-value because he always shied away from public idealistic professions and after 1832 was even more fearful of appearing to encourage radical demands. He undoubtedly regarded himself as a liberal, even if he carefully, perhaps over-subtly, tried to exclude all popular or democratic overtones from the word.[7] As has been suggested above, his attitude towards the Reform Bill was not based entirely on expediency, and his Irish policy carried even more of a liberal

1. Hansard, vii. 1184 (4 October 1831).
2. Hobhouse diary 4 June 1835; V, 38.
3. Melbourne to Holland 25 October 1836, Add. Mss. 51,560 f. 31.
4. Howick diary 30 January 1836.
5. Newbould, 'Cabinets of Grey and Melbourne', pp. 255, 296.
6. Gash, Reaction and Reconstruction, p. 166 n.1.
7. Melbourne to Russell 2, 8 August 1837, MEL/RU/382,389.

hallmark. In smaller matters, too, Melbourne showed himself broad-minded and reasonable. He had been a supporter of Romilly's legal reforms;[1] he was a consistent adherent of the campaign to remove Jewish disabilities, to within six months of his death in 1848;[2] he defended the dedication of a Unitarian work to Queen Victoria in the teeth of Anglican hostility;[3] and he refused to apologise for allowing the Socialist Robert Owen to be presented to the Queen when another outcry was raised.[4] Melbourne's liberal principles often had to be forced out of him by the pressure of events; they were also restricted to questions of civil and religious liberty; but they should not be discounted.

The Municipal Corporations Bill.

The reform of the municipal corporations was probably the most direct result of the Reform Act itself.[5] After June 1832, the unrepresentative nature of these corporations became glaringly apparent. A Radical-dominated Royal Commission investigated town government from July 1833. In March 1835 it produced a partisan but impressive Report which recommended new corporations, elected by household suffrage and ballot, and possessed of considerable local powers. As early as July 1834, Melbourne had informed the King that the necessity of a 'decisive and effectual measure' founded upon the expected Report was 'absolute and unavoidable.'[6] Accordingly, a bill closely based upon the Report was accepted by the Cabinet at the end of May 1835 and introduced by Russell on 5 June.

It is probable that many Liberals saw the bill as a source of party advantage: it would end the Tory stranglehold on local government, especially

1. Torrens p. 53.
2. Torrens p. 547. Contrast Grey's attitude: Holland diary 29 July - 3 August 1833, Add. Mss. 51,870 f. 663.
3. O. Chadwick, The Victorian Church (1966) I, 394-5.
4. Melbourne to E. Baines 20 December 1839, MP 5/12.
5. I owe much of this section to G. B. A. M. Finlayson, 'The Municipal Corporations Act 1835' (Oxford B.Litt. thesis 1959).
6. Melbourne to William IV, 2 June 1835, Sanders p. 282.

where corporations could influence parliamentary elections. Aberdeen went much further and alleged that the bill would help to distract attention from their alliance with O'Connell.[1] It might also divide the ranks of the opposition, as Graham warned Stanley.[2] Melbourne himself was not much influenced by such considerations. He certainly had nothing in common with burghers, especially Tory ones, and was not likely to care about their privileges. But, of greater importance was his practical experience of discords prevalent in towns whilst he had been Home Secretary. During 1831-32 he had concluded that the old corporations were

> 'too narrow for the times ... and that instead of forming the bulwarks of internal security, they form a source of peril, of hazard, and of danger.' 3

He had been deeply disturbed by the internal animosities in Nottingham, Leicester, Derby, and Coventry, and, above all, by those in Bristol where

> 'the Corporation has no community of feeling with the public ... because of its secret character and mode of proceeding; and, above all, because of its exclusive nature, and oligarchical character.' 4

The recollection of the events of 1831 moved Melbourne to exclaim,

> 'Why, good God, my Lords, we have passed through troublesome times, have seen a great deal of public excitement and public tumult, but I can only say that I have felt much less fear from Birmingham or Manchester, than I have from any town where there was a Corporation ...' 5

By contrast, he claimed,

> 'We are about to give the whole body of the people some interest in the government of their towns, and by that means to give them an interest in the preservation of the public peace, and the protection and good management of public property.' 6

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1. Finlayson, op.cit., p. 72.
2. Graham to Stanley 25 April 1835 Graham Papers 30.
3. Hansard. xxix. 1342-55 (3 Aug. 1835).
4. ibid.
5. ibid.
6. ibid.

Melbourne was undoubtedly preoccupied with the prudential aspects of the question but he was not insensitive to the liberal justification for the measure. He bluntly told the Tory peers, who were much wrought up and had initially prevented Melbourne from speaking at all, that the municipal corporations bill was demanded by the inhabitants of all the relevant towns and by the majority of the people in general.[1] He thought it right to denounce the old oligarchy as 'a system which has generally terminated in tumult, turmoil, rebellion, and blood.'[2]

Melbourne's views were of considerable importance in the translation of the radical ideas of the Report into the municipal corporations bill. The crucial reform was the introduction of household suffrage, qualified only by payment of the rates for 3 years. This was attacked by Peel, not unjustifiably, as a breach in the principles of the Reform Act itself. According to Parkes, the Cabinet also had scruples about the change but, he claimed, 'Ellice and I convinced Lord Melbourne, and he converted them.'[3] If this is so, it would certainly be in keeping with Melbourne's support for a low franchise in early 1831. (Neither Parkes nor Melbourne can have known beforehand that only 20-25% more people would be enfranchised by household than by £10 suffrage.[4]) The rest of the bill was equally sweeping. The only radical proposals rejected by the Cabinet were the ballot and popular election of magistrates. Parkes, lately secretary to the Commission, was delighted with the bill and could hardly find enough metaphors with which to describe his feelings. He told Durham, 'it is a smasher' and would be 'poison to Toryism', and that they would 'clear the roost from top to bottom.'[5] Melbourne's support was apparently much needed for Parkes confessed,

> 'I never thought when we began with the Cabinet that we should spoon them with it. But it stays on their stomachs up to to-day.'[6]

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1. ibid.
2. ibid.
3. Parkes to Durham 10 October 1836, Lambton Papers.
4. E. Keith-Lucas, The English Local Government Franchise (1952) p. 63.
5. J. K. Buckley, Joseph Parkes of Birmingham (1926) pp. 122, 131.
6. Parkes to Durham 1 June 1835, Lambton Papers.

The bill passed the Commons easily once Peel, though critical of its political bias, offered no outright opposition to it. In the Lords, however, it was a different story. The Ultra Tories, led by Lyndhurst, nearly threw the bill out at once; instead, they insisted on hearing counsel and then, on 3 August, at 3.00 a.m., they carried by 124 - 54 a motion to hear evidence at the bar of the House. This was an unusual course which would greatly delay the bill. It had been strongly opposed by Melbourne whereupon the Duke of Newcastle had declared his conduct unconstitutional and threatened to impeach him for introducing such a revolutionary bill in the first place.[1] Melbourne was especially angry with Wellington who had given some undertaking to prevent such a motion. There was a dramatic scene in which Melbourne 'standing on Tiptoe, and reaching across the Table, and striking it vehemently, in a tone and look of great indignation, full in the face of the Duke of Wellington, [said] "Never again will I make a Contract with those, who want either the Will or the Power to execute their Agreement." '[2] At this 'the Duke looked very black and pulled his hat over his eyes. Some one told Melbourne this. He said "I did not mean to go near the wind." '[3] Melbourne was greatly aroused by the opposition (or 'drunk' as the Tory papers professed to believe) and warned the Lords that their tactics would prove their own destruction and that he would not be beaten by such delays. In this way he baffled Tory hopes that he might resign.[4]

The hearing of evidence continued for a week. Melbourne quietly displayed his contempt for the proceedings by sitting in the Lords 'surrounded by his boxes and papers transacting his own business'[5] and occasionally protesting vehemently that he bowed only to superior force. Peel, Stanley and Richmond condemned the action of the Ultras and there was a flurry of talk about serious

1. Hansard, xxix. 1338-9.
2. Hatherton diary 3 August.
3. Hobhouse diary 3 August; V, 45-6.
4. Hansard, xxix. 1424-5.
   Howick diary 4 August.
   Hobhouse diary 3 August.
5. Howick diary 4 August.

1. ibid. 7, 22 August.
2. Hansard, xxx. 338-40.
3. ibid. 496.
4. Howick diary 18 August.
5. Hatherton diary 13 August.
6. Hatherton diary 4 September.
   Melbourne to Brougham 13 October 1835, Brougham Papers 43,538.
7. Hansard, xxx. 496,636.
8. Parkes to Durham 14 August, Lambton Papers.
9. Hansard, xxx. 1132-85.

reform of the Lords for obstructing business in this way.[1] On 12 August, just before the Committee stage, Melbourne emphasised again the strength of public feeling in favour of the bill and the disastrous consequences of ignoring the people's representatives in the Commons.[2] This had little effect on Lyndhurst and his vengeful followers. From 13 to 25 August they carried many damaging amendments. Melbourne fought back this onslaught as well as he could. He made, for instance, a powerful attack on Lyndhurst's restriction of the councillors to the wealthiest citizens as 'more odious, more aristocratical, and more oligarchical than any known principle of the Constitution' and 'alien to the feelings and genius of the people.'[3] Even the critical Howick thought Melbourne 'has done very well so far as defending the general principle of the bill', though believing that 'he has not half argued the particular amendments.'[4] Moreover, Melbourne was not well supported by the other Whig peers, except for Brougham.[5]

Perhaps shortcomings in debate mattered little when there was a built-in Tory majority of anything up to 90 votes. But if Lyndhurst and his associates had not been defied, they would have altered the bill out of recognition and perhaps forced the government to resign. Melbourne had no liking for either outcome, nor did he wish to fight an election with reform of the Lords as a campaign slogan. He was therefore prepared to accept amendments, some of which, indeed, he thought improvements;[6] but in general, he sought to make the Tories concede the essential parts of the bill with the threat of a direct clash with the Commons and 'the people'.[7] Parkes admired Melbourne's stand and tactics: he told Durham on 14 August,

> 'I am just come out of Lord Melbourne's dressing room who is full of resolution and acuteness. I believe his resolution of character added to his station has alone successfully held the helm' 8

Melbourne's combination of concession and resistance worked fairly well. Russell's conciliatory speech on 31 August[9] received support from Peel who thus left the Ultras in the Lords isolated. Lyndhurst was furious but at a final meeting on 3 September, at Apsley House, the moderates, led by Harrowby and

Wellington, won the day.[1] On the government side, Russell had explained at a meeting at the Foreign Office which amendments would be accepted; Hume had to be won over by O'Connell before he acquiesced in the concessions.[2] At a second meeting on 7 September, Russell found that the Liberals agreed with the government's final compromise terms with the Lords, though O'Connell and Warburton again had to head off a Radical revolt.[3] Outside the Commons the same sentiments prevailed. Place was discontented, wanting to settle accounts with the Lords once and for all.[4] But Parkes wrote to Durham:

> 'looking at our Governors of whom Melbourne is the only good contriver, I am advising our Rads to accept for fear the Lords should cut the stick and in some juggle of the forms throw the Bill out ...'5

Agreement was therefore reached with the Lords over such contentious issues as the rights of freemen and the method of appointing magistrates.[6]

The bill was eventually passed on 10 September. In view of the basic lack of public excitement on the issue[7] (in spite of what Melbourne told the Lords) and the qualms of conservative Whigs,[8] Melbourne's government had done remarkably well, even if much helped by Peel's attitude. Some Radicals might complain but Parkes, more in touch with political realities, was well pleased. Melbourne was more cautious: he told Greville that the new Act was 'a great 'bouleversement', a great experiment, and we must see how it worked.'[9] He had approached the reform of town government with severely practical intentions but had in the end helped to carry a measure which went beyond the mere preservation of public security in towns. To judge from what he told E. L. Bulwer in 1837, he looked back with some satisfaction on this achievement.'[10]

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1. Finlayson, op.cit., pp. 114-15.
2. Torrens p. 385
   Howick diary 31 August.
3. Holland diary 7 Sept., Add. Mss. 51,871 f. 907.
   Howick diary 7 September.
   Torrens p. 385.
4. Finlayson, op.cit., p. 108.
5. Parkes to Durham 6 Sept., Lambton Papers.
6. For the details see Finlayson p. 122.
7. Finlayson, op.cit., p. 120.
8. Lord Western to Melbourne 16 August, MP 39/89.
9. Greville diary 9 September 1835; III, 320.
10. Melbourne to E. L. Bulwer n.d. [August 1837], Sanders, p. 375.

Anglicans and Dissenters

The question of religious reform was probably the most intractable which Melbourne's government encountered. Yet it was virtually inescapable. The Reform Act encouraged the Dissenters to press their already vigorous campaign against Anglican privileges. At the same time, intelligent members of the Established Church saw the need for internal reforms to modernise it.

Melbourne himself had no particular desire to be drawn into religious conflicts. His own religious views were tepid and backward looking. He had an intellectual taste for theology but his own faith was at best that of a sceptic. Allen, the atheist librarian at Holland House, claimed Melbourne for his own beliefs.[1] This is probably going too far. Melbourne disliked dogmatism of any sort and Haydon, the painter, revealed a much more troubled strain in him.[2] He may, indeed, have been sceptical about his own scepticism, here as elsewhere. He accepted the Anglican Church because it was long-established and traditionally tolerant.[3] As a young man he had written that 'Toleration is the only good and just principle' and laid down that 'if we are to have a prevailing religion, let us have one that is cool and indifferent, and such a one as we have got.'[4] These views never altered. In 1835 he told Spencer that he thought the present character of the Church of England 'good, that is, as harmless as a Priesthood, naturally a pestilent thing, can be'.[5] Later he told Queen Victoria that the Church of England was best because 'the least meddling.'[6] He was not, however, an enthusiastic Anglican. He deplored the existence of zeal, whether found in Luther, Wilberforce and the Evangelicals, or Dr. Arnold ('too vehement').[7]

1. Greville diary 16 December 1835; III, 331.
2. B. R. Haydon, Journals, 1 March 1835; III, 12.
3. Hansard, xxv. 840 (1 August 1835).
4. W. Lamb to Lady Elizabeth Melbourne 27 March 1800, Panshanger Papers 17.
5. Melbourne to Spencer 25 October 1835, Spencer Papers.
6. Q. V. diary 13 September 1838; II, 18.
7. Chadwick, The Victorian Church; I, 160.

He disliked new departures in doctrine or morality. He complained to Holland about Puseyism that 'I hardly make out what it is' and that he had read 57 pages of Newman on justification without understanding a sentence or deriving an idea; with some justice he concluded, 'I believe these Puseyites are all against us, but I doubt their being for anybody else.'[1] When Melbourne was obliged to receive two deputations from Sabbatarians, he did so with displeasure, lounging in his armchair and spitting into the fire.[2] Similarly, Queen Victoria commented on his infrequent attendance at church services and his propensity for falling asleep during the sermon.[3] On the other hand he asserted his lay rights against the vicar of Hatfield Church, informing him that

> 'I should be very unwilling to consent to any alteration which should not give me as large, as commodious and as well situated a Pew as that which I have at present.' 4

Melbourne favoured respectable clergy - 'I am all for keeping up the character of the hierarchy' - but he also wanted them to be submissive and not 'always poking themselves into everything.'[5] He had a healthy contempt for bishops, 'sad dogs' who should be appointed young 'else they go off directly, and don't learn anything.'[6]

With such views Melbourne was not likely to be forward in reforming the Church of England. He told Queen Victoria in 1838 that he would gladly have foregone the recent changes in the Church but that 'the Cry for Reform came from the bosom of the Establishment itself,'[7] But he believed sufficiently in the religious virtues and social value of the Church to want to see it continue in a healthy state. Moreover, he clearly perceived the growing

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1. Melbourne to Holland,29 August 1840, Add. Mss. 51,559 f. 69.
2. Chadwick, op.cit., p. 457.
3. Chadwick, op.cit., p. 160.
4. Melbourne to Rev. Faithful,24 June 1839, MP 25/2.
5. Chadwick, op.cit., p. 160.
6. ibid.
   See also Hatherton diary 24 February 1836.
7. Q. V. diary 13 September 1838; II, 18.

power of the Dissenters, especially with the passage of the Municipal Corporations bill. He said at that time:

> 'Depend upon it, it is the Established Church, not the hereditary peerage, that has need to set its house in order.'[1]

As he was not particularly attracted by the religion of Dissenters, Melbourne was quite prepared to assist the Church in its own rejuvenation. In any case, his hand would have been forced by Peel's appointment, in February 1835, of an Ecclesiastical Commission to follow up Grey's Commission of 1832 and to produce practical reforms. In June 1835 Melbourne issued a new Commission which retained the bishops and leading Anglican laymen such as Harrowby but substituted himself, Lansdowne, Russell, Rice, and Cottenham for Peel's Tory appointments. Howley, the archbishop of Canterbury, and the other bishops accepted the government's commitment to appropriation in Ireland and Church Rates reform in England but seem to have received some assurance that no Church property would be appropriated for the sake of the latter measure. This caused trouble two years later but in the meantime the Commission functioned harmoniously. Some Whigs thought this harmony went too far and that it allowed the bishops to dominate proceedings in the interests of very moderate reform.[2] Such charges were, however, rather vague. It has also been argued that non-attendance by the Whig members facilitated the Commission's work.[3] In Melbourne's case none of this may have mattered too much since his views on Church reform were anyway fairly well attuned to those of the hierarchy.

The Commission's first task was to continue the rationalisation of episcopal boundaries and the reduction of inequalities in episcopal incomes which Peel's Commission had recommended in March 1835. Melbourne himself was inclined to ridicule the idea of redistributing bishops' incomes and defended to Howick the image of 'a rich and lazy Church against a poor and active one.'[4]

1. Torrens p. 387.
2. Holland diary August 1836, Add. Mss. 51,871 f. 949.
   Greville diary 27 June 1836; III, 359.
3. Chadwick, op.cit., p. 129.
4. Howick diary 23 May 1835.

Clearly, Melbourne was only half serious on this occasion but even in the Lords he declared that reduced episcopal incomes were 'inconsistent with the form of government under which we lived, and to the state of society in which we were found.'[1] This attitude seems to accord well with that of at least three of the bishops on the Commission[2] and helps to explain the limitations of the Established Church bill of 1836. This fixed a theoretical minimum of £4,000 p.a. for any bishopric but left the six wealthiest sees with substantially larger incomes; although two new bishoprics for the industrial north were created, this was effected by suppressing two older bishoprics. The bill also established the Ecclesiastical Commission as a permanent body.

It was mainly a non-party measure but it was strongly attacked in Parliament by Radicals and High Churchmen. The former wanted a greater redistribution of episcopal incomes and more done for the poorer clergy.[3] With some difficulty they were restrained by Parkes and by a general meeting of ministerialists at the Foreign Office.[4] Tory opposition in the Commons, led by Sir Robert Inglis, was not very numerous but it was more serious in the Lords. The formidable Dr. Phillpotts of Exeter, assisted by the purely obstructionist Duke of Cumberland, attacked and altered the bill; he might have done more had not several bishops died in 1836.[5] His stand was supported by those like Sydney Smith who wanted a good career available for birth and talent, and by those like Manning who rejected all lay interference in clerical matters and feared the Church would be reduced to 'a mere secular establishment for popular religious instruction'[6] In such circumstances close co-operation between Howley and Melbourne was important.

1. Hansard, xxxii. 124 (10 March 1836)
2. Chadwick, op.cit., pp. 129-130.
3. Hatherton diary 19 July 1836.
4. Parkes to Durham 26 July 1836, Lambton Papers.
   Greville diary 24 July 1836; III, 364.
5. W. L. Mathieson, English Church Reform 1815-1840 (1923), pp. 133-5, 138-9.
6. ibid. p. 139.

After the 1836 Established Church Act, the Commission considered the question of pluralites and the reform of cathedrals. The former was a difficult problem when nearly 2,000 benefices were under £100 p.a., 2,878 had no parsonage, and 1,728 had no inhabitable parsonage. There were also the objections of the careerists as in the case of Sydney Smith. It is not surprising therefore that the Pluralities Act of 1838 confirmed the practice as well as limiting it to some extent. Only two benefices could henceforth be held together, provided they were within a ten mile radius, with a joint value not exceeding £1,000, and with no more than 3,000 parishioners in either case. The Lords further restricted the Act to future presentations only. Another Act was needed in 1850 to impose stricter conditions for income and distance. The 1838 Act also strengthened the bishops' powers over their clergy in the matters of residence and the number of Sunday sermons. Melbourne disliked any increase in bishops' powers and thought that if they were to become more powerful, 'they should be made really responsible for the state of their Dioceses, and should make yearly returns to Parliament and to the Privy Council.'[1] Nothing came of this idea, however, and Melbourne was left to reflect that 'if you will have reformation, you must incur some evil.'[2]

The reform of cathedrals aroused the greatest opposition of all. In 1836 the Commission proposed to suppress superfluous prebends, rectories and canonries and apply their revenues to poor parishes and new ones in cities. Most of the cathedral chapters, led by Canterbury, waged a strenuous campaign against such notions. Once again Sydney Smith turned his pen against the Commission. Pusey denounced its efforts as illegal, distinguishing, to his own satisfaction at least, between cathedrals, which the Commission might inquire into, and their endowments and patronage which it might not investigate.[3] Not until the fifth attempt did the Dean and Chapter bill pass, in 1840, with

1. Melbourne to Spencer 25 October 1835, Spencer Papers.
2. ibid.
3. Mathieson, op.cit., pp. 150-1.

twelve bishops in the Lords voting against it. 360 non-resident prebends were abolished, as were 72 residentiary ones and 68 sinecure rectories. In addition the separate estates of deans and canons were vested in the Ecclesiastical Commission, after the expiry of existing life interests. Likewise their separate, individual rights of patronage (as opposed to corporate ones) were transferred to the bishops. Finally, the incomes of deans and canons were rendered more equal, though the four richest cathedrals still had advantages in this respect. Over £360,000 was made available by this Act, even if the method of suppression of canonries was slow and cumbersome. It owed something, at least, to Melbourne. He had, for instance, disposed of the scholastic plea for cathedrals by telling the Lords that

> 'the study of theology may be a very good thing in its way, but it is not a thing that we want [=lack] in these days.' 1

When the movement for cathedral reform ran out of steam in the later 1830's it was Melbourne who characteristically warned that

> 'there could be no course on the part of Governments and Parliaments which led more certainly to ruin and destruction than to withhold that concession in a moment of returning security which they were ready to make when under the pressure of danger.' 2

At times Melbourne found reforming the Church wearisome work. In July 1836 he simply slept through one and a quarter hours of a speech by Lord Londonderry on the surplus revenues of the see of Durham.[3] About the same time he said of the Church arrangements, 'we must push them through and be bothered no more about them.'[4] In 1838 he told Russell 'I am quite tired of reforming the Church', a sentiment he repeated to Archbishop Whateley.[5] Moreover, in two of his objectives he largely failed. Lay control over the reformed Church was not as complete as Melbourne would have wished; and he

1. Hansard, lv. 987.
2. Mathieson, op.cit., p. 150.
3. Hatherton diary 21 July 1836.
4. ibid., 19 July 1836.
5. Melbourne to Russell 1 February 1838, MEL/RU/444. Chadwick, op.cit., p. 129.

never managed to install on the Ecclesiastical Commission those additional Whigs, whether clerical or lay, with which he had threatened Archbishop Howley in 1836.[1]

On the other hand, Melbourne had helped the Church to survive what Keble called 'the first revolutionary Parliament.'[2] As Melbourne said, he did not think that 'the Church alone and by herself was celebrated for her legislation';[3] he was therefore prepared to supply the deficiency. Precisely how far he can be credited with these reforms must remain debatable. Peel, assisted by Blomfield and Harrowby, would have been capable of taking Church reform some distance. But it is doubtful if Peel could have played quite the same role as Melbourne, given his troubles inside his own party at this time. Melbourne, however, had more authority with his supporters. He also had a suitable outlook. He was sufficiently concerned for the Church's future to see the need of reform, but sufficiently traditional to desire a slow transition. His prejudices were widespread enough for him not to brook opposition from Radicals, Dissenters,[4] High Tories, bishops, cathedral chapters or the Oxford movement. Consequently, he played a definable if hardly pre-eminent part in adapting the Anglican Church to the requirements of the age.

At the same time as he sat on the Ecclesiastical Commission, Melbourne had to satisfy the demands of the Dissenters.[5] Their principal grievances included: the compulsory Anglican marriage ceremony, Church rates, exclusion from the universities, and the absence of legal registration for births and deaths. Their feelings had intensified as efforts on their behalf in these various fields failed during Grey's ministry. The Dissenter lobby in the Commons increased and was firmly behind the coalition which toppled Peel in April, 1835.

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1. Melbourne to Howley 29 June, Sanders p. 311-12.
2. Mathieson, op.cit., p. 167.
3. Hansard, lv. 989 (27 July 1840)
4. See below p.272
5. See R. G. Cowherd, The Politics of English Dissent (1956).

1. W. Lamb to Lady Elizabeth Melbourne 27 March 1800, Panshanger 17.
2. Q. V. diary 19 June 1839; II, 210.
3. Cowherd, op.cit., p. 94.
4. second Derbyshire speech December 1834, Torrens p. 325.
5. Cowherd, op.cit., p. 86.
6. Cecil, Lord M., p. 145.
7. Melbourne to Russell 16 Aug. 1834, MP 13/32, copy.
8. Melbourne to Holland 16 March 1837, Add. Mss. 51,558 f. 140.
9. Russell to Melbourne 15 August, MP 13/31.
   Melbourne to Russell 16 August, MP 13/32.
10. ibid.

Melbourne was divided in his reactions to this campaign. In theory, he had long disliked Dissenters because they were 'more zealous, and consequently more intolerant, than the Established Church.'[1] This did not prevent him from employing Dissenters as his steward and gardener in Hertfordshire, though characteristically he avowed a material motive in this - 'Great thing to have a dissenter; they don't go to races, they don't hunt, and don't engage in any expensive amusements.'[2] It did, however, make him indifferent to the Dissenters' dislike of the internal reform of the Establishment in the 1830's. They felt strongly that such a reform postponed consideration of their own grievances and that a reinvigorated Church would encroach on their own territory in industrial areas.[3] In the context of 1834, moreover, Melbourne was annoyed that the Whigs' difficulties had been increased by 'the bitter hostility and ulterior designs against the Established Church, which have been openly avowed by several classes and bodies of the Dissenters.'[4] He discerned the differences within the Dissenting community, in particular that between the moderate Unitarians and the militant Baptists;[5] so much so that he once announced to a Deputation of Dissenters, 'it's these damned Anabaptists who do all the mischief.'[6] Melbourne was aware also of the essential moderation of Methodism,[7] though that may only have increased his contempt for Lord John Russell's half-brother, Wriothesley, as 'a snuffling Methodist'.[8] None of this, however, made Melbourne an obvious champion of Dissenting interests.

On the other hand, he was responsive to the justice of the Dissenters' cause in many respects. In August 1834 he instructed Russell to prepare new plans, on the basis of the Dissenters' wishes, for their grievances over marriage, registration, church rates, and admission to universities.[9] It is true that Melbourne dreaded the repugnance of purely civil marriage 'to the habits and feelings of this country'.[10] But, as so often, he merely doubted if he could get a piece of legislation through Parliament, and, if he did, whether it might not cost him votes. Melbourne's initiative was then nullified by the events of November 1834. The apparent delay in these matters after his

return to office in April 1835, which has been alleged to show a lack of crusading zeal and a fondness for office,[1] is to be explained by the advent of the Municipal Corporations report. The subsequent bill pressed heavily upon the government's time and abnormally extended the parliamentary session well into September. Moreover, as Melbourne foresaw, it was a bill which would greatly benefit the Dissenters.[2] Their representative in the Commons, John Wilks, told Russell in May 1835 that his community was content to postpone religious grievances until the bill was passed.[3] Apparently, the United Committee warned Melbourne in June, 1835 that delay 'might be attended with serious consequences in the event of a general election.'[4] From this it has been argued that Melbourne acted under intimidation in finally adopting the Dissenters' cause later in 1835.[4] In fact, the Committee's warning seems superfluous in view of Melbourne's commitment to reform already. In any case, he probably could not have been forced to heed it when a general election was a distant prospect.

In September 1835 Melbourne established another Cabinet committee, headed by Russell, which was to study Dissenters' grievances.[5] As a result registration and marriage bills were ready by January, 1836. Russell's bill of 1834 had conceded Dissenters' right to separate marriage arrangements but still left them too much under the Church's surveillance; Peel's bill of 1835 had permitted their marriages only as a civil contract. The 1836 bill solved the problem by allowing chapels to be registered for marriages. The Lords insisted on a registrar's presence at chapel marriages (but not for church ones). Since this meant registration by one of the Poor Law officials, the Dissenters wanted to fight the point until dissuaded by Russell.[6] Melbourne was criticised

1. Newbould, op.cit., pp. 264-5.
2. Torrens p. 387
   (Dissenters were, in practice, still excluded from most corporations, despite an annual Indemnity Act since 1760.)
3. Cowherd, op.cit., p. 91.
4. ibid., p. 92.
5. Gash, Reaction and Reconstruction, p. 71.
6. Torrens p. 338.

for accepting the Lords' amendments[1] but there was more Tory opposition than is sometimes allowed. On the whole, the Dissenters were satisfied, especially as the registration act provided a long-desired national register of births, marriages and deaths.

The question of the admission of Dissenters to the universities was more difficult. The old universities were so much Anglican preserves that any attempt to change their character was certain to arouse enormous opposition. In 1834 a bill originally introduced by a Unitarian MP, G. W. Wood, would have abolished Anglican subscription at entry or on graduation. It passed the Commons but was lost in the Lords by 102 votes. Although it was not a government measure, Melbourne felt bound to speak for it by paying tribute to the antiquity and sincerity of Dissenters' beliefs.[2] In 1835 he supported Radnor's bill which was framed on similar lines. On this occasion Holland, who thought the Anglican subscriptions an 'immoral and revolting practice', wrote that 'Melbourne spoke with great spirit and effect.'[3] The bill was defeated by 163 - 57 but, according to Hobhouse, Melbourne's speech

> 'was of more service to his Government, in the country, than twenty majorities in the Lords. The spirit, the eloquence, the sincerity, the deep feeling of every word, made a great impression on all who heard, and all who read, what he said.' 4

After these defeats, two of the heaviest inflicted by the Tories in the Lords in the post - 1832 period, other means had to be sought. The government found a partial solution in the grant of charters to London University and University College in November 1836. Henceforth Dissenters could at least take degrees, though even this concession attracted considerable animosity from Tories and the old universities.[5] The Dissenting deputies still pressed Russell for

1. Howick diary 20, 21 July 1836.
2. Hansard, xxv. 840-5 (1 August 1834).
3. Holland diary 13 July 1835, Add. Mss. 51,871 f. 889.
4. Hobhouse diary 13 July; V, 42-3.
5. Chadwick, op.cit., pp. 94-5.

action against Oxford and Cambridge but Melbourne asked,

> 'Is this absolutely necessary? ... If it is not absolutely necessary, I am sure that it is not prudent to stir this question. There is none upon which prejudice is stronger or more violent. Many of our own friends were in their hearts against it.' 1

With a small majority in the Commons, including what Holland called many 'lukewarm and squeamish Whigs',[2] an exceedingly hostile House of Lords and no strong public support on the issue, Melbourne was being only realistic.

In practical terms exclusion from the universities was more of a burden than the Dissenters' liability to Church rates.[3] Nonetheless they objected, if anything, more violently to this Anglican imposition, even though only £250,000 was raised for the upkeep of church buildings from the whole country and in some towns Dissenters had not paid rates for a number of years. Althorp had, however, tried to abolish Church rates in 1834 by substituting a grant out of the land tax. Since the Dissenters would still have contributed indirectly, and with less chance of evasion, they refused to accept this plan. But it entailed an obligation upon Melbourne's government to take up the grievance and he acknowledged this by reserving his right to take action over church rates when establishing the Ecclesiastical Commission in May, 1835. But he also assured Howley that such action would involve no diversion of Church funds.[4] In 1836 Melbourne, Russell, Lansdowne and Rice wanted to initiate a reform but the Cabinet postponed action until the rest of the legislation beneficial to Dissenters was safely passed.[5] Then in June 1836 the Church rates measure was dropped for that year. Howick commented:

> 'I am a little afraid this is not quite right but the desire to get through the session outweighed every other consideration.'[6]

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1. Melbourne to Russell 15 December 1836, MML/RU/281.
2. Holland diary November 1835, Add. Mss. 51,871 f. 918.
3. Mathieson, op.cit., pp. 102-3.
4. Gash, Reaction and Reconstruction, p. 84 n.3
5. Memorandum to Russell March 1836, P.R.O. 30/22/2A ff. 323-44.
6. Howick diary 18 June 1836.

The delay was ill-received by the Dissenters who were already suspicious of the government's apparent docility in the face of the Ecclesiastical Commission. In October 1836 the Church Rates Abolition Society was formed. In February 1837, 400 delegates lobbied government ministers and scrutinised the voting of MPs. Over 2,300 petitions were sent to Parliament. The government had, however, already decided on a Church rates bill. This would establish a Commission to administer the property of bishops, deans, and chapters and, by efficient management, raise a surplus which, it was estimated, would pay for the maintenance of church buildings. To staunch Anglicans the proposal seemed to be one simply to reduce the Church's income and one smacking of Irish appropriation. Melbourne foresaw this clearly:

> 'the opposition we may expect to our measure is such as to leave us little chance of carrying it. We shall have against us the Church and its adherents and specially all those who like Lord Harrowby have nothing so much at heart as the augmentation of small livings.'[1]

He also expected some Whigs to oppose the bill.

There was, however, nothing wrong with Melbourne's spirit. He told Russell:

> 'I am not against ... another desperate battle with the Church but I think with the allies whom they will have they will very likely effectually beat us this time.' 2

Nor was he lacking in principle. He pointed out that the Church rate was an ancient institution, at least 600 years old in common law, and of modest proportions,[3] but he sympathised with the Dissenters' case. When the bill received a majority of 23 in the Commons on 15 March, Melbourne thought the division

> 'a very good one considering the mass of prejudice, ignorance and interest opposed to the bill ... I fully expected to be beat and think it a wonder that we were not and highly creditable to the House of Commons.' 4

Moreover, he thought it in the Church's interest to remove a cause of 'much unseemly discord and contention.'[5] His dislike of the measure sprang from

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1. Melbourne to Russell 5 January 1837, MEL/RU/287.
2. Melbourne to Russell 9 January 1837, MEL/RU/289.
3. Melbourne to Russell 11 January 1837, MEL/RU/290.
4. Melbourne to Holland 16 March 1837, Add. Mss. 51,558 f.140.
5. Melbourne to William IV, 5 February 1837, Sanders p. 324.

another source. As he wrote to Ellice,

> 'the Dissenters in my opinion will overthrow the Ministry. By pressing Church Rates, they force upon us a measure which ... will upset us.' 1

In the end, as so often, Melbourne's feelings were evenly balanced, reflecting the state of the question itself. He summed up the position to Holland at the end of March:

> 'the fact is the measure is sufficient to create great irritation against us, but the grievance not heavy enough to excite a very strong feeling upon our side. ... it is a trumpery business and a disgrace both to Dissenter and Church man.' 2

The Church rates bill ran into difficulties on all sides. Dissenters and Radicals objected to it because it would improve the Church's revenues. The King much disliked it and Melbourne had to defend it at great length to him.[3] Worse still, it provoked a full scale revolt by the Church hierarchy, particularly by those bishops on the Ecclesiastical Commission. Fifteen bishops condemned the bill shortly after it was announced in the Commons on 3 March and a week later Howley and his colleagues refused to serve on the commission any longer. On 9 March the bill was denounced in the Lords by Howley, in a procedurally irregular manner. Hatherton commented on

> 'an unusually large attendance of Tory members, especially of the usual hands in managing and creating mischief, at the Bar, and yet there was no Notice of any motion.' 4

Melbourne was taken aback but saw through the move and told Howley he was

> 'put forward ... by those who had more guile and entertained deeper designs than himself'

so as to influence the vote in the Commons.[5] He went on to attack the bishops for obstructing a measure of peace and concord.[6] What Greville called 'a grand flare-up' continued with a counter-attack upon Melbourne by Blomfield, bishop of London.[7] When the latter alleged that they had agreed unanimously

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1. Melbourne to Ellice, 1 February, Ellice Papers 28 f. 44.
2. Melbourne to Holland, 31 March, Add. Mss. 51,558 f. 145.
3. Melbourne to William IV, 5, 13, 17, 20 February, Sanders pp. 323-30.
4. Hatherton diary 9 March.
5. Hansard, xxxvii. 151.
6. Howick diary 9 March.
7. Greville diary 18 March; III, 399.

about Church rates in 1835, Melbourne declared, according to Hatherton, 'no, not unanimously, I always dissented'. Hatherton heard Melbourne immediately afterwards ask Lord Lansdowne if he was not correct in making this claim; Lansdowne agreed that Melbourne was, but said that he himself had always agreed with the bishops.[1] Two days later, Melbourne vented his feelings on the newly appointed bishop of Ripon, telling him that the episcopal tactics were 'politically the most hostile that could be devised' and 'personally neither civil nor considerate.'[2] Melbourne was particularly angry because he believed that, since the events of 1829 and 1830-2, the Tories had been looking for a popular cry and that they thought they now had found one; they had therefore misrepresented the bill so as to excite people to defend the Church, for instance, by pretending that no funds at all would be provided in lieu of Church rates.[3]

Faced with such opposition the bill had little chance of success. Even in the Commons conservative Whigs began to desert. One of them, J. E. Denison, told Melbourne that

> 'with a Party full of misgivings, and likely to split on many points, a majority of 23 is a bad army to fight with.'[4]

There was, as Melbourne had predicted, a strong feeling that proceeds from improved leases should augment small livings and new urban parishes.[5] On 23 May the majority in the Commons on the bill fell to 5. The government, with the exception of Russell and Howick, was therefore glad to see the bill expire with William IV in June.[6] After the elections of 1837 Melbourne and Russell agreed that the Church rates bill could be dropped, though they would not formally abandon the principle.[7]

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1. Hatherton diary 9 March.
2. Torrens p. 429.
3. Melbourne's Commonplace Book, Panshanger Papers 19. Hansard, xxxvii. 152.
4. Denison to Melbourne n.d. [March 1837], MP 23/45.
5. ibid.; Hatherton diary 8 April 1837.
6. Howick diary 20 May.
7. Russell to Melbourne, 11, 28 August MEL/RU/38, 42. Melbourne to Russell, 13, 24 August MEL/RU/387, 392.

The new reign also marked the end in general of Whig efforts on behalf of the Dissenters. In view of the government's weak position in Parliament this was understandable. It was all the more so when the Dissenters had made very little attempt to organise their voting strength behind government candidates in the 1837 general election. Instead, they had concentrated on securing candidates, often Radicals, pledged to their own specific programme.[1] Disestablishment became increasingly popular with Dissenters. In such circumstances, Melbourne must have felt that the government's efforts on behalf of Dissenters had reached the limits of what was practicable and desirable.

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1. Cowherd, op.cit., pp. 95-6.

1. Gash, Reaction and Reconstruction, p. 36
2. Hansard, xxx. 1254-6 (2 September 1835)
3. ibid.
4. Melbourne to Brougham, 13 October 1835, Brougham Papers 43,538.
5. ibid.
6. Ebrington to Howick, 15 November 1835, Grey Papers.
7. Melbourne to Brougham, 13 October, loc.cit.

The House of Lords

The most logical consequence of the Reform Act would have been a reform of the House of Lords, especially when the Lords began to obstruct government legislation in the years after 1832. The Radicals' demands for changes in the Upper House impressed and worried even those like Peel and Lyndhurst who resisted them.[1]

Melbourne had no liking or respect for the Tory Ultras who did so much to discredit the Lords. He saw them as stupid, illiberal, and dangerous. In September 1835 he said of them:

> 'we are subject to their domination and their guidance ... we are forced to adopt the measures of a majority who are led by the more violent, blind, and unyielding of themselves ...' 2

He chafed under 'the power which is unhappily placed in their hands.'[3] Melbourne was aware, moreover, that each Whig defeat in the Lords made the King more difficult to control. But not only were all his instincts opposed to any radical reform of the Lords; he knew also that the issue was both over-rated and over-simplified by most hostile people. In the first place he thought the outcry 'most unreasonable' and reflected, 'I have never seen any clamour, which was without real cause, prevail very long in this country.'[4] He pointed out that 'the fact is they did the Muncipal bill little harm; they adopted the most essential parts of it and in some respects they improved it.'[5] Ebrington, one of the most progressive Whig peers, agreed with this analysis, and noted that the Lords' acceptance of corporation reform had lessened the clamour against them.[6] Secondly, Melbourne saw what most would-be reformers ignored: the great practical difficulties involved in any reconstruction of the Lords. He claimed he had never

> 'observed gross absurdities to make a very durable impression upon the public mind. Now nothing can be more absurd than all the plans proposed for the reformation of the House of Lords except O'Connell's and that is pure Democracy.' 7

An Upper House elected by the peers or any limited electorate would have produced an assembly even more conservative than the existing one. If elected by the same constituencies as the Commons, it would have no real

purpose to serve. The alternative was the creation of a liberal majority in the Lords, on a hereditary or life basis, accompanied by abolition of seats for bishops and the Scottish and Irish representative peers.[1] There were several strong objections to this course. The government would have to find at least 70 suitable Whigs, not an easy task if respectability and wealth were criteria, especially if seats in the Commons were not to be left vulnerable. Such a step would lead to a clash with the King and to a general election. Melbourne was not prepared for such a struggle in the absence of strong public feeling against either the hereditary basis or the powers of the Lords.

This remained his view even when, in 1836, the Lords amended the Irish Tithes and Corporations bills so drastically that the government had to abandon them. Russell, who had long smarted under the Lords' yoke, proposed a steady creation of peers, at least 8 at a time, and whenever needed, to overawe the Lords by the fear of a large creation (this fear having been effective at the time of the Reform bill).[2] He was supported by Holland and Howick but Melbourne thought the idea would 'lead to the resignation of the Government, and to attempts to form another ' and he refused to precipitate a struggle with such unforeseeable consequences.[3] Russell therefore withdrew his memorandum before the rest of the Cabinet saw it, trying to comfort himself with the thought that 'one day or other, we shall all come to one mind upon it.'[4] In fact, however, Russell returned to his theme in August 1836, telling Melbourne that Grey had given him a pledge to create peers in 1834.[5] Against this could be set the opinion of 'Ben' Stanley, the chief whip, that any attempt to force the Lords issue would prompt several Whig MPs to

1. See Gash, Reaction and Reconstruction, p. 43-4
2. Russell memorandum 5 June 1836, P.R.O. 30/22/2B f. 152.
3. Howick diary 26 May, 28 June.
   Melbourne to Russell, 5 June, Walpole 'Life of Russell, I, 267.
4. Russell to Melbourne, 5 June, MEL/RU/21.
5. Russell to Melbourne, 22 August, MP 13/51.

desert to Peel.[1] In Melbourne's mind the only danger was that press agitation might inflate the subject and endanger the ministry.[2]

It was plausible for Russell to contend that 'the Ministers stand in the position of confessing the evil, and not consenting to the remedy'[3] but the remedy was always elusive and after 1836 the Lords came to seem less of an evil. Liberal weakness after the 1837 election coincided with a more reasonable stance by the Lords, With Wellington and Peel in harness, and with the former leading the Ultras, such potentially controversial measures as the Union of the two Canadas and the Canadian clergy reserves bill were allowed through, as eventually were much modified bills on Irish tithes, poor laws, and municipal corporations. Russell still wanted a life peers scheme in August 1837 and in 1839 Roden's motion of inquiry into Normanby's Irish policy provoked talk of a small creation of peers; but nothing came of either suggestion.[4] In his 1837 election address at Stroud, Russell himself had declared against any alteration in 'the ancient constitution of this country.'[5] On his return from India in June 1838, Macaulay told Greville that there was such a lack of enthusiasm for reform of the Lords that he would no more advocate it than he would representative government in Turkey or monarch and a hereditary peerage in the U.S.A.[6] English society was still too aristocratic for any movement against the Lords to flourish for long.

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1. Stanley to Parkes 5 September 1836, Parkes Papers 25.
2. Parkes to Durham 10 October 1836, Lambton Papers.
3. Russell memo. 5 June 1836, loc.cit.
4. Russell to Melbourne 1 August 1837, MEL/RU/33.
   Melbourne to Russell 2 August, MEL/RU/382.
5. Walpole, Life of Russell, I, 283.
6. Greville diary IV, 117.

Ballot

Of those constitutional questions left in the air by the Reform Act, secret voting was the one which caused most trouble for Melbourne's government. The idea of making the secret ballot part of the Reform bill had been much canvassed,[1] and it remained a rallying point for Radicals of all shades after 1832. Grote's annual motions for it became celebrated. Ballot was a controversial idea which aroused strong opposition even from otherwise liberal politicians. Some felt that only open voting allowed the unenfranchised to influence the outcome of elections. A commoner objection was that ballot was an unmanly and underhand method of voting.[2] It was also argued that a secret ballot would increase frauds at elections and yet still fail to protect voters whose political inclinations would be known or discoverable in other ways.[3]

Melbourne shared such views. He told Russell he was certain that ballot 'would aggravate all the evils which exist' and introduce new ones.[4] He explained to Queen Victoria the unpleasant secretiveness of the method and his belief that it would not 'prevent Landlords from turning out their Tenants'; further, 'there would be great fraud exercised in carrying it into execution.'[5] On the other hand he disliked 'the Evils which arise from the unjust and tyrannical exercise of power and influence', as he told a Liberal MP.[6] He admitted also to Queen Victoria that 'the system of oppression and intimidation was very hard' and ' therefore I don't wonder at <u>their</u> wishing to try it.'[7] How far such feelings carried him is unclear. According to Parkes, Melbourne confessed himself converted to ballot by an article by J. S. Mill

1. Brock, <u>GRA,</u> pp. 140-1.
2. G. W. Russell to Lord J. Russell 28 February 1838, <u>Early Russell Correspondence</u> II, 217.
3. Brock, <u>GRA</u>, p. 357 n. 57.
4. Melbourne to Russell 13 Aug, 15 Sept. 1837, MEL/RU 387, 400.
5. Q. V. diary 10 June 1839; II, 204.
6. Melbourne to J. Buckland 16 Feb. 1838, MP 20/69.
7. Q. V. diary 10 June 1839; II, 204.

in the Westminster Review.[1] If this is correct, it follows that Melbourne's real objection to ballot was that it was

> 'only put forward in the first instance, and that all the other points, extension of suffrage, Reformation of the House of Lords would all be pressed successively in the same manner.' 2

As he told Parkes, he did not want to lend substance to Tory cries that he was a Radical-led prime minister. In Melbourne's opinion even to make ballot an open question in the Cabinet would 'immediately elevate this question into an importance which it does not possess.'[3] Moreover, there was the practical consideration that others in the government, especially Lansdowne, would not countenance such a move; Melbourne warned Ellice, 'depend upon it, doing so is the destruction of the government.'[4]

Melbourne was embarrassed by ministerial support for ballot almost as soon as his second government was formed. On 1 June, 1835 he wrote to Poulett Thomson, the only completely committed Cabinet minister,

> 'I hope you will be careful of what you say upon the Ballot to-morrow. A little more prejudice against us would go near to unship us.' 5

Melbourne's policy was to be lenient and flexible so far as he could. As he said in 1837,

> 'we have never pressed much for attendance, and we have always winked at the absence of those who were unwilling to vote upon the subject.' 6

This was sensible in view of the degree of support for ballot; even in 1836 Grote received 88 votes against 139. Those who demanded ballot were greatly assisted by the 1837 elections.[7] Melbourne later admitted that there had been unprecedentedly numerous and glaring instances of intimidation and interference;

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1. Parkes to Durham 10 October 1836, Lambton Papers.
2. Melbourne to Russell 3 January 1837, MEL/RU/284.
3. Melbourne to Ellice 17 November 1836, Ellice Papers 28 f. 42.
4. Howick diary 25 October 1836.
   Melbourne to Ellice 17 November 1836.
5. Sanders p. 288.
6. Melbourne to Russell 3 January 1837, MEL/RU/284.
7. Russell to Melbourne 13 September 1837; Walpole, Life of Russell, I, 286.
   T. Thornley (MP) to Melbourne 13 Feb. 1838, MP 38/63.

and that if even one tenth of what he had heard of the reckless and unscrupulous use of power conferred by wealth and station were true, he could not wonder at the demand for ballot.[1] For one moment in August 1837, Melbourne was prepared to consider making ballot an open question as Russell wanted.[2] But even then he was sensitive to being misled by 'sudden impressions' and 'a notion of what has taken place at the elections.' He also felt that, basically, ballot was a second-rate issue.[3] There soon returned all his latent fears of a recurrence of agitation, especially on a question 'so plausible and so taking with the unthinking.'[4] He therefore obliged Russell to give up any idea of making it an open question.[5]

The problem did not, however, go away. In the 1838 session it was difficult to find candidates for junior office who were not supporters of ballot. Sheil, for example, suffered, even though both Russell and Melbourne wanted to promote him. Melbourne thought of giving way as a result of 'its being represented to me that so many were pledged to vote for it.'[6] Russell, however, was now ultra-sensitive to his reputation for consistency with his 'finality' speech of November 1837 and would not hear of such a move. The rest of the Cabinet also thought ballot too democratic and not popular enough.[7] As Grote's usual motion approached, Russell looked likely to resign if any minister voted for it; Sir Hussey Vivian at the Ordnance was pledged to do so and therefore acted as a special irritant upon Russell. Queen Victoria recorded Melbourne's view that 'Lord John took it rather too seriously; but he added: "Lord John does."' Melbourne himself thought it 'better not to take much notice of who votes for or against it.'[8] However, he made efforts, through Ellice, to get his supporters

1. Hansard, xli. 47-9 (23 February 1838).
2. Russell to Melbourne 11 August 1837, MEL/RU/38.
   Melbourne to Russell 13 August 1837, MEL/RU/387.
3. ibid.
4. Melbourne to Frederick Lamb 7 Oct., 1837, Panshanger Papers 17.
5. Melbourne to Russell 15 September 1837, MEL/RU/400.
6. Melbourne to Russell 23 January 1838, MEL/RU/438.
   Greville diary 6 April 1838: IV, 187.
7. Howick diary 15 February 1838.
8. Q. V. diary 5, 6 Feb. 1838; I, 271, 273.

to vote against Grote or to abstain, though refraining from any threats.[1] Thomson was allowed to stay away. Grote's motion was defeated by 315 - 198, and, even though only 69 ministerialists voted in the majority, Russell did not resign. He was, perhaps, sobered by Melbourne's admonition that the end of the government on such a question would displease their supporters and 'come like a clap of thunder upon the country.'[2] Believing as he did that ballot was not a first-class issue, Melbourne thought it not worthwhile to let it damage the prestige and chances of his government; and he had sufficient standing and technique to impose on his colleagues the policy which followed logically from this view.

In 1839 the Radicals decided to press their demands over a wider front. Household suffrage and shorter parliaments were added to ballot by the most vociferous, even though, as Hobhouse wrote, such demands would

> 'put us in a minority of 70 or 100 in the House of Commons, and would not add to our supporters in the country.' 3

Hitherto only the question of shorter parliaments, and that sporadically, had troubled Melbourne's government. It had arisen principally in November 1836 as a by-product of Russell's quest for a means of shackling the Lords. Measures against the Lords would involve an election but this was pointless when the King could not live long, and when his death would result in a new election. To deal with this, and to appease the Radicals, Russell suggested a bill to end the dissolution of parliament on the monarch's death, limit the duration of parliaments to 5 years, and allow new office-holders to keep their seats without seeking re-election. This rather mixed bag of ideas was supported by Duncannon, Thomson, Howick, Abercromby, and Ellice; Stanley and Fox Maule were already pledged to shorter parliaments.[4] Melbourne distrusted Russell's ulterior motives and thought the measure would in no way satisfy the Radicals.[5]

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1. Melbourne to Ellice 13 January, 15 February 1838, Ellice Papers 28 ff. 56, 58.
2. Melbourne to Russell 7 February 1838, MEL/RU/450.
3. Hobhouse diary 3 April 1839; V, 183.
4. Newbould, op.cit., p. 286.
   Howick diary 25 October 1836.
5. Melbourne to Russell 27 December 1836, P.R.O. 30/22/2D f. 260.

Above all, he disliked the idea of shorter Parliaments. He had argued in 1834 that

> 'Shorter Parliaments and more frequent elections will be the ruin of the liberal party, if there were no other objection to them and there are many. ... It is as clear as the day that the more frequent you make elections, the more certainly you give the representation into the hands of the wealthy, for you never will so far overcome by laws the habits of this People, as to make elections really cheap and inexpensive.' 1

Melbourne disliked such reforms because of their democratic tendency rather than because of their ineffectiveness. But, whatever his ulterior motive, his contention was very probably correct. All the evidence suggests that the corruption of the electorate in the 1830's was a matter of deep habit which could not be changed with any electoral machinery then available.[2]

In the spring of 1839, therefore, Melbourne still rejected ideas of constitutional reform. He admitted to Queen Victoria that 'our friends ... have been running riot so much lately' that it was necessary 'to bring them to the post', but he did this successfully with the vote of confidence on Irish policy on 15 April.[3] He told Holland, 'I am against going an inch further' and much approved Russell's Stroud 'Letter' which defied the Radicals.[4] Russell's stand, however, infuriated some of them and helped to produce the fatal Jamaica vote.[5] The rebels were chastened by the government's resignation and do not seem to have absolutely insisted on a concession over ballot from the Cabinet when it unexpectedly returned to power.[6] But, on 22 May, ministers agreed that ballot could be an open question for future office holders. This decision apparently was known unofficially in Liberal circles about two weeks later.[7] For the time being, rather oddly, existing

1. Melbourne to Mulgrave 12 December 1834, Mulgrave Papers MM/6.
2. Brock, GRA, p. 328.
3. Q. V. diary 22 March 1839; II, 137.
4. Melbourne to Russell 3 May 1839, MP 14/21.
   Melbourne to Holland 6 May 1839, Add. Mss. 51,559 ff. 29-30.
5. Greville diary 10 May; IV, 209-10.
6. Melbourne to ?, 18 May, Broadlands GC/ME/291, copy.
   Howick diary 22 May.
   E. J. Stanley to Melbourne 13 May, MP 36/124.
   Hume to Melbourne 25 May, Melbourne to Hume, MP 28/32, 33.
7. O'Connell to Fitzpatrick 7 June, O'Connell Correspondence II, 185.

office-holders were not apparently given the same freedom.[1]

After Melbourne's return to office, the Radicals raised several other constitutional topics: the repeal of the rate-paying clauses for £10 householders (one of the least satisfactory aspects of the 1832 Act)[2]; the elimination of bribery in elections; and the enfranchisement of £10 householders in counties. Melbourne would agree only to a committee of inquiry for the rate-paying clauses. He thought it was simply impossible to do anything to lessen bribery; if anything, he thought public decency had been less infringed before 1832 when there might well have been one borough owner instead of two hundred voters to take bribes.[3] Melbourne was, however, prepared to alter the country franchise. Grey and Howick thought this an infringement of the principles of the Reform Act but Melbourne said, in words which Gladstone in the 1860's might have used, that it was

> 'entirely a question of circumstances, prudence and expediency dependent upon the opinion that may be formed upon the fitness of those to whom the right of voting was .. to be extended ...' [4]

On 1 June the Cabinet decided that Russell should resist Fleetwood's notion on 4 June in favour of the £10 county franchise but state that the government would consider it and thus conciliate the Radicals.[5] This led to what Melbourne described as a disagreeable scene with Howick threatening to speak against Russell if the latter took such a line.[6] By 1 June Howick was talking of resignation and Grey of speaking against the government in the Lords.[7] 'It would', Melbourne told the Queen, 'give us a great shake.'[8] On 4 June Russell talked with Howick and decided on his own initiative to reject

1. Howick diary 22 May.
2. Brock, GRA, p. 325.
3. Torrens p. 261.
4. Howick diary 28 May.
   Melbourne to Howick 25 August 1839, Grey Papers.
5. Howick diary 1 June.
6. Q. V. diary 1 June; II, 195.
7. ibid. 3 June; II, 197-8.
8. ibid. 5 June; II, 199.

Fleetwood's motion completely, leaving no hope for the future. The motion was lost by 207 - 81. Russell's speech led to angry recriminations by Normanby, Thomson, and Hobhouse; as Melbourne put it, 'there's a dreadful ferment.'[1] Melbourne decided to hold a Cabinet on 6 June 'in order to let them cool a little' as he told the Queen; and meanwhile Duncannon acted as a conciliator.[2] The affair ended with angry attacks upon Howick in the Cabinet, without anyone resigning.[3] But the threat of resignation by Howick's critics forced Russell and Melbourne finally to make ballot an open question for all, so as to soothe the wounded Radicals.[4] As a result Grote's motion on 18 June attracted the votes of Thomson, Campbell, Sir George Grey, and two Russells, although his total support rose only to 218.

To surrender over ballot was perhaps inglorious when Melbourne had once described such an act as 'utter loss of character.'[5] From another angle it was, perhaps, a sign of weakness and aimlessness on the part of his government, which could not be concealed by Melbourne's reflection that open questions had been common in the days of the younger Pitt.[6] But it could also be said that Melbourne's long rearguard action had achieved its objective. As he said, such an open question did not 'immediately affect the administrative course and action of the Government' and after June 1839 ballot passed into a long eclipse.[7]

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1. ibid. pp. 199-200.
2. ibid.
3. ibid.
   Howick diary 6 June.
4. Melbourne to Russell 11 June, MP 14/37.
   Russell to Melbourne 12 June, P.R.O. 30/22/3C f. 342.
5. Melbourne to Ebrington 7 January 1839, Fortescue papers 1262 M/L1/3.
6. Melbourne to Russell n.d. [June 1839], MP 14/35.
7. Melbourne to Russell 11 June 1839, MP 14/37.

The Corn Laws

The other, and greater issue on which Melbourne was increasingly hard pressed was the Corn Laws. Feeling against them increased as food prices rose and industrial depression set in from 1836 onwards. From the time that C. P. Villiers received 95 votes for a Commons motion against the Corn Laws in March 1838, they became one of the most live problems Melbourne had to face.

He was prepared to consider the Free Trade arguments on their merits but found them lacking in accuracy or sense. He believed that

> 'foreign manufacturers would have grown up, if our trade in Corn had been free' and felt certain that 'opening our trade now, will not put an end either to their manufactures or their prohibitions ...' 1

It would be hard to say that Melbourne's opinion here was proved wrong by later economic developments. For such reasons Melbourne called the Anti-Corn Law League 'a set of fools'.[2] He never argued openly against the powerful claim that food prices would be lower without the Corn Laws, but pointed out that it was impossible to be certain of the extent to which corn could be grown abroad or of its price.[3] Moreover, he feared the risk of 'a large labouring population, dependent in any considerable degree upon foreign corn' and thought it 'worth some sacrifice to insure a supply within ourselves.'[4] He later quoted the opinion of the American President, Van Buren, in support of this view.[5]

Melbourne's doubts largely arose from a lack of information about Britain's grain imports and their future prospects, something for which he was not entirely to blame. Even in 1842 Peel and Ripon disagreed over the likely price of foreign grain.[6] More fundamental was the ending of grain

1. Melbourne to Ebrington 27 January 1839 Fortescue Ll/7.
2. Melbourne to Hatherton 19 Jan. 1841, Hatherton Papers,
3. Melbourne to Russell 29 December 1838, MP 13/117.
4. ibid.
5. Hansard, liv. 1040-3.
6. Gash, Peel, p. 307

imports from north-western Europe and France and the substitution of Mediterranean, and, eventually, trans-Atlantic, imports; a process which was in an awkward intermediate stage in the later 1830's.[1] Even so, Melbourne can be criticised for overlooking the obvious growth in population and the fact that serious deficiencies in years of bad harvests would become worse and demand some remedy. Since he never referred to the possibility of greatly increased efficiency in British agriculture, he left himself only the choice of further grain imports. In the last analysis, however, Melbourne's defence of the Corn Laws on a theoretical level was part of a wider failure to respond to the possibilities of Free Trade. It was reasonable for him to contend that 'to leave Agriculture entirely unprotected, whilst other interests are defended would be obviously unjust.'[2] But his statement that 'to repeal all duties upon Import is a chimerical notion'[3] misrepresented the case for a further instalment of Free Trade. Important progress towards tariff reform had already been made, as Melbourne, with his admiration for Huskisson, must have appreciated. Within the context of freer trade in general, the ending of protection for agriculture made economic sense. But Melbourne never provided that context.

When the Whigs finally tried to liberalise trade through Baring's budget of 1841, they were also trying to correct an alarming budget deficit. In fact, however, the only way to make up the revenue, at least without an undue delay, was to impose an income tax. Melbourne himself ought to have remembered his words of 1819 about the need of a property tax in an extra-ordinary situation.[4] But such a tax was possible only with undisputed control of the Commons. Melbourne's government was unfortunate enough to face great economic and financial difficulties at the very moment when its majority fell to rock-bottom. The

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1. J. H. Chaloner, 'The Agitation against the Corn Laws', Popular Movements c. 1830-1850 ed. Ward, p. 140.
2. Melbourne to Duke of Hamilton 31 Jan. 1839, MP 27/27, copy.
3. ibid.
4. Hansard, New Series, xl, 213.

Whigs tried to make the 1841 budget do too much and anyway had no real chance of getting it passed. By contrast, Peel in 1842 devised a more comprehensive set of proposals and had a powerful Commons majority at his back to get them through. In personal terms, too, he had the advantage over Melbourne. Peel was taken by surprise at the need to provide new economic and fiscal policies, but, with his trained mind, comparative youth, and ears to the ground in the Commons, he was much more flexible and adaptable than his predecessor.[1]

Whatever his lack of economic vision, Melbourne could still see much objection to the existing Corn Laws and he refused to pledge himself never to alter them.[2] If any change was to be made, he favoured the moderate fixed duty which Thomson recommended.[3] But he could not bring himself to advocate such a change for he feared that it would entail a great political struggle. He was honest enough to admit that 'without excitement nothing is done' but he dreaded agitation over a question which he saw as 'a hateful one - full of bitterness and crimination and abuse and acrimony.'[4] He told Russell that

> 'it will not be settled either one way or the other without a very severe struggle, a struggle which will increase all the evils of the present day by leaving behind it more animosity, discord, and alienation than even prevails at present.' 5

Melbourne hated the thought of 'letting loose upon the Landowners a rabid and ferocious hostility' and utterly refused to do so merely for the sake of political advantages which those like Abercromby expected to accrue from such action.[6] In July 1838 Melbourne said he would not move 'unless a decided opinion was expressed on the subject by a large majority of the people.'[7]

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1. See Gash, Peel, p. 328-9.
2. Hansard, xlv. 27-32 (5 Feb. 1839).
3. Melbourne to Russell 29 Dec. 1838, MP 13/117.
4. Melbourne to Ebrington 27 Jan. 1839, Fortescue L1/7.
5. Melbourne to Russell 29 December 1838, MP 13/117.
6. Melbourne to Ebrington 20 January 1839, Fortescue Papers L1/6.
7. Hansard, xliii. 1174-5 (2 July 1838).

In this matter, above all others, the shadow of 1831-2 lay before him. He made this clear to Russell:

> 'If the feeling and opinion are weak, we shall fail. If strong, we shall still only carry it by the same means as we carried the Reform Bill, and I am not for being the instrument or among the instruments of another similar performance.' 1

In the winter of 1838-9 he thought the outcry not very strong, the work of master manufacturers 'taking advantage of the present dearness of corn, and with the object of lowering wages.'[2] But, by making it a Government measure, 'we shall strengthen it at once to such a degree that we shall be ourselves carried away by it.'[3] Clearly, Melbourne thought it would then be impossible to stop at merely a moderate fixed duty. This explains his much-remarked outburst in the Lords that to leave the whole agricultural interest unprotected would be 'the wildest and maddest scheme that has ever entered into the imagination of man to conceive.'[4]

Melbourne may or may not have estimated correctly the degree of public enthusiasm on the issue late in 1838.[5] It was at least plausible for him to decline to be stampeded and to wait, as he wrote to Russell on 20 January 1839, 'to see what the real feeling is, both in and out of Parliament.'[6] This was, however, at variance with Russell's wishes. The latter had been led to the fixed duty scheme in searching for a popular cause to redeem his 'finality' speech.[7] By January 1839 Russell was quite importunate on the subject. As a result Melbourne sharply informed him: 'I do not care how many people are for a fixed duty' and 'I do not care how open the question is left but I am not prepared to pledge myself to a fixed duty. I hope you will persuade Thomson

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1. Melbourne to Russell 19 January 1839, MP 13/123.
2. Melbourne to Russell 20 January 1839, MP 13/124.
3. ibid.
4. Hansard, xlvi. 608-11 (14 March 1839)
5. See above p.197-9
6. Melbourne to Russell 20 January 1839, MP 13/124.
7. Prest, Russell, p. 141.

and Howick to acquiesce in this.'[1] A three hour Cabinet on 23 January defined the government's position. In 'a very eager debate' Howick and Thomson spoke 'very strongly' for a 10/- fixed duty; the majority favoured this also but thought 'it would be extremely unsafe for the Government to change at this moment.'[2] Melbourne's policy therefore prevailed. His caution seems justified by the subsequent votes in the Commons. On 19 February Villiers motion against the Corn Laws was defeated by 367 - 172, with 97 ministerialists in the majority. A month later Villiers moved for a committee of inquiry, a moderate stance which the government, on Ebrington's recommendation, endorsed.[3] Despite this, the motion was lost by 342 - 195, with 77 ministerialists voting against it. With the Commons firmly in favour of agricultural protection, and his own followers divided, Melbourne might feel that everything which he had written to Russell and Ebrington in December 1838 and January 1839 had been substantiated.

Melbourne maintained his position for the next two years. When the Corn Laws were debated in 1840 he repeated his arguments of the previous year, though carefully reserving his right to change the system if circumstances altered.[4] In 1840 Villiers fared little better than he had in 1839: his motions were defeated by 245 - 129 (3 April) and by 300 - 177 (26 May). There was no move inside the Cabinet for a change of policy until August 1840 when Russell asked Melbourne seriously to reconsider the Corn Law which 'cramps commerce, and currency, and breeds discontent.'[5] Then, somewhat unexpectedly, revision of the Corn Laws became part of Baring's budget proposals in 1841.[6] It is particularly difficult to explain why Melbourne gave way to Russell's demand for a change. It is possible that Melbourne was simply indifferent

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1. Melbourne to Russell 21, 23 Jan. 1839, MP 13/125, 126.
2. Q. V. diary 24 January 1839; II, 104-5.
3. Ebrington to Melbourne 2 February 1839, MP 101/25.
4. Hansard, lii. 1311; liv. 1040-3 (23 March, 11 June 1840).
5. Russell to Melbourne 24 Aug., Broadlands GC/ME/412(2).
6. See above p. 193

about the whole business, calculating on certain defeat for the idea, in the Lords if not the Commons.[1] There is some evidence for such an interpretation in Clarendon's story of Melbourne calling after his colleagues as they left the decisive Cabinet meeting,

> 'is it to make our corn dearer or cheaper, or to make the price steady? I don't care which: but we had better all be in the same story.' [2]

This implies, however, a cynicism in Melbourne's attitudes which is not found elsewhere. It is more probable that he was simply overcome by the sheer weight of party opinion. Large numbers of far from radical Whig peers had come out against the existing Corn Laws.[3] In the Commons, conservative Whigs accepted the proposal in the hope of electoral advantage. Even Melbourne's own brother, now Lord Beauvale, had decided in favour of a moderate fixed duty.[4]

One other explanation for Melbourne's change of mind may be advanced. By 1841 he had had time to reflect upon the nature and implications of Chartism. His conclusions seem to have softened his rigid defence of the Corn Laws. In May 1839 he told the Lords that he perceived a new feature in the feelings of the people: public professions of an intention to plunder, violence and bloodshed.[5] This was a caricature of the Chartists as a whole but Melbourne was clearly worried by their intentions and by their organisation and discipline.[6] By 1841 the Chartist movements were defeated and in disarray but perhaps only temporarily, especially if they could acquire the middle class leadership of the Anti-Corn Law League. Melbourne may have thought such an alliance unlikely but it was not an obvious impossibility. In May 1841 he explained to the Lords that when financial reforms were necessary, 'it appeared impossible to him to leave that, the master grievance untouched.'[7] In August

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1. Fitzwilliam's motion against the Corn Laws in the Lords in June 1840 had been lost by 194 - 42.
2. Clarendon to Russell 22 March 1851, Walpole Life of Russell, I, 369.
3. Newbould, op.cit., p. 379.
4. Beauvale to Melbourne 6 December 1839, MP 106/39.
5. Hansard, xlvii. 1163.
6. See below p.318
7. Hansard, lvii. 1375.

1841 he emphasised

> 'what I have always looked upon as the pinch of the question, namely, that these laws have been introduced and supported by those who have a direct interest in maintaining them. ... I tell you it is not safe for the governing powers of a country to stand in such a situation as to be open to an imputation of so popular, so plausible, and so specious a nature as that which I have described ...'[1]

Whatever his motives, Melbourne's belated conversion to a moderate fixed duty was thought discreditable even by his friends. The unfailingly loyal figure of Hatherton thought that Melbourne would

> 'retire to disadvantage in public opinion, on account of his recantation of his Principles respecting the Corn Laws. Had he even last year, when Office was not at stake, conceded to his Colleagues on the point, and made a fixed Duty a Government measure solely on the score of policy, half the Country would have come round to it by this time; and though he could not have carried it perhaps either then or now, he would now have marched out with his Colors flying, whereas he is now battered by his Opponents and old friends, and accused of desertion of Principle for the sake of Office ...'[2]

Hatherton also thought Melbourne himself was much annoyed and unusually depressed by the new Corn Law proposal.[3] If this was true, it did not disturb Melbourne for long. In August 1841, in reply to a similar charge by Wellington, he simply said that men were always changing their opinions.[4] Out of office, moreover, he was able to look back with satisfaction upon the fact that, as he told Greville,

> 'he had prevented any measure being proposed for above three years, and that if he had done it sooner his Government would have fallen sooner.'[5]

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1. Hansard, lix.69 (24 June, 1841)
2. Hatherton diary 3 May 1841.
3. ibid.
4. Hansard, lix.91-2
5. Greville diary 29 Dec. 1843; V, 222.

Education

Although it aroused less political controversy than the issues so far mentioned, the debate in the 1830's over the need for further popular education was, as always, most revealing of attitudes towards the future shape of society. It was a problem Melbourne first came up against in connection with the informative, widely-read, subversive and illegal unstamped press. It has already been suggested that his policy towards it whilst he was Home Secretary was less severe than has sometimes been thought.[1] It is necessary here to consider the campaign waged against the newspaper stamp duties in the mid-1830's and Melbourne's reaction to it.[2]

Both middle class and working class Radicals wanted an end to the stamp duty on newspapers of 4d. per copy. Their motives were different but, by the time Melbourne returned to power in 1835, they had virtually joined forces. Meetings, petitions, and motions in Parliament resulted. But Spring Rice's budget of 1835 did not include reform of the stamp duties. Holland noted the differences of opinion within the Cabinet. Spring Rice and Howick wanted strict enforcement of the law, mainly for fear of a loss of revenue. Russell and other ministers were against increased powers to enforce the duties, lest such a move provoke a Radical clamour; but they were also against a reduced duty, lest the Tories attack them for not reducing taxes on landowners instead. In the end the Cabinet left the decision to Melbourne, who took no action either way.[3]

Early in 1836 pressure on the government intensified. Meetings became larger and more numerous, especially in London. Delegations to Cabinet ministers became more impressive and more strident.[4] On 11 February, a Radical deputation, including Hume and Place, lobbied Melbourne himself. He told them he had

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1. See above p.104-110
2. I am indebted to P. Hollis, The Pauper Press (1970), chapters i, iii.
3. Holland diary July 1835, Add. Mss. 51,871 ff. 900-2.
4. Hollis, op.cit., 84.

listened to all their arguments, moral, political, statistical, financial, and even personal, and admitted that the duty could not be defended on 'so mean a foundation' as the state of the revenue.[1] Melbourne's conversion helped to tip the balance against the stamp duty, though there is insufficient evidence to show that it was by itself decisive. Spring Rice could anyway hardly ignore the success of the new unstamped broadsheets, which were widely circulated and fairly respectable; or the practical failure of the Stamp Office in its prosecutions; or the weight of opinion against the duties. Spring Rice refused total repeal, which was favoured by Melbourne, Russell, Poulett Thomson and Howick, according to J. S. Mill.[2] The Chancellor proposed instead a stamp duty of 1d and greater powers for the Stamp Office; he also greatly reduced the paper duties. This compromise was reached partly at the behest of publishers of stamped newspapers and cheap books. It was not an unqualified victory for at least the working class radicals.

Rice's proposals passed the Commons in July 1836 with only a few Tories and two Radicals voting against them directly. But the Tories were, in reality, opposed to this apparent assistance to the diffusion of knowledge and they tried to reduce the soap duties instead, a move which was defeated only by 241 - 208.[3] Such opposition was not repeated in the Lords. There, Melbourne emphasised that the bill was intended to deal with the unstamped papers which were so difficult to suppress. But he also said it was intended to facilitate the liberty of the press and the spread of knowledge.[4] Hatherton thought his speech 'capital' and 'very spirited'.[5] Melbourne was thus prepared to take the chance of some subversive ideas for the sake of popular education in general. His attitude was more subtle and more liberal than the entrenched Tory one: Lord Lowther, for instance, declared in 1831 that Mechanics'

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1. ibid.
2. ibid. p. 86.
3. S. Walpole, History of England from 1815 (1900), IV, 78.
4. Hansard, xxxv. 967-71 (8 August 1836).
5. Hatherton diary 8 August.

Institutes and newsrooms were baneful and ruinous to the country because they merely produced over-educated, discontented 'politicians' with radical ideas.[1]

The question of a popular press was succeeded by the larger one of education through an improved system of primary schools. The original government grant of 1833 was both small and largely spent on subsidising Anglican voluntary efforts. From the mid-1830's various pressure groups were created to extend the system and to make more money available for Dissenter schools.[2] In addition, Russell happened to be an ardent educational reformer. In 1838 he held discussions with the grant-aided societies[3] and prepared new schemes.

He did this without any encouragement from his superior. This was not because Melbourne opposed education in general, although some of his remarks have given this impression. He is recorded, for instance, as saying that he did not believe in education 'because the Pagets got on so damned well without it.'[4] On this occasion Melbourne was deliberately flippant; on others he showed a serious approach. For example, in April 1837 he spoke in favour of Radnor's bill to alter the Oxford and Cambridge Statutes for the sake of internal reforms. Melbourne argued that universities never reformed themselves, that the old ones were inferior to Durham and London, that there was now a great demand for liberal knowledge, and that from his own experience, he knew what a graveyard of talents and characters the universities could be.[5] Nor was Melbourne opposed to the idea of education for all. In 1835 he announced his agreement in principle with most of Brougham's far-reaching resolutions on the need for better popular education.[6] He respected the potential abilities of the uneducated. In 1841 he told Hatherton that he believed

> 'there was no more intelligent people in the world than the manufacturing Population in the district comprised between Derby, Nottingham and Leicester.' 7

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1. Lowther to Lord Lonsdale 15 December 1831;
   A. Aspinall, Politics and the Press 1780-1850 (1949), p.12.
2. See Cowherd, Politics of English Dissent, pp. 118-20.
3. The National Society (exclusively Anglican) and the British and Foreign Society (largely Dissenting).
4. Sanders, p. 384.
5. Hansard, xxxvii. 1018-22 (11 April 1837).
6. Hansard, xxvii. 1333; xxix. 71-6.
   Melbourne to S. Rice 19 June 1835, Monteagle Papers 13,381.
7. Hatherton diary 24 March 1841.

Equally, he approved of the principle behind contemporary Mechanics' Institutes and was tempted by the suggestion that they should receive government assistance.[1]

But all of these inclinations were outweighed by his firm belief that a state-aided and directed system of education was wrong. As he candidly told Queen Victoria, 'I daren't say in these times that I'm against it, - but I <u>am</u> against it.' He thought it might do 'pretty well in Germany, but that the English would not submit to that thraldom.' Voluntary education was best and anyway 'people of any great genius were educated by circumstances.'[2] Such views were increasingly anachronistic and too narrowly based upon his own educational experiences. But, in the light of his attitude to the press, they certainly do not suggest that he thought it was even desirable, let alone possible, to keep people ignorant and deferential.

Melbourne was also cool towards Russell's scheme because he distrusted the role of the Dissenters in it. At one stage Russell was thinking of abolishing the grant but Melbourne agreed with Rice that this would never do, even if 'the Dissenters do not get as much of it as they expected and therefore wish that there should be none.'[3] He explained:

> 'I am a little fearful that John Russell has got himself a little entrapped by these crafty Quakers. The Quaker is the subtlest Beast of all the field.' 4

After his experiences with Church rates in 1837, Melbourne's attitude is perhaps understandable. Finally, Melbourne was deeply sceptical of the argument, which attracted much support in the wake of Chartism, that more education would produce a more responsible and less criminal working class.[5]

When, therefore, Russell's new education plans came before the Cabinet on 26 November, 1838 they were accepted in the face of good-natured resistance

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1. Melbourne to Mulgrave 23 April 1836, MP 99/138,copy.
2. Q. V. diary 10 February 1839; II, 117.
3. S. Rice to Melbourne 5 September 1838, MP 10/1.
   Melbourne to Rice 10 Sept., Monteagle Papers 13,390.
4. <u>ibid</u>.
5. Melbourne to Russell 7 February 1839, MP 13/137.
   Q. V. diary 7 April 1839; II, 148.

from Melbourne. Hobhouse recorded a memorable scene:

> 'Lord Melbourne confessed that he was against the thing altogether; on which Howick said "Thank God there are some things which even you cannot stop, and that is one of them." Melbourne only smiled.' [1]

Russell was absent on this occasion so Melbourne informed him of the Cabinet's decision that the education question could not be escaped or deferred. He added, however, with a characteristic combination of prejudice and practicality,

> 'I think education at present stands in England upon a better ground than any new one upon which you will place it. I am convinced that if you attempt a combined system you will fail; but I have no objection to yield my opinion and try.' [2]

He concluded by asking Russell to prepare a bill for the next session of Parliament.

In February, 1839 Russell announced in the Commons an increased grant of £30,000 which would be distributed by a Committee of the Privy Council (in effect a Board of Education). This would enable schools outside the orbit of the two main societies to be assisted. Inspectors were to be appointed for all the grant-aided schools. In addition, a 'normal' school for the instruction of teachers, on a non-denominational basis, was proposed. The new grant was derided by Brougham who contrasted its meagre provision with the £70,000 voted for the Queen's stables in the same year. Far more dangerous, however, was the opposition from Anglican opinion which feared that the Church's hold upon education was to be undermined by the growth of secular principles and Dissenting schools. Petitions flooded in; Stanley attacked the plan violently and eloquently in the Commons; and in June the government only scraped by with majorities of 280 - 275 and 275 - 273.[3] Russell had to abandon his idea of a 'normal' school under the fury of these attacks.

Melbourne cannot have regretted the loss of the normal schools since he had said that they would 'breed the most conceited set of blockheads ever known,

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1. Hobhouse diary 26 November 1838; V, 168.
2. Melbourne to Russell 27 November 1838, MP 13/99.
3. S. Walpole, History of England IV, 185.

and that'll be of no use whatever.'[1] He was, however, aroused to defend the plan in the Lords when it was a matter of curbing the clergy's pretensions to an educational monopoly and asserting the Crown's right to appoint the committee without the need for a bill in Parliament. He therefore denounced the campaign led by Archbishop Howley as 'one of the most idle and unfounded cries that was ever raised.'[2] Somewhat unexpectedly Lansdowne was the principal force behind the plan in the Lords but Melbourne's contribution was not insignificant; even Howick admitted that he spoke well.[3] The Lords passed resolutions against the education plan and presented them to the Queen with a large body of bishops and peers in support. Guided by Melbourne, the Queen found no difficulty in rejecting their address, replying in words supplied by Grey which Melbourne had selected as being sharper than others which had been suggested.[4]

Thanks to such help, the Privy Council Committee survived. The opposition of the Church continued until a partial concordat was reached in July, 1840 by which the archbishops were allowed a veto upon the appointment of all inspectors connected with National Society Schools.[5] Melbourne continued his anti-clerical stand. In December, 1840 he asked Russell about his nominee for a church living:

> 'Is Gore stout and is he a sort of fellow who will say he is for the Government scheme of education in the presence of the Bishop and forty rabid Parsons after a visitation dinner?' 6

He could go no further, however, in his enthusiasm for state-controlled education.

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1. Q. V. diary 10 February 1839; II, 117.
2. Hansard, xlviii. 1255 (5 July 1839).
3. Howick diary 5 July 1839.
4. 'Annual Register' 1839, p. 171.
   Howick diary 10 July 1839.
5. Chadwick, op.cit., p. 340.
6. Melbourne to Russell 28 December 1840, MP 15/22.

Army Reform

As can be seen in his attitude towards the new Education Committee, Melbourne was deeply out of sympathy with the desire for rational,centralised administration which preoccupied many early Victorian reformers. He said of the Benthamites that 'they were all fools,' even though he added that 'a doctrinaire was a fool, but an honest man.'[1] He described John Austin, a leading Benthamite intellectual, as 'a damned fool' whose book on jurisprudence was 'the dullest book he had ever read, and full of truisms elaborately set forth.'[2] Melbourne reacted irritably even to the Benthamites' use of English; to him 'cheap government' was 'a vile Benthamite phrase ... away with it.'[3] It would be a mistake to equate administrative reform and Benthamite ideas too readily[4] but it is hard not to feel that they were closely associated in Melbourne's mind.

His dislike of administrative reform emerges clearly in the prolonged controversy over the reform of the army, even if the main proponents of such reform were not specifically Benthamites. A commission of 1833, headed by the Duke of Richmond and including Russell and S. Rice, recommended the consolidation of 'the many and anomalous bodies' which governed the army, either into one Board or into a new Secretary of State for the war department. Russell urged this upon Melbourne in September, 1834, saying that he was himself pledged to the Commons to reform the existing structure.[5] The advent of Howick as Secretary at War in Melbourne's second government led to more strenuous attempts at reform. Howick was able, ambitious and perenially discontented. He was 'disgusted' with his office - 'it is all details and of the most disagreeable nature.'[6] His responsibilities did, indeed, extend only

1. Greville diary 25 September 1834; III, 141-2.
2. ibid.
3. Melbourne to Brougham 13 October 1835, Brougham Papers 43,538.
4. W. Thomas 'The Philosophic Radicals', in Pressure from Without ed. Hollis, p. 53.
5. Russell to Melbourne, 29 Sept. 1834, MEL/RU/1
6. Howick diary 24 April 1835

to the supervision of the annual army estimates. He felt hemmed in by the overall control of the Secretary of State for Colonies and War; by the independence of the Treasury and the Ordnance in some aspects of army finance; and by the army professionals at the Horseguards, to whom, in theory, he was subordinate. In 1837 Howick obtained a second Commission to investigate the army. This included four Cabinet ministers and came to similar conclusions as the first had done. In particular it recommended that the Secretary at War should be given more power, without which, as Howick saw it, 'he cannot fairly be held responsible to Parliament for the amount of military expenditure.'[1] He was supported by Russell who told Melbourne that reform was 'absolutely necessary' and cited the names of Palmerston, Hobhouse, and Ellice (all former Secretaries at War) in support.[2]

Howick and Russell, for the present, wanted merely to take away the powers of the Colonial Secretary for army affairs and give them to the Secretary at War. This could be done by an Order in Council and would not need an act of Parliament. They also revived earlier calls[3] for the removal of the commander in chief, Lord Hill, and his deputy, Lord Fitzroy Somerset, on the grounds that they were both bigoted Tories. Melbourne's view was that such administrative changes might be right in principle but they would be very unpopular with the army, needed preparation, and should not be made at that time. He objected even more strongly to changes in personnel at the Horseguards, especially as he feared the accusation that he had not dared to make such changes so long as William IV lived.[4] This did not put off Howick for long. In December 1837 he tried to strengthen his case by specific charges of mismanagement (involving excessive mortality rates for soldiers in colonial stations) on the part of the Colonial department and the Commissariat department

1. Howick to Russell 6 July 1837, MP 7/67.
2. Russell to Melbourne 7 July 1837, MEL/RU/32.
3. Melbourne to Howick 18 May 1835, Grey Papers.
4. Melbourne to Russell 7 July 1837, MEL/RU/366.
   Melbourne to Howick 15 July 1837, Grey Papers.

of the Treasury.[1] Melbourne admitted Howick had a good case but feared the resignation of 'all those who are now at the head of the army departments' and, also, the immensely weighty opposition of the Duke of Wellington.[2] Howick still pressed for the transference of the Commissariat to the Ordnance Board and for his own office to be endowed with the Colonial Secretary's army powers, and for a public commitment to the eventual implementation of all of the 1837 Report.[3] Melbourne replied that such measures 'are of very great consequence, much greater than they appear to be' and wrote to Russell disarmingly, 'I do not much like it, but do not pronounce decisively against it.'[4]

One of Melbourne's main difficulties was the solid opposition of the army chiefs to any increase in the powers of the Secretary at War. If the generals at the Horseguards resigned, satisfactory replacements would hardly be forthcoming, or if they were, they would have no authority with the army. As he told Howick on 8 January 1838, it was essential to have a contented army 'in the present difficult times.'[5] The emergence of Chartism strengthened such considerations. The generals were anyway in a strong position because Army reform was seen by many as a Radical demand, and a peculiarly disagreeable one at that. They could therefore count on the automatic support of the Tories and on the secret sympathy of many Whigs. Nonetheless, under pressure from Russell, Melbourne finally agreed to the creation of a fourth Secretary of State.[6] Howick was not gratified by this solution but he accepted it.[7] Then, however, Melbourne discovered from the party's representatives, including 'Ben' Stanley and Duncannon, that no one in the Commons wanted such legislation at that time.[8]

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1. Howick to Melbourne 15 December, MP 7/74.
2. Melbourne to Howick 16, 25 December, Grey Papers.
3. Howick to Melbourne 26 December, MP 7/75.
4. Melbourne to Howick 28 December 1837, Grey Papers.
   Melbourne to Russell 29 December 1837, MEL/RU/431.
5. Melbourne to Howick 8 January 1838, MP 7/81, copy.
6. Melbourne to Howick 15 Jan. 1838, MP 7/84, copy.
   Melbourne to Russell 17 Jan. 1838, MEL/RU/435.
7. ibid.
   Russell to Melbourne 22 Jan. 1838, MEL/RU/49.
   Howick to Melbourne 18, 28 Jan. 1838, MP 7/85, 8/1.
8. Melbourne to Russell 29, 30 Jan, MEL/RU/440, 441.

1. Howick to Melbourne 4 August, MP 8/9.
   Q. V. diary 20 August; I, 387.
2. Howick to Melbourne 10 January 1839, MP 8/14.
3. Melbourne to Rice 24 January 1839, Monteagle 13,392.
4. Melbourne to Howick 26, 28 January 1839, Grey Papers.
5. Howick diary 31 January 1839.
   Rice to Melbourne 21 February 1839, MP 10/17-18.
6. Howick diary 9 February.
   Melbourne to Queen Victoria 10 Feb. 1839; Letters of Queen Victoria, I. 147.
7. Howick to Melbourne 26 August 1839, MP 8/47.
8. Howick to Melbourne 18 January 1838, MP 7/85.
9. Russell to Grey 26 January 1847; Prest, Russell, p. 122.

Nothing therefore was done. Howick continued to cite individual cases of maladministration whilst Melbourne worried about Howick's gift for indiscretion in the Commons.[1]

A fresh row broke out in January 1839 when Howick accused the Treasury of trenching upon his financial preserves in issuing certain allowances.[2] Melbourne was not pleased by this further stage in what he dubbed 'the Howickian controversy'.[3] After consulting Palmerston's experience, he decided that the Treasury had been right in principle but, as a matter of expediency, ought to have consulted Howick. He ended with an appeal to the latter: 'you must not drive us to the wall.'[4] Howick, nearly resigned but, instead, he devised a new plan for the War Office to audit its own accounts, which was strongly denounced by Rice as Chancellor.[5] There was a very stormy Cabinet on 9 February as a result. Melbourne blamed Howick for bringing up the larger question of army reform and for his attack on Rice.[6] Howick therefore lost all the battles he had fought. The disputes over the army figured prominently in his reasons for resignation from the government in August, 1839.[7]

It is difficult to say whether army reform would have had the dire consequences which Melbourne feared. From the perspective of the Crimean War, failure to introduce reforms seemed a far greater disaster. Melbourne was much to blame here, for, as Howick argued, he was the person with a decisive voice.[8] But, in turn, he was swayed by the absence of a strong opinion in the Commons or the country at large, and by Wellington's view that administrative reform would destroy the army.[9]

Conclusions

It is clear that Melbourne did not like change, especially after his experiences in 1830-32. He was therefore a reluctant reformer of the society in which he lived. He hoped that the wearisome process of improvement would at least slow down. In September 1838 he told Howick:

> 'I should think the period was now arrived when we need not bring forward such a multitude of measures as we have lately been in the habit of doing.' 1

Moreover, his vision included no measures for the direct benefit of the poorer groups of society. Whilst he was Home Secretary his department was involved in the preparation of the 1833 Factory Act. Torrens, himself a later Radical MP, credited Melbourne personally with the achievements of the Act.[2] But its deficiencies were striking even at the time, and Melbourne's responsibility for its more progressive aspects is hard to establish. Torrens' view is not easily reconciled with what Queen Victoria recorded of Melbourne's attitudes. Melbourne told her that

> 'all Government has to do "is to prevent and punish crime, and to preserve contracts." He is FOR labour and does not think the factory children are too much worked.' 3

Within these limits, however, it is possible to see Melbourne as a genuine, if reticent liberal. If there had to be reforms he certainly felt that he had a better claim than Peel to bring them about. For Melbourne, Peel's liberal conservatism was the offering of a mere showman. After Peel's famous statement of Conservative principles in his Glasgow speech of January 1837,[4] Melbourne contemptuously referred to 'that great booth which sprang up so suddenly in Glasgow to the great astonishment of everybody'.[5] These powerful, if misplaced feelings greatly facilitated his adoption of a reform programme. Moreover, whether he realised it or not, he was one of the few

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1. Melbourne to Howick 15 September 1838, Grey Papers.
2. Torrens p. 271.
3. Q. V. diary 7 April 1839; II, 148.
4. Gash, Peel, pp. 154-5.
5. Hansard, xxxix. 273 (November 1837).

politicians with the necessary qualifications to implement such a programme: he was in power, and was close enough to the Radicals to be acceptable to them but close enough to the centre to moderate and control them. It is not enough to state, as Ziegler does,[1] that all the reforms of Melbourne's government had been initiated under Grey: putting them into effect was a very different matter.

The scope and quality of those reforms are a matter for debate. Ziegler, however, unduly depreciates them.[2] It has been well observed that the achievements of the Whigs after 1832 were not far above the minimum acceptable to the country but that they were also about the maximum which the House of Lords, and even the Commons would stand.[3] This is an opinion which was shared by some of the more discerning and realistic Radicals by the late 1830's. Edward Lytton Bulwer argued that 'no liberal politician ... can honestly contend that there is no distinction, except that of office, between Whigs and Tories.' It was necessary that there should be 'a certain practical compromise of theory and action.' As he pointed out, it was impossible for Melbourne to 'govern England on the principles of Sir William Molesworth' and 'if Sir William Molesworth succeed to Lord Melbourne, there would be a million Molesworths to condemn him for not going far enough.'[4] Even John Wade, publisher since 1820 of the 'Extraordinary Black Book', modified his view of the Whigs who, he thought, deserved 'national gratitude and confidence'[5] by 1840. If such tributes are justified, Melbourne deserves a share in them.

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1. Ziegler, Melbourne, p. 202.
2. ibid., pp. 202, 217, 363.
3. Southgate, The Passing of the Whigs, p. 64.
4. 'Edinburgh Review', 70 (1839) pp. 258, 260, 264.
5. J. Wade, Glances at the Times (1840), p. 30.

Chapter Six

Melbourne's Cabinet

'It is not the House of Lords ... there's some fun in that ... it's those internal dissensions that vex me.' Melbourne to Queen Victoria; Q.V. diary, 24 August 1839, II. 240.

The selection and control of his ministers were obviously two of Melbourne's fundamental duties as prime minister. There is not space here to consider his relations with all of his Cabinet colleagues; a representative selection has therefore been made. The most notable casualties of this procedure are Melbourne's Chancellors of the Exchequer. He was not altogether negligent of his responsibilities as First Lord of the Treasury: for instance, he actively concerned himself with the various banking crises which occurred in the later 1830's. But he did not know enough to go very deep into economic and financial matters with either Spring Rice or Baring. His correspondence with them will therefore not be examined here.

In the first place, Holland and Glenelg may be taken as outstanding examples of ineffective ministers who nonetheless had sufficient claim upon Melbourne to retain their places.

Holland's disadvantages were considerable. He was not a clever man, as Melbourne admitted,[1] and his lack of business-like qualities and robust health debarred him from anything more than the nominal duties of Chancellor of the Duch of Lancaster. His formidable wife also made him a liability. Melbourne found her 'fatiguing'[2] and once commented to Russell:

> '... Lady Holland is out of town which greatly promotes peace of mind. I must do her the justice to say that since the Commencement of the administration, nothing has been done, with which she has not found fault nor upon which he (sic) has not given trouble.' 3

On the other hand, Holland's warm personal qualities made him, as Hatherton put it, 'beloved beyond any man I knew.'[4] Melbourne too acknowledged the attraction of Holland's character.[5] Moreover, Holland was the living embodiment of the still powerful Foxite tradition. During the Syrian crisis

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1. Howick diary 23 April 1835.
2. ibid.
3. 8 August 1837, MBL/RU/389.
4. Hatherton diary 16 November 1840.
5. Melbourne to Lady Holland 26 December 1840, Add. Mss. 51,560 ff. 82-3.

of 1840, this inheritance led him to adopt a defiantly Francophile posture which plagued Melbourne, especially when Holland gave away Cabinet discussions to the French. Even then, Holland could not easily have been cashiered when so many Whigs in both Commons and Lords looked back with respect and admiration to the days of his uncle. Melbourne himself was susceptible to such feelings as he made plain by his frequent visits to Holland House, the political and social 'salon' of the Whigs.

Glenelg stood out amongst Melbourne's colleagues by virtue of his intellect and successful academic career. He was recognised as a gifted and estimable man, and an excellent Parliamentary speaker, if he chose.[1] But he was notorious for incompetence as a minister. Hobhouse believed his inefficiency was the result of an over-scrupulous and fastidious approach to business but it was more usually ascribed to idleness.[2] Glenelg certainly had acquired this undesirable reputation before he was made Colonial Secretary in April 1835,[3] so that, in making this appointment, Melbourne was swayed by memories of their friendship as Canningites in the 1820's. He later admitted to Lady Howick that 'he had always felt that Ld. G[lenelg] was the weak point in his Gov[ernmen]t.'[4] In fact, Glenelg did not even do very much to assist Melbourne as a debater in the Lords, perhaps because, as the prime minister discovered, he got up at 5.00 a.m. which made him 'sluggish and sleepy at five in the evening.'[5] But it was Glenelg's mishandling of important colonial questions, notably Canadian ones, which led to irresistible demands for his replacement by February, 1839. Melbourne then managed to have the worst of both worlds by asking for Glenelg's resignation in a most abrupt and maladroit manner.[6] As late as March 1841, Glenelg was still sore at his treatment and Melbourne still

1. Holland diary n.d. [1839], Add. Mss 51,872 ff. 1093-4.
   Hobhouse diary 5 February 1839; V, 176.
2. ibid.
3. Ellice to Melbourne 26 March [1835], MP 5/6.
4. Howick diary 28 December 1837.
5. Melbourne to Palmerston 25 Aug 1839, GC/ME/303.
6. Melbourne to Glenelg 3 February 1839, MP 5/77.
   Hatherton diary 5, 9 February 1839.

trying to conciliate him.[1] Whatever Glenelg's shortcomings, Melbourne's careless acceptance of them for nearly four years, followed by his sudden dismissal of his old associate, show him at his worst as prime minister.

Unlike Glenelg, Lansdowne did not in any way owe his seat in the Cabinet to Melbourne personally.[2] Heir to the Shelburne tradition and the most distinguished representative of the more conservative Whigs, Lansdowne was quite simply indispensable; as indeed he had been to all Whig governments, actual or prospective, since 1806. He had, however, no outstanding talents and was rather indolent;[3] as Guizot perceived in 1840, Lansdowne 'sought to be honoured and esteemed, rather than to act and rule.'[4] His liberal political feelings were also distinctly circumscribed: in March 1831 he had wanted to give up the Reform Bill at the first sign of real opposition; and at least one experienced parliamentary observer was surprised that he had not resigned with Stanley in May 1834.[5]

Accordingly, Melbourne had to manage Lansdowne as well as he could. This meant consulting him before any colleague except Russell and carrying him over patches of rough ground. Two incidents from 1834 indicate how little Lansdowne's heart was in Melbourne's government. In September Lansdowne was aroused by the accidental omission of two of his 'protégés' from the Irish Poor Law Commission. For technical reasons it was extremely difficult to remedy the oversight and Melbourne asked Lansdowne to 'try whether you cannot manage the matter with these gentlemen.'[6] Lansdowne took offence and declared that, being weary of office, he wished to resign. It took some strong words

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1. Hatherton diary 25 March 1841.
2. The Lansdowne Papers have not been made available to me.
3. Greville diary 15 May 1835,
   Hatherton diary 8 August 1835.
4. F. Guizot, An Embassy to the Court of St. James (1840), p. 133
5. Brock, EHR, p.184,
   J. Grant, Random Recollections of the House of Lords (1836), p. 250.
6. Melbourne to Lansdowne, 10 Sept.; Torrens p. 300.

from Melbourne to dissuade him:

> 'for God's sake consider that you are embarked, and that it is not an indifferent matter upon what occasion and in what manner you retire.' 1

Lansdowne also made difficulties when Melbourne proposed Russell as Leader of the Commons in November 1834. According to Holland, Lansdowne thought that Russell's nomination would shut the door on Stanley and in an interview with Melbourne gave the latter cause to complain of his coldness and reserve.[2]

Thereafter Lansdowne seems to have exercised a generally dampening influence upon Melbourne's government. He was noticeably indifferent to forming a government in 1835 or to continuing it after the 1837 election.[3] Concessions over minor matters, however, appeased him. For instance, when a successor to Normanby in Ireland had to be found, Lansdowne successfully voiced his disapproval of the radical Lord Radnor and his wife (of the latter apparently on personal grounds).[4]

Mulgrave (from 1838 Marquess of Normanby) was deliberately elevated by Melbourne to his first Cabinet, and then to the Lord Lieutenancy of Ireland in 1835. In many ways this proved an inspired choice: Mulgrave was invaluable in implementing the government's liberal Irish policy. The Lord-Lieutenant's character, however, was less than perfect and led him to advance exaggerated claims on behalf of his office and himself. Hatherton thought Mulgrave 'a very vain silly person, devoid of judgment'[5] whilst Brougham dismissed him as 'foolish'.[6] In 1838 Mulgrave certainly pressed his claims to a marquisate and to the Lord-Lieutenancy of Yorkshire in a way which substantiated such opinions.[7]

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1. Melbourne to Lansdowne 12 Sept; ibid.
2. Holland diary 12 Nov., Add. Mss. 51,870 f. 774.
3. See above p.173
4. Lansdowne to Melbourne n.d. [February 1839], Panshanger 17. Melbourne to Russell 10, 11 February 1839, MP 13/141, 142.
5. Hatherton diary 6 July 1838.
6. Q. V. diary 22 March 1838; II, 136.
7. Mulgrave to Melbourne 20 April, 19 July, MP 100/34, 83.

Melbourne liked Mulgrave[1] and indulged his vanities but not when they might have political repercussions. In May 1835 Melbourne had to warn the Lord Lieutenant that in distributing minor offices at Dublin he was encroaching on the rights of Morpeth as Irish Secretary.[2] With memories of Stanley and Anglesey, and Littleton and Wellesley, still painfully fresh in his mind, Melbourne was anxious for good relations between Lord-Lieutenant and Secretary.[3] In January 1837 Mulgrave wanted retaliatory measures against office-holders who had attended a great Protestant meeting in Dublin at which his government had been denounced. It took several letters from Melbourne, who was supported by the rest of the Cabinet, to restrain Mulgrave and partially soothe his feelings.[4] Even so, Melbourne told Russell, 'I am afraid he is much hurt and mortified.'[5] After a comparable incident in October 1838, Melbourne had to write to Normanby (as he now was),

> 'I believe you will think that you have done nothing, if you come away from Ireland without having removed a Lord Lieutenant. ... Pray take hellebore and purge your mind of that propensity to dismissal ... which is always a most foolish measure.' 6

Nor did Melbourne like 'those pardons of Mulgraves or his progresses' which he thought 'too like the acts of an absolute sovereign and not in the character of a Constitutional Government.'[7] He did not, however, stop Mulgrave's conspicuous exercise of the prerogative of mercy. As a result the Tories, on this occasion under Lord Roden, had plenty of ammunition for their wholesale attack, via a Lords' Committee, on the Irish Government in 1839. Melbourne might well reflect to Hatherton, during the Committee's proceedings, that it had been a case of 'intoxication' from the moment Mulgrave had received his

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1. Melbourne to Grey 26 July 1834, Grey Papers.
2. 19 May, Mulgrave MM/14.
3. Melbourne to Mulgrave 23 May 1835, Mulgrave MM/16.
4. Melbourne to Mulgrave 30 January, 1, 4, 7 February, Mulgrave MM/138, 141, 144, 145.
5. 5 February, MEL/RU/304.
6. 29 October, Mulgrave MM/200.
7. Melbourne to Russell 3 February 1837, MEL/RU/303.

appointment.[1]

When he returned to England in 1839 as Colonial Secretary, his deficiencies continued to trouble Melbourne. The latter confided to the Queen that

> 'it's very easy for a man to be Lord Lieutenant of Ireland ... but when you bring a man over to be Secretary of State, you see what he is. Normanby is a very clever man ... but he has no public ability, no power; very fluent, but not impressive.'2

Russell had even greater misgivings than Melbourne and insisted that Normanby and himself swop offices. He pointedly argued to Melbourne that

> 'the Home Office is always more immediately under your control, and nothing can be done there without your consent.' 3

After the exchange had been effected (on 18 August) Melbourne signalled his agreement with Russell's diagnosis by writing to Lansdowne:

> 'Normanby will have a difficult task ... but we must keep him up and assist him to the best of our power.' 4

Characteristically, even as he left the Colonial Office, Normanby contrived to quarrel with Poulett Thomson (Durham's successor in Canada) and Melbourne was busy keeping the combatants apart until Russell took over.[5]

Until circumstances threw them together in July 1834, Melbourne and Russell had been politically a fair distance apart. Russell had always been a Whig through and through, while Melbourne had been extremely fickle in the cause. Russell had been a parliamentary reformer by conviction long before Melbourne became one out of necessity. Differences in age and temperament made matters worse.[6] The contrast between the two men is nicely brought out by Melbourne's statement to Palmerston in August 1834:

> 'Johnny can be quiet about nothing and will give us a great deal of trouble. He is in my opinion essentially and in fact worse than Durham.'7

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1. Hatherton diary 29 April 1839.
2. Q. V. diary 14 August 1839; II, 233.
3. Russell to Melbourne 19 July; Walpole, Life of Russell, I. 335-6.
4. 19 August, Torrens p. 488.
5. Normanby to Melbourne 13 August, MP 10/62.
   Melbourne to Russell 13 August, MP 14/55.
6. See Prest, Russell, pp. 73-8.
7. Melbourne to Palmerston 28 August GC/ME/18.

Melbourne was, however, generous enough to recognise Russell's qualities: the sincerity of his liberalism, his capacity for hard work, and the effectiveness of his Commons speeches. Accordingly, on Althorp's removal in November 1834, Melbourne had little doubt that Russell was the right person to lead the party in the Commons.[1] His decision is especially interesting because it meant passing over the considerable claims of Palmerston, to whom Melbourne was much closer, both politically and personally, than he was to Russell. Ostensibly, Palmerston was unconcerned about the Leadership but a letter to his brother shows him more than willing to accept the post if it were offered to him;[2] and his behaviour at Melbourne's final Cabinet can be interpreted as discreetly signifying disappointment and disapproval at the choice of Russell.[3]

Melbourne finally acknowledged Russell's importance in February 1835 when he bowed to the latter's insistence on the appropriation of Irish Church revenues, as described in chapter three. Russell's enhanced position was made clear at the first Cabinet of Melbourne's second government. Holland noticed how he asserted himself, for example, by pressing for more rapid progress on the Municipal Corporations bill than it had hitherto enjoyed.[4] In this way there was set a pattern which characterised their relationship for the rest of the decade. Russell animated Melbourne's usually rather passive liberalism and also supplied the detailed hard work on legislation which Melbourne, by temperament and by his isolation in the Lords, could not provide.

There is not room here to give more than a few examples of Russell's unique authority in the Cabinets of the later 1830's. On 7 May 1837 the Cabinet discussed how they should react to the postponement of the Irish Corporations bill by the Lords but it was left to Russell 'to decide what it might be necessary to say tomorrow according to circumstances', as Howick recorded.[5]

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1. Holland diary 10 November, Add. Mss. 51,870 ff. 768-9.
2. Palmerston to W. Temple 16 Nov. 1834; Bulwer Life of Palmerston, II, 208.
3. Torrens p. 315.
4. Holland diary 20 April, Add. Mss. 51,870 f. 814.
5. Howick diary 7 May.

Before the new parliament met in late 1837, Melbourne told Russell,

> 'with respect to the measures to be brought forward, you must know so much more of the probable temper of the House of Commons than I can, that I should be inclined to defer entirely to your opinion in this respect.' 1

When Russell unilaterally reversed the Cabinet's decision over Fleetwood's motion in June 1839,[2] Melbourne quoted to the Queen without disapproval Russell's claim that 'a leader must sometimes act for himself.'[3]

In spite of Melbourne's objections to some of Russell's cherished schemes for reform, notably over education and the Corn Laws, the two men agreed well enough about the main lines of policy. Russell might seem more of a Reformer than Melbourne, but the latter told Anson in 1841 that Russell had been 'far more of a "finality" man than he had, and in the Cabinet had always been averse to violent change.'[4] It was Melbourne who proved the more flexible over ballot in the end. He told Russell:

> 'I do not see in so strong a light as you do the objection to open voting [in the Cabinet] upon questions which do not immediately affect the administrative course and action of the Government.' 5

Melbourne was, indeed, quite as worried by Russell's lack of judgment in practical matters as he was by the latter's reforming ideas. Sometimes the result was merely a minor incident. In March 1839 the City authorities felt outraged at a bill extending into their preserve the powers of the Metropolitan Police. Melbourne commented to the Queen,

> 'rather dangerous to stir ... it shouldn't have been done without some previous arrangement with them; this is John Russell's doing.' 6

Sometimes Russell caused more serious trouble by what Melbourne would have seen as ill-considered actions. On 8 February 1837, Melbourne wrote to Russell:

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1. 4 September, NML/RU/395.
2. See above p.288
3. Q. V. diary 5 June; II, 200.
4. Anson memorandum 7 August; Letters of Queen Victoria, I. 296-7.
5. Melbourne to Russell 11 June 1839, MP 14/37.
6. Q. V. diary 20 March; II, 132.
   See Ellice to Melbourne [20 April 1839] MP 5/24.

'I hope you have said nothing damned foolish. I thought you were rather teeming with some imprudence yesterday.' 1

This showed some insight on Melbourne's part. Russell had the previous night made a passionate speech in the Commons during which he had staked the existence of the government on the passing of the Irish Corporations bill - without Cabinet authorisation for such a stand. Worst of all, Russell's over-sensitive conscience nearly brought the government to a premature end in the autumn of 1838. He felt that after his strong declaration against ballot at the end of 1837, he could not continue to lead a party whose majority now favoured ballot. Melbourne had great difficulty in persuading Russell not to resign precipitately but in the end brought him round.[2]

The one period when Melbourne directly interfered with Russell's office was during the Chartist emergency of 1838-9. Basically Russell showed great good sense and tolerance as Home Secretary in dealing with the Chartists.[3] He was apt, however, to be careless about details, and, occasionally, to be over-zealous in proposing counter-measures. It was at these points that Melbourne stepped in.

On 23 November 1838 Melbourne asked Russell to obtain accurate reports of the speeches of Stephens and Oastler, although when Russell proposed action against such leaders Melbourne was sceptical of success and did not encourage him.[4] On 19 March 1839 Melbourne advised Russell to alert magistrates and mayors in areas where Chartists were allegedly arming but 'without writing a public letter or a circular.'[5] Following General Napier's advice, Russell then wanted to call out the Yeomanry in some of the northern counties but Melbourne told him, in effect, that this was overstepping the mark.[6] As ever Melbourne was against the issue of arms and also opposed to Russell's idea for

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1. MEL/RU/305.
2. Q. V. diary 13, 15 September; II, 17-18, 20.
   Tavistock to Melbourne 7 November, MP 19/85.
3. F. C. Mather, Public Order in the age of the Chartists p. 40.
4. MP 13/97.
   Melbourne to Russell 1 Dec., MP 13/102.
5. Melbourne to Russell, MP 14/4.
6. Russell to Melbourne 30 April, MEL/RU/84.
   Melbourne to Russell 30 April, MP 14/17.

a seizure of Arms bill (in the aftermath of the Birmingham riots).[1] Russell dropped the latter proposal but at the same time warned the Cabinet that

> 'if disturbances took place during the holidays he should propose to call Parliament together and resign the seals.' 2

Yet when the local magistrates seemed supine, Melbourne had to write to Russell on 17 July, 'you will of course have this affair at Birmingham closely looked into.'[3]

It would appear that Melbourne found Russell's handling of the Chartists somewhat erratic and unreliable. It is true that Normanby as Home Secretary was also guided by Melbourne in Chartist affairs[4] but the evidence given above perhaps shows that Russell needed Melbourne's experience and self-assurance at this difficult moment.

With this one exception, it is clear that Russell was moving into the ascendancy before the government's final resignation. Spencer Walpole argued that after Russell had successfully insisted on Glenelg's removal in February 1839, he was virtually prime minister.[5] It seems more accurate, however, to date Russell's supremacy from Melbourne's defeats over the 1841 budget and the subsequent dissolution. This is because they involved issues over which Melbourne felt strongly, and, in the case of the Corn Laws, had fought hard for several years. Moreover, as late as the Syrian crisis of 1840 Russell was not having things all his own way.[6]

Perhaps the precise degree of power which either man enjoyed cannot be evaluated. But the essential feature of their partnership was that, taken all round, it was a success. Even their personal relations warmed up as they worked together. When Russell defended Durham much more wholeheartedly in the Commons than Melbourne had done in the Lords, the latter set aside his

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1. Melbourne to Russell 2 July 1839, MP 14/42.
2. Hobhouse diary 6 July; V, 213.
3. MP 14/48.
4. 20 December 1839, Mulgrave MM/251.
   Mather, op.cit., p. 42.
5. Walpole, Life of Russell, I. 314.
6. See below pp. 343-7.

dislike of the Radical Earl and simply wrote to Russell: 'your speech was excellent'.[1] For his part, Russell wrote of Melbourne in October 1842,

> 'his nature is so kind, so high, so noble, so open, that it is impossible to have lived in intimacy with him without loving him.' 2

On the political level, each contributed to the government in a way which the other could not. Without Russell, Melbourne's administration would have been spiritless and mediocre; without Melbourne to restrain Russell's 'imprudence', Russell's gifts would have been wasted. In the long run, as circumstances changed, the Liberal alliance could do without Melbourne, but, in a curious way, Russell himself perhaps could not. When left to himself after 1842, he was never quite as successful as he had been during his duumvirate with Melbourne.[3]

The best documented and arguably the most interesting of Melbourne's relationships was the one with Palmerston. Melbourne's response to the most intractable of his colleagues will therefore be examined at length. Even so it is not intended to give a detailed account of British foreign policy from 1834 to 1841; this has been provided by Sir Charles Webster.[4]

Melbourne's fellow Whigs were inclined to believe that he exercised no control at all over Palmerston at the Foreign Office.[5] Some drew a contrast between his failure and Grey's supposed success in the same field.[6] Webster presents a much more objective picture.[7] He argues that Grey did not really control foreign policy, that 'Melbourne's pithy little notes probably had some effect on the official despatches', and that Melbourne occasionally

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1. 15 August 1838, MP 13/59.
2. Russell to Lady Holland 31 October 1842; Later Russell Correspondence ed. G. P. Gooch (1925), I. 25.
3. See Prest, Russell, pp. xv-xvi.
4. The Foreign Policy of Palmerston, 1830-1841 (1951).
5. Fox Maule to Russell 22 December 1845; Later Russell Correspondence, I. 97.
6. Russell to Melbourne 19 Nov. 1840; Walpole Life of Russell, I. 363. Creevey to Miss Ord 11 August 1834, Creevey Papers ed. Sir H. Maxwell (1905), pp. 628-9.
7. op.cit., pp. 33-4, 36.

intervened decisively on Palmerston's side. He also notes, but in no way emphasises, some of the occasions when Melbourne did not let his Foreign Secretary have everything his own way. It was almost inevitable, however, in the circumstances of a semi-biographical work, that Webster should exaggerate Palmerston's role and diminish that of the prime minister. There can be no pretence that a like difficulty does not arise with the present study of Melbourne; but it is still worthwhile to draw out the latter's significance in foreign affairs.

In dealing with Palmerston, Melbourne had very few advantages apart from the vital one of being prime minister. In strength of character Palmerston yielded nothing to Melbourne and in Melbourne's sister, Emily, he had an uncritical admirer and ally. His administrative expertise and his competence in the Commons made Palmerston indispensable to the government: Melbourne was forced to recognise this in April 1835 when Palmerston successfully threatened not to enter the government at all unless he was given the Foreign Office.[1] In practical terms Palmerston held all the cards. He had a command of languages, was a master of diplomatic detail, and was prepared to spend endless time on foreign affairs. Melbourne could not even pretend to rival him in these ways.

If, within these limitations, Melbourne sought to intervene in foreign policy, what was his underlying approach? Webster characterises him as 'far less enterprising' than Palmerston, and generally cautious and conservative.[2] It is certainly true that on the whole Melbourne favoured doing very little in foreign affairs. He did not share Palmerston's enthusiasm for the cause of European liberalism. He was not sure that it worked to England's advantage. He wrote to Palmerston on 11 February 1838:

> 'all these Chambers and free Presses in other countries are very fine things, but depend upon it, they are full as hostile to England as the old Governments... 3

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1. See above p. 169
2. op.cit., p. 350, 36.
3. GC/ME/188.

He also thought Palmerston exaggerated liberalism's inherent merits. When the Foreign Secretary pontificated about liberal institutions to the King of Naples in 1840, Melbourne objected to his view that arbitrary governments were lawless, observing that 'there are many laws in Russia and in Turkey, which the sovereigns of those countries, despotic as they are, could not venture to alter.'[1] He also denied the assertion 'that where there are no popular institutions there can be no public opinion.'[2] Finally, he produced the realistic argument: '... that we have a right to some reciprocity of liberality may be true, but is not likely to have much effect.'[3]

Webster tends, however, to discount the extent to which Melbourne was in basic agreement with much of Palmerston's policy. He had some concern for national prestige, as he showed in his attitude to British involvement in Spain. He was always very wary of France and in the last resort prepared to confront her openly, as he did in October 1840. He shared Palmerston's belief in the need to prop up Turkey, as again he demonstrated in the 1840 Syrian crisis. Finally, he saw in Russia a threat to British interests in India and the eastern Mediterranean. Melbourne's contribution to foreign policy lay, therefore, in his ability to soften Palmerston's language and tone in dealing with foreign powers, to eliminate Palmerston's wilder ideas for action, and, sometimes, to sustain their policy against opposition from inside the Cabinet.

In the first place, Melbourne checked nearly all of Palmerston's more important despatches. Two examples will be given here since they arise out of incidents not directly connected with the topics discussed below.

In the summer of 1834 Palmerston snubbed some vague, not to say devious overtures from Metternich for joint action in defence of Turkey. Webster sees Palmerston as thus 'paying back old scores on Metternich' and showing

1. 4 February, GC/ME/347.
2. ibid.
3. ibid.

a determination 'to keep London and not Vienna as the centre of negotiation.'[1] Melbourne gradually decided this attitude was wrong and on 29 September told Palmerston that his latest draft to Vienna was in part 'superfluous, if not inexpedient.'[2] On 3 October he wrote to Palmerston that

> 'Jesuitical as Metternich's despatch is ... I do not see that we could be considered as admitting any part of it, if we ... [asked] an explanation of what it really did mean ...';

and, further, Palmerston should tell Metternich that he shared his opinion

> 'of the importance of preserving the Independence and integrity of the Ottoman Empire'. 3

The upshot was that Palmerston replied politely to Metternich, offering to consider any proposals he might make.[4] Where Metternich's overtures were concerned, Melbourne had indeed "sniffed a rat", but had insisted on a reply which prudently concealed this. He felt that such a response was justified by the closeness of British and Austrian interests in the Eastern question, a fact which Palmerston in his more objective moods would not have disputed.

In 1836 Cracow was occupied by the three East European powers in disregard of the Treaty of Vienna. Palmerston immediately drew up a strong Note of protest. Melbourne, however, doubted whether it was

> 'prudent or dignified to proceed in so very formal and precise a manner in a matter which you are neither able nor prepared to push to extremities.' 5

Palmerston complained but agreed to change the Note into a despatch to be communicated (and thus probably softened) by their ambassadors.[6] Melbourne agreed with him that it was right to protest[7] but was forced to point out the realities of power on the continent, something which Palmerston was disinclined to face as late as the invasion of Schleswig-Holstein in 1864.

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1. Webster, op.cit., pp. 343-4, 346.
2. GC/ME/21.
3. GC/ME/22.
4. Webster, op.cit., p. 345.
5. Melbourne to Palmerston 8 April, GC/ME/92.
6. Palmerston to Melbourne 10 April, MP 11/37.
7. Melbourne to Palmerston 12 April, GC/ME/93.

Despatches might be altered but it was not so easy where existing, firm British policies were concerned. In particular, Melbourne found himself committed to some sort of interference in the Iberian peninsular. He had been amongst the strong minority of Grey's cabinet which had prevented outright intervention in January 1834 on behalf of Dom Pedro's and Donna Maria's claims to Portugal.[1] Palmerston had, however, secured an alliance with France, Spain, and Portugal (as represented by Donna Maria) in April 1834. By this treaty the Spanish government under the Queen Regent actively helped to expel the Portuguese pretender, Dom Miguel, and his ally, Don Carlos, who was the pretender to the Spanish throne. For Palmerston the defeat of the Miguelites was a triumph for the liberal cause. His cabinet opponents, on the other hand, believed that Dom Pedro would have won without British help and did not see him as especially liberal.[2]

Once Queen Donna Maria was installed, Portugal ceased to be an issue in the British cabinet. Then in September 1836, the Portuguese Queen was forced by an internal revolution to grant a more liberal constitution. The British ambassador and Admiral Napier (hero of the earlier struggle against Miguel) wanted military and naval forces sent against the victorious revolutionaries.[3] Palmerston was momentarily tempted to adopt this course but soon rejected it. His sensible decision seems to have been in part the result of pressure from Melbourne. The latter first reminded him that neither the cabinet nor Parliament was likely to sanction a military expedition and then made clear his own disinclination 'to entangle ourselves in intricate operations, which might lead us far beyond what we at present intend.'[4]

From 1838 Palmerston's interest in Portugal changed considerably. In September 1838 Palmerston urged Melbourne to put down the Portuguese slave

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1. Howick diary 13, 15 January 1834.
2. Webster, op.cit., p. 388.
3. ibid, p. 487 and n.1.
4. 10, 11 October 1836, GC/MB/132, 133.

trade, optimistically claiming that 'we have only to order our Cruizers to seize Slave Traders under Portuguese Flag South of the Line, and wherever found'.[1] Rightly or wrongly Melbourne declined to do anything of the kind and the slavery issue remained to be settled by treaty a few years later. In September 1839 and in April 1840, Palmerston wanted to seize the Portuguese colonies, especially Goa, so as to extract compensation on behalf of numerous British claimants.[2] Melbourne (and Russell) resisted this on the grounds that it would taint 'the whole of our slave trade proceedings with the suspicion of self-interest.'[3] Melbourne also pointed out that such action might 'overturn the Queen's Government and let in the Miguelites, which would be a ridiculous termination.'[4] This was perhaps an exaggeration but Palmerston's penchant for spectacular strokes was clearly a liability which Melbourne had to offset.

By comparison with Portugal, events in Spain are sufficiently complicated to merit a brief resumé here. In the summer of 1834 the Queen Regent, on behalf of her daughter Isabella, faced a rebellion by Don Carlos, who relied heavily on northern separatists for soldiers and on Metternich and his allies for money. Britain was bound by the Quadruple Alliance of April 1834 to assist Queen Cristina and Palmerston eagerly took up her cause. He knew that the Cabinet and Parliament would not allow him to send troops or money directly but he helped to create the British Legion of 8,000 men, sent warships to northern Spain, and supplied arms. Relations with France fluctuated as ministries in Paris changed but were not good whenever Thiers or Molé was in power. The Cristino cause itself fared badly in the fighting, especially in the summer of 1837 when the Carlists attacked Madrid in strength. Thereafter, however, it gradually became apparent that the Queen's side was winning, even if peace was achieved only with the Convention of Bergara (August 1839) and the flight of Don Carlos to France.

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1. 4 September MP 11/88.
2. Palmerston to Melbourne 3 September 1839, 2 April 1840, MP 12/9, 34.
3. Melbourne to Palmerston 6 September, GC/ME/305.
4. Melbourne to Russell 4 September, MP 14/58.

1. Melbourne to S. Rice 30 May 1835, Monteagle 13,381.
2. Melbourne to Palmerston 11 June 1835, GC/ME/32.
3. Melbourne to Russell 2 October 1835, MEL/RU/180.
4. Melbourne to Palmerston 11 June, GC/ME/32.
5. F. Baring to Melbourne 24 September, MP 1/15.
6. GC/ME/126.
7. Howick diary 12 March, 14 November, 14 December 1836.
8. Melbourne to Russell 1 October, MEL/RU/410.
   Russell to Melbourne 16 August, 6 September, MEL/RU/52, 56.
9. MEL/RU/52.
10. Melbourne to Russell 7 September 1838, MP 13/75.
11. Melbourne to Palmerston 6 Feb., GC/ME/149.

Where does Melbourne fit into this general picture? In the main he supported Palmerston's policy, though much subject to doubt as the war dragged on. He reasoned that success in Portugal was not secure without a similar success in Spain.[1] He thought that the Cristinos offered the best chance of a stable government[2] when Don Carlos was too arbitrary, and when the only other possibility was that 'constituent assemblies will be formed and God knows what take place.'[3] Accordingly, the only doubt he had about the raising of the British Legion was that its Irish recruiting drive might be thought 'a scheme of the Government to get rid of the Roman Catholic population.'[4] In 1838 he allowed Palmerston to send out Ordnance stores despite objections from the Treasury that this was a subsidy without Parliamentary approval.[5] Indeed, at times Melbourne worried that not enough had been done because, as he told Palmerston on 18 September 1836, 'it may be urged that it is not creditable to a powerful nation to interfere ineffectually.'[6]

Such an attitude was not unimportant when there was disagreement inside the Cabinet about their Spanish policy.[7] In particular, Melbourne resisted pressure from Russell for a withdrawal from Spain in October 1837 and August-September 1838.[8] On the latter occasion Russell wanted to leave only a token force of 'two or three ships, with about a dozen artillerymen.'[9] Melbourne would have liked an honourable chance to withdraw but would not allow it to look like British weakness.[10]

At the same time, Melbourne kept a rein upon what was done to help the Cristinos. In February 1837 he warned Palmerston against stepping up naval operations, especially the use of sailors and marines as land garrisons, for fear of opposition from William IV and Parliament: 'if we push the thing too far, we shall hazard our power to give as much assistance, as we have already done.'[11]

The question of loans to the Queen's government also perturbed Melbourne. In December 1835 came news that Villiers, the British ambassador, had arranged a treaty which secretly guaranteed a loan in return for commercial privileges

for British cotton exports. Palmerston told Villiers to substitute a simple commercial treaty[1] but only after a Cabinet on 7 December, in which Melbourne took a prominent part, had disavowed the loan clauses.[2] When Palmerston continued to hanker after a loan in March 1836, Melbourne had to insist:

> 'For God's sake do not dream of guarantee of money, until you have ascertained a little the feeling of our own friends in the House of Commons. You will have the whole body of Tories against you and the least slackness upon the part of your own friends throws you into a minority.' 3

As late as February 1837 Melbourne had to put another severe damper on 'these proposed money transactions.'[4]

In other ways, too, Melbourne kept a careful eye on Palmerston. He agreed that the French were 'very unaccountable and make but unpleasant allies to act with'[5] but he tried to get Palmerston to omit 'anything of reproach and taunt, however deserved' in official communications.'[6] In October 1837 he headed off a Palmerston proposal to appeal to Austria and her allies. He argued that the latter would simply deny giving aid to Carlos, that 'we shall have a long paper of Metternich's condemning the whole of our policy', and, above all, that they might 'propose a Congress or some concerted measure for a suspension of arms etc.' which would be difficult to refuse.[7] Subsequently, when Villiers suggested the same idea in December 1837, Palmerston rejected it. Finally, in 1840, Melbourne dissuaded Palmerston from pressing a Coburg marriage upon Queen Isabella. He argued that

> 'the young Coburg would be considered the nominee of the Queen of England and we should be accused of trying to establish our own creatures upon all the thrones of the world - two in the Peninsula.' 8

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1. Webster, op.cit., p. 437 n.1.
2. Howick diary 7 Dec.
3. 7 March, GC/ME/80.
   See Webster, op.cit., pp. 439, 451.
4. 6 February 1837, GC/ME/150.
5. Melbourne to Palmerston 26 May 1836, GC/ME/102.
6. Melbourne to Palmerston 17 Oct. 1836, GC/ME/136.
7. Melbourne to Palmerston 19 Oct., GC/ME/177.
8. Webster, op.cit., p. 467 n.1.

Without Melbourne's guidance and support, British policy in Spain might not have been greatly different or much less successful, but at the very least he supplied that touch of finesse which Palmerston lacked.

Palmerston made plain his overriding preoccupation in a letter to Melbourne of 24 September 1835:

> 'The great enemy of England is Russia ... and the main object of our foreign policy must be for years to come to counteract her'. 1

Melbourne was well aware that Russian and British interests were liable to clash in the area from Turkey to India but he took a much less doctrinaire view of the problem than Palmerston. The latter believed that if 'we are to sit with our Arms across' the result would be 'war forced upon us in disadvantageous circumstances by a neglect of timely exertion in peace.'[2] Melbourne believed that reasonable precautions, such as increasing the fleet, ought to be taken but that undue confrontation with Russia might bring nearer a war which was not otherwise inevitable.

He wrote to Grey in January 1836 that he did not believe Russian 'designs', especially against Turkey, were close to completion; and, further, that 'Russia has never yet acted by open force against the decided will of other European nations ...'[3] Melbourne believed that Russian policy produced an exaggerated reaction in English minds and he was against 'getting embroiled in these Eastern affairs earlier and deeper, than there is any necessity to warrant.'[4] He added, with characteristic deflation,

> 'The Black Sea and the Caucasus and these great Asiatic empires inflame imaginations wonderfully.' 5

After all, as he reminded Palmerston on receiving a map showing Russian territorial gains,

> 'a map of England with her acquisitions during the same period would make a very respectable figure and colour no inconsiderable portion of the globe.' 6

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1. MP 11/26.
2. ibid.
3. 5 January, Grey Papers.
4. Melbourne to Palmerston, GC/ME/67(1).
5. ibid.
6. Melbourne to Palmerston 17 February 1836, GC/ME/72.

Finally, Melbourne stressed the need for Austrian support in any move against Russia, at least so far as Turkey was concerned.[1] But, as he pointed out,

> 'if you require his [Metternich's] co-operation in the North and East, he will demand ... concessions in the West and South, which you will not be able to make.' 2

Significantly, Melbourne did not rate the Russian threat high enough to advocate such concessions.

Consequently, while Palmerston always wanted Melbourne to make a 'clatter' against Russia,[3] Melbourne tried to moderate Palmerston's despatches. When Palmerston wanted to criticise allegedly menacing Russian moves, in October 1835, Melbourne agreed that they must show they were on the alert, but, added,

> 'the expression "asking explanation" is rather strong unless mitigated and explained as I have above suggested.' 4

Similarly, in December 1835, he restrained his foreign secretary from remonstrating with Nicholas I after the latter had made a particularly illiberal speech at Warsaw against the Poles.[5] In 1836 he found much of a Palmerston despatch 'inconvenient' because it pledged them

> 'to a continued objection to that Baltic fleet, which there are reasons for, and with which we may ultimately find it necessary to put up.' 6

Finally, in February 1836, Palmerston raised the question of support for the Circassians against the Russian advance in the Caucasus. Melbourne stamped on this idea:

> 'I am against exciting people to commit themselves in a warfare in which you cannot give them effectual support.
> Besides Russia will have just cause of complaint against you. ... it is an act of hostility on your part to assist them [the Circassians].'7

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1. Melbourne to Palmerston 29 February 1836, GC/ME/75.
2. Melbourne to Palmerston 17 March 1837, GC/ME/156.
3. Webster, op.cit., p. 563.
4. 20 October 1835, GC/ME/46.
5. Melbourne to Palmerston 14 Dec., GC/ME/54.
6. Melbourne to Palmerston n.d. [1836], GC/ME/81.
7. Melbourne to Palmerston 29 February, GC/ME/75.

Melbourne was not always successful, of course. Too late he realised his mistake in allowing the violent Russophobe, Urquhart, to be appointed Secretary to the Constantinople embassy and then could not persuade Palmerston to move him elsewhere.[1] As a result, Howick denounced Melbourne for indolence and his 'inveterate habit of leaving things to follow their own course.'[2] Before long Urquhart got into the 'scrape' Melbourne had feared: he involved Britain in the 'Vixen' incident and had to be dismissed (though he survived to trouble Palmerston later[3]). In 1838 Melbourne was quicker off the mark in warning Palmerston not to get mixed up in Serbia, where the Foreign Secretary hoped to make a client out of Prince Milosch and thus build up a barrier against Russia.[4] Palmerston, however, ignored Melbourne's view that it was useless to proceed without Austrian help. Within a year his solo operation had failed completely: Milosch was humbled by a combination of the Serbian people, his overlord the Sultan, and Russia; Palmerston's agent in Serbia had to retreat; and Russia was presented with a brief triumph.

There was one major clash between prime minister and foreign secretary arising out of their different attitudes to Russia. In November 1835 Palmerston began to press for a treaty with France and the Sultan to guarantee Turkish independence. This was designed to counter Russia's success at the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi in 1833. Melbourne wanted to bring in Austria at once whilst Palmerston, distrusting Metternich, would offer her the treaty only after Britain and France had signed. At what seems to have been the crucial cabinet meeting, on 23 December, ministers divided evenly on Palmerston's proposal of a separate Anglo-French treaty. Melbourne was then given a casting vote which he used against Palmerston's plan.[5] Afterwards, Palmerston spent several weeks in passionate pleading of his case,[6] but he had to confess

1. Melbourne to Palmerston 5 March 1836, GC/ME/78.
2. Howick to Grey 6 February 1836, Grey Papers.
3. See Sir C. Webster, 'Urquhart, Ponsonby, and Palmerston', Eng. Hist. Rev., lxii (1947), 327-51.
4. Melbourne to Palmerston 18 April, GC/ME/196.
5. Howick diary 23 Dec.
6. Palmerston to Melbourne 7, 12 January 1836; MP 11/31, GC/ME/518.

to Granville on 9 February 1836 that

> 'Melbourne remains immoveable and the natural consequence of that is, that other members of the Cabinet who originally agreed with me begin to partake of Melbourne's opinion.' 1

To Palmerston Melbourne explained his opposition as follows:

> 'I have a great dread of treaties made in the dark and which may bind us in a manner, which we do not now anticipate.' 2

To Grey he added the view that

> 'it seemed ... to be hastening things onward unnecessarily towards a rupture, it looked like joining decisively with France to the exclusion of all other powers and throwing down the gauntlet to all Europe ...' 3

Melbourne therefore held out, especially as he was fortified by support from Grey (and, later, Wellington).[4]

The Palmerston project was finally killed by a change of ministry in Paris. Once the slippery Thiers was at the head of the government, few in the Cabinet would sign a treaty with France and without Austria.[5] Melbourne tried to smooth over their differences by assuring Palmerston,

> 'my policy is I should think much the same as yours. [i.e.] ... Do not be rash or entertain exaggerated apprehensions respecting Turkey, but be watchful, and try to concert with France and Austria upon that matter.' 6

For all this, it had been an important collision between the two. Moreover, it shows Melbourne fully capable of tactical manoeuvre. Since he had expected that Austria would reject the idea of a treaty,[7] his counter-suggestion of trying to bring her in looks like a mere device. Indeed, when such an idea was finally raised in Vienna in August 1836, Metternich proved unresponsive.[8]

1. Webster, op.cit., p. 586.
2. 24 December 1835, GC/ME/58.
3. 5 January 1836, Grey Papers.
4. Sanders pp. 342-7.
5. Russell to Melbourne 21 March 1836, MEL/RU/20.
6. 21 March 1836, GC/ME/84.
7. Melbourne to Palmerston 8 January 1836, GC/ME/24.
8. Webster, op.cit., p. 589.

In early 1837 Melbourne again intervened to some effect. In February and March, as a result of the seizure by Russia of the 'Vixen' (a British ship trading off the Circassian coast), Palmerston contemplated support for the Circassian revolt and a contest with Russia over the rights of navigation in the Black Sea.[1] His resolve was strengthened by apparent assurances of support from Metternich.[2] Palmerston was not looking for war but Melbourne nonetheless stepped in at several points. Early in March he told Palmerston that

> 'the advancing a claim to the right to trade to the whole of the coast of the Black Sea, not occupied by Russia, appears to me to be doubtful upon the ground of right, of reason, and of expediency.' 3

He also warned that 'Powerful Ministers have in general found themselves unable to induce this nation to vindicate her rights in distant countries.'[4] On 17 March he stated that the government 'could not stand upon' the case of the 'Vixen'; at the very least, they needed French and Austrian support, and Melbourne profoundly distrusted Metternich's motives 'in pushing us forward against Russia.'[5] He thought Palmerston was simply misconstruing the treaty of Adrianople and that by the latter Russia had in fact a perfect right to claim the whole Caucasian coast-line.[6] He even told Palmerston to be discreet in the Commons:

> 'I think the effect of the treaty of Adrianople is too grave and serious a question for you to give a decided opinion, in a debate of this nature'. 7

By June 1837 a compromise was reached by which Britain recognised Russia's rights in the one port where the 'Vixen' had been arrested but not the justice of the Russian blockade of the whole Circassian coast. Palmerston may have

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1. See above p. 329-30
   Webster, op.cit., pp. 572
2. Webster, op.cit., pp. 572-3.
3. n.d., GC/ME/155.
4. ibid.
5. GC/ME/157.
6. 13 April, GC/ME/161.
7. 17 March, GC/ME/156.

had this in mind from the outset; Webster assumes, but does not prove this. However, since Palmerston's relevant despatches to his ambassador in St. Petersburg were sent after Melbourne had taken his stand,[1] the solution to an awkward problem probably owed as much to the prime minister as to his foreign secretary.

Melbourne exercised a comparable moderating influence over Central Asian policy, although his role here was less prominent than in the Near East. Palmerston, naturally, was convinced that Russian ambitions in the vast area between the Southern Caspian and North West India must be thwarted at all costs. He therefore ardently wished to establish British influence in Persia and Afghanistan and to stop Russia edging south-west, past the Caspian, towards such places as Khiva and Bokhara. Melbourne was less convinced of the need for a forward policy in Central Asia. He reminded Palmerston in February 1836 that Russia's 'advanced posts in Asia' were about 2,000 miles from her capital and that this 'remoteness from St. Petersburg ... is amongst others a source of weakness.'[2]

Over Persia, Melbourne and Palmerston, and indeed nearly all the Cabinet, were agreed that its pro-Russian ruler must not be allowed to succeed in his designs upon Herat.[3] The Persian attack upon this independent state on the Afghan border was in fact beaten off in the summer of 1838 but news of this did not reach England till late October. Melbourne would not, however, agree to any invasion of Persia by a British force from India as proposed by McNeill, the British envoy in Persia.[4] The great distances involved initially left Melbourne merely hoping that Lord Auckland in India would be too sensible to listen to McNeill. But on 7 October 1838 an emergency Cabinet decided to instruct Auckland not to invade Persia. There is no direct evidence that Palmerston wanted such an invasion but he might well

1. Webster, op.cit., p. 574 n.1.
2. 17 February, GC/ME/72.
3. Howick diary 1 August 1838.
4. Melbourne to Russell 29 September 1838, MP 13/76.

have welcomed a 'fait accompli' by his pro-consuls. McNeill, 'a good Russian-hater' according to Webster,[1] had been Palmerston's deliberate choice for Persia. The Foreign Secretary certainly believed that some clash with Russia was inevitable and that the further away from India it happened the better.[2] Palmerston also positively looked forward to sending a fleet into the Black Sea 'if any event should happen to compel us to make a Demonstration against Russia.'[3]

The Cabinet agreed that Palmerston should protest to Russia about the activities of Simonich, her ambassador to Persia, who had encouraged the Shah to attack Herat. Even here Melbourne tried to dilute the Palmerstonian expressions:

> 'should not a little blarney be put in, such as that the explanation is asked in a friendly spirit and for the purpose of maintaining the relations of Peace.' 4

He returned to this theme in a letter to Palmerston of 13 October 1838:

> 'we should not lay down that War between us and Russia is unavoidable, and ... our representation to Russia should not be couched in haughty or unfriendly language ...' 5

It was also decided on 7 October 1838 to depose the pro-Russian ruler of Afghanistan, Dost Mohammed, and restore his predecessor at Cabul, Shah Shuja. An expedition from India accomplished this task by August 1839. Melbourne's support for this move was not entirely consistent with his general attitude, even if he had some hope, as he told the Queen on 7 April 1839, that the 'crash' with Russia herself would be 'staved off for the present.'[6] He therefore bears as much responsibility as anyone for Britain's unhappy involvement in Afghan affairs, especially the military disaster at Cabul in 1841.

In the short term, however, he continued his efforts to restrain his

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1. Webster, op.cit., p. 742.
2. Webster, op.cit., p. 738-9
3. Palmerston to Melbourne 2 June 1837, MP 11/62.
4. Melbourne to Palmerston n.d. [Oct. 1838], GC/ME/236.
5. GC/ME/241.
6. Q.V. diary; II, 146-7.

foreign secretary. The latter, elated by his success in Syria in late 1840, pressed for vigorous measures in Central Asia.[1] In 1841 Auckland rejected Palmerston's exhortations to seize Herat in particular,[2] so Palmerston tried to persuade Melbourne to order him to do so.[3] Melbourne, however, would not agree without consulting the Cabinet: 'it is too great a step and may produce too great consequences to do it without.'[4] In the event, the issue was engulfed in the general dissolution of the government. It was perhaps appropriate that one of Melbourne's last acts in office should have been once more to slow down a Palmerston enterprise.

By 1839 Russia was no longer in English eyes the greatest immediate threat to the Turkish empire. Her place had been taken by Mehemet Ali, who had built up a very strong position as Pasha of Egypt and had turned against his nominal master in Constantinople. In particular, in 1833 he had forced the Sultan to grant him Syria for his lifetime. In May 1839 Sultan Mahmud attacked Mehemet Ali but found himself fighting an unsuccessful war. Palmerston had long wanted to break the Pasha's power and to this end now sought the help of the other major European states. But he ran into difficulties. By the time Russia agreed in December 1839 to share the defence of the Straits with the other countries, the French had gone back on their initial willingness to help the Sultan. Instead, they made Mehemet Ali their 'protégé'.

It is important to establish Melbourne's attitude to the negotiations which Palmerston was conducting. Holland depicts him as doubtful and temporising, and hoping that somehow the problem would go away of its own accord.[5] Holland's account was written up later, in July 1840, when he was thoroughly wrought-up and even more critical of Melbourne; but it contains some truth.

1. Webster, op.cit., p. 750.
2. ibid., p. 751.
3. Palmerston to Melbourne 1 June 1841, MP 13/25.
4. Melbourne to Palmerston 2 June, GC/ME/488.
5. Holland diary n.d. [early October 1839] Add. Mss. 51,872, ff. 1159-61.

Late in October 1839, Melbourne confessed to the Austrian ambassador that he was against coercion of Mehemet Ali because it created divisions among the great powers and that he would have preferred direct agreement between Sultan and Pasha.[1] He wanted to carry France along with Britain and was against provoking her, as Palmerston was inclined to do, by exposing the inconsistencies of her policy.[2]

It is probable, however, that what Melbourne feared was coercion of Mehemet Ali by Britain alone, as he told Palmerston on 5 December, and not coercion as such.[3] Moreover, he seems to have been more worried about acting without Russia than without France. This is the inference, at least, of his opposition in October 1839 to the idea of the British fleet sheltering inside the Dardanelles. The proposition was reasonable in view of the imminent bad weather, and was supported by Palmerston, but Melbourne thought it would look like a move to enter the Sea of Marmora and thus antagonise the Russians.[4]

Melbourne's basic reaction to Mehemet Ali was, in fact, fairly similar to Palmerston's. He thought the Pasha himself guilty of 'great violence and tyranny', as he wrote to Palmerston on 26 October 1839.[5] Above all, as he was to tell Holland in August 1840, he believed that 'a strong active aggressive Mussulman Power in Egypt is devilishly against us with all our Eastern interests.'[6] On the same occasion Melbourne admitted that he had 'always been puzzled' and had 'always thought that there were strong reasons on both sides.'[7] But there is no reason for supposing that a masterful Palmerston was simply dragging along an unwilling yet weak prime minister, the interpretation offered by Holland

1. Webster, op.cit., p. 653.
2. Q. V. diary 1 October; II, 257-8.
   Melbourne to Palmerston 16 November, GC/MB/314.
3. GC/MB/320.
4. Webster, op.cit., p. 655 n.1.
5. GC/MB/312.
6. Melbourne to Holland 29 Aug., Add. Mss. 51,559 ff. 68-9.
7. ibid.

as he reviewed the whole business in July 1840.[1]

Unlike Palmerston, Melbourne did not have a positive relish for a confrontation with France but, once Russia proved amenable, he was certainly prepared to stand up to the French. In an interview on 8 March 1840, Guizot, the new French ambassador, found Melbourne well-disposed towards his own government but opposed to leaving Syria in Mehemet Ali's hands. He told Guizot that

> 'the Pasha will always want to extend his dominions beyond Syria, the Sultan will ever wish to reserve that province. The position is untenable, we must put an end to it.' 2

Guizot tried all his arguments but admitted that he left Melbourne 'neither seriously alarmed nor convinced.'[3]

Melbourne therefore left Palmerston to negotiate an effective alliance against Mehemet Ali, a task which was not accomplished till the end of July 1840. Indeed, Melbourne told the Prussian ambassador even at the end of June that he did not expect the powers to agree, with or without France.[4] As usual, of course, he was more moderate than Palmerston when it came to diplomatic communications between London and Paris.[5] He also had more doubts than his self-confident brother-in-law about British military and naval capacity in the Eastern Mediterranean.[6] However, he was fundamentally behind Palmerston's policy in these months.

In Cabinet Melbourne said little; but that was his custom, and in this case Palmerston, Hobhouse, and Minto would make all the necessary running. But he lent background support, typified by his handling of the problem posed by Lord Ponsonby, Palmerston's ambassador at Constantinople. The Francophile, anti-Turkish section of the Cabinet, led by Holland, held Ponsonby to be even worse than his master in point of abrasive, irresponsible, and warlike policies.

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1. Holland diary 7 July, Add. Mss. 51,872 f. 1180.
2. F. Guizot, An Embassy to the Court of St. James, p. 45.
3. ibid., p. 47.
4. Webster, op.cit., p. 687.
5. Melbourne to Palmerston 11 March, 7 May 1840, GC/MB/359, 374.
6. Melbourne to Russell 11 January 1840, MP 14/94.
See below p.346, 348.

Melbourne also thought Ponsonby a serious liability but would not recall him because, as he wrote to Holland on 17 May,

> 'it would be an utter and complete Abandonment of all our Policy there and of the Porte.' 1

However much Melbourne helped, it was Palmerston who remained pre-eminent during the long negotiations with the other European powers.[2] By early July he was in a position to press the Cabinet for a decision: the talks with France had totally failed; and a revolt inside Syria had revealed a way of ousting Mehemet Ali.[3] But his plan for proceeding against the latter without French good-will was more or less rejected by the Cabinet on 5 July. Palmerston at once offered his resignation.[4] This stirred Melbourne into activity. Previously, he had merely warned Palmerston of likely opposition in the Cabinet and tried to make him offer a compromise.[5] Now he persuaded Palmerston to try again at another Cabinet meeting, since no formal decision had been taken on 5 July.[6] Palmerston made it clear, however, that his plan for a Four-Power Convention must be accepted if he were to stay in office.[7]

What were Melbourne's thoughts as he tried to patch up his divided Cabinet? He told Palmerston on 7 July:

> 'I have no notion that your resignation must not dissolve the present Government and how another is to be formed in the present state of parties and opinions I see not.' 8

Obviously, political stability at home and his obligations to the Queen were important considerations for Melbourne, but, was he primarily or even mainly interested in Cabinet unity for domestic reasons, as Webster and Ziegler argue?[9]

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1. Add. Mss. 51,559 f. 63.
2. Webster, op.cit., p. 621
3. ibid., p. 688-89.
4. Palmerston to Melbourne 5 July, GC/ME/536.
5. 7 June, 4 July, GC/ME/389, 392.
6. Melbourne to Palmerston 6 July, GC/ME/393.
7. Palmerston to Melbourne 6 July, GC/ME/537.
8. GC/ME/394.
9. op.cit., pp. 690, 711; op.cit., pp. 322, 328.

In his efforts to bring round the leading anti-Palmerstonians, Holland and Clarendon, he also showed equally great concern for the fate of British foreign policy. On 7 July he wrote to Clarendon:

> 'we must have no resignations ... the country cannot stand them. They would materially injure its policy, either way.' 1

Melbourne's concern was perfectly justified. If the Francophiles resigned and the government fell, the Tories would almost certainly continue Palmerston's policy. The latter was indeed so popular with Tory M Ps, if not with Peel himself, that a few months later its creator was reliably rumoured to be in direct communication with the Opposition.[2] But no Tory government could undertake such a policy with the same chance of success as Melbourne's possessed. One of the essences of the Palmerston approach was speed: this would be denied to an incoming government. Further, French resistance would be greatly stiffened by the spectacle of British disunity and hesitancy. The choice, therefore, lay between the efficient or inefficient pursuit of the Palmerston line on foreign policy. Knowing this, and anyway basically disagreeing with his two dissident ministers, Melbourne had every reason to put pressure on them.

He softened the attitude of Clarendon by the letter cited above. Holland he saw in person on the night of 7 July, and again on the morning of 8 July just before the decisive Cabinet meeting.[3] The latter proved lengthy but ended in Palmerston winning over most of his colleagues, assisted as he was by French obstinacy and by the news that Austria would join in coercive action even without France.[4] Melbourne apparently said little but it was to him that the Foreign Secretary owed his opportunity. Holland and Clarendon formally recorded their dissent in a Minute but did not resign. As Melbourne later

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1. Clarendon Papers, ed. Maxwell; I, 195.
2. Greville diary 9 Jan. 1841; IV, 374.
3. Holland diary, Add. Mss. 51,879 f.110d
4. Webster, op.cit., p. 500

reminded Palmerston, 'never ... was a great measure undertaken upon a basis ... so slender and so uncertain.'[1] That being so, Melbourne stands out as something more than an accessory after the fact.

It will be convenient at this point to give the briefest of sketches of the international events which developed after Palmerston's domestic success. He proceeded to negotiate a Convention on 15 July with Russia, Austria, and Prussia. This offered Mehemet Ali the hereditary rule of Egypt and the Pashalik of Acre for life, but firmly inside the Ottoman Empire, and only if he accepted immediately. The Pasha, however, refused these terms. As a result the Convention Powers sent naval forces to Syria, which, in conjunction with Turkish troops and the local rebels (the Druses), progressively defeated Mehemet Ali's forces during the late summer and autumn. Beirut was taken by 10 October and Acre early in November, though news of the latter success did not reach Western capitals till 24 November; by the end of November the British fleet triumphantly appeared in Alexandria. But all of this took time, and, as Guizot declared to Melbourne on 28 July, 'if you end it quick, you will have judged right. If it drags into length, you will have made a mistake.'[2] Thiers' government in Paris was enraged by the July Convention and strengthened France's armed forces. Its belligerence was merely increased by the failures of its client in Syria. Thiers threatened to start revolutions in Italy and Germany to repay Austria and Prussia; an attack on the Rhineland seemed imminent; the French and British Mediterranean fleets looked likely to clash. Eventually, however, the basically moderate Louis-Philippe dismissed Thiers (21 October) and installed Marshall Soult, with Guizot as the all-powerful foreign minister. These events, followed soon by the final news from Syria, ended this prolonged war-scare.

There are broadly two possible interpretations of Melbourne's relations with Palmerston during the months from July to November 1840. The first

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1. Melbourne to Palmerston 14 Sept. 1840, GC/ME/418.
2. Melbourne to Palmerston 28 July, GC/ME/402.

derives from the Holland-Clarendon viewpoint, though it is found most vividly in the pages of Greville's diary. It presents Melbourne as weak and ineffective, badly wanting to avoid war but unable to control Palmerston or to ease the tension with France. Greville wrote of Palmerston's 'absolute despotism at the Foreign Office' and of the Cabinet as 'a complete republic.'[1] Russell, who joined the Francophile party at a fairly late stage, informed Melbourne that Palmerston was spoilt for 'want of control or contradiction ... But for that you are more to blame than he is.'[2] The alternative version depicts Melbourne more or less correctly sizing up the resistance which Louis-Philippe would offer and keeping the Cabinet together so as to give Palmerston's policy a chance to work. This approach, which was first suggested by Lloyd Sanders,[3] will be the one adopted below.

In the first place, it is remarkable how anti-French Melbourne often showed himself. On 27 July he asked Palmerston what the latter wanted him to say when he saw Guizot the next day.[4] When Palmerston reviewed all the failed negotiations with France at the end of August, Melbourne commented:

> 'it is a capital paper and completely proves that France has no right to complain of offence or surprise or of anything else in the course which has been taken.' 5

To counter Russell's inclination to resign in September, Melbourne relied on arguments which Palmerston could not have bettered:

> 'If the British Government is broken up by the mere bluster and threats of the French, and by the sole apprehension of a difference with that country, what will be the impression, both upon Europe and upon France, of their strength and courage, of our weakness and humility?
>
> It will encourage France to such a degree that, even if it staves off war now, it will produce it very shortly.' 6

Even in December 1840, by which time the crisis was over and British policy triumphant, Melbourne was unsympathetic to France. He wrote to Palmerston on

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1. 24 August 1840; IV, 307-8.
2. Russell to Melbourne 29 Sept., MEL/RU/124.
3. op.cit., p. 460 (editorial note).
4. GC/MB/401.
5. 29 August GC/MB/413.
6. Melbourne to Russell 16 Sept., MP 14/155.

15 December:

> 'It is a strange thing that France will not be content with our doing what she wishes, in not disturbing Mehemet Ali in Egypt, unless we say that we do it from regard of her, or rather from fear of her ... I never heard of such a thing before.' 1

He also opposed Metternich's idea of recognising the French position in Algiers, on the grounds that 'you do not restore the former state of things by giving a locket or a bracelet' and lest it assist France to extend her power in Africa.[2]

These feelings were admittedly tempered by a healthy respect for French pride and strength. Melbourne's estimate of Louis-Philippe as much ruled by 'passion' with 'a great deal of Jemappes left about him still'[3] may have been meant only to make Palmerston more malleable but there are other more convincing opinions from him. Long before the 1840 crisis, Melbourne had described French public opinion as wild and changeable[4] and the French 'individually and collectively' liable 'to act from immediate temper without much calculation of consequences.'[5] Melbourne was also concerned about French naval superiority in the Mediterranean, of which Minto at the Admiralty informed him. The Russian fleet could theoretically have assisted the British but Melbourne felt this would be humiliating and would encourage Russian ambitions too much.[6]

Understandably, therefore, Melbourne feared for the preservation of peace. On 26 August he admitted to Russell, 'for myself, I can neither eat nor sleep for anxiety'.[7] As late as 11 October Melbourne wrote to Queen Victoria that 'with a nation so irritable as the French, and with the constitution which they have ... it is impossible to feel secure for a moment.'[8]

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1. GC/ME/467.
2. Melbourne to Palmerston 29 December GC/ME/470.
3. Melbourne to Palmerston 25 Aug., GC/ME/412.
4. Melbourne to William IV, 10 November 1836, Sanders p. 354.
5. Melbourne to Palmerston 18 September 1838, GC/ME/233.
6. Minto to Melbourne 23 August 1840, MP 9/52.
   Melbourne to Palmerston 25 August, GC/ME/412.
7. Sanders p. 467.
8. Letters of Queen Victoria, I. 238.

By then, however, his fears may have been aggravated by considerable ill-health.[1] In fact, the die had been cast as early as 9 August when ministers met at Melbourne's house to arrange for measures necessary in the event of France declaring war.[2] Melbourne's anxieties were simply the understandable ones of someone who was prepared for war in the last resort but did not much like the prospect.

Accordingly, without ever going as far as Holland, for instance, wanted, Melbourne was very ready to be conciliatory towards France. By 22 August, he was trying to get Palmerston to 'make some Communication to France,' as he wrote to Russell.[3] When the latter added his pleas for a new Five Power agreement, Melbourne stated to the foreign secretary on 25 August:

> 'it is most highly desirable that something should be done to withdraw us from our present state of uncertainty.' 4

But, the great difficulty in the way of conciliating France was, as Melbourne told Russell on 26 August, that

> 'whatever we propose to do France will object to, and then will come the question between us. We can hardly modify our terms, and France cannot join us to enforce them.' 5

The sheer logic of the situation, more than some invincible strength of character on Palmerston's part, emasculated any conciliatory moves.

Such efforts were intensified only as Melbourne came under increasing pressure from Russell, who was by early September a belated convert to the Francophile camp. On 10 September Russell threatened to resign unless both a special mission was sent to Constantinople to give temperate advice to the Sultan and France reassured that she would be invited to rejoin the Convention Powers if warfare in Syria worsened or continued for long.[6] Melbourne supported these proposals in a general way - but only the first to any great

1. Melbourne to Queen Victoria 9 Oct.; ibid., I. 236-7
2. Clarendon Papers ed. Maxwell, I. 199.
3. MP 14/148.
4. GC/MB/412.
5. MP 14/149.
6. Walpole, Life of Russell, I. 348-9.

1. Melbourne to Palmerston 10 Sept., MP 12/51.
2. Walpole, Life of Russell, I. 349.
3. 16 September, GC/MP/421.
4. 16 September, MP 14/155.
5. Melbourne to Russell 19 September (1), MP 15/1.
6. 19 September (2), MP 15/2.
   See Prest, Russell, pp. 219-20.
7. 19 September, GC/ML/423.
8. Walpole, Life of Russell, I. 351.
   Russell to Melbourne 28 Sept., PRO/RU/123.
9. Greville diary 29 September; IV, 331.
10. Normanby to Melbourne 29, 30 September, MP 10/122, 123.
11. Greville diary 1 Oct.; IV, 335.

extent - to Palmerston.[1] The latter ignored them, so, on 15 September, Russell asked Melbourne to prepare the Queen for his resignation.[2] Melbourne reminded Palmerston of the need for an answer[3] but checked Russell quite sharply:

> 'For heaven's sake do not be precipitate; consider this matter well. You have been a consenting party to the Convention; you cannot, upon slight or subordinate grounds, withdraw yourself from the consequences of it.' 4

It is noticeable that Melbourne confined himself to foreign policy, with little reference to the domestic consequences of Russell's resignation. Again, on 19 September, he stressed that appeasement would only encourage 'the unquiet and aggressive character of the people of France.'[5] He also dealt severely with Russell's susceptibility to the Francophile views of his brother, telling him that

> 'the Duke of Bedford is a good adviser for principles and opinions but bad for action. All advisers are dangerous. They encumber the free exercise of the understanding and substitute authority for reason.' 6

When Palmerston still delayed any reply to Russell's proposals of 10 September, Melbourne urged him to pacify Russell, but in terms which strongly suggest that Melbourne thought it more important to soothe Russell's wounded vanity than to re-think their Near Eastern policy.[7] Palmerston's eventual reply did not give satisfaction and on 26 September Russell again threatened resignation; he agreed to suspend this only until he could hear a personal plea from the Queen.[8] He then confronted Palmerston in person at an emergency Cabinet on 28 September. This proved inconclusive, not least because Melbourne expressed his disinterest by falling into either a real or a simulated sleep.[9] Before the Cabinet met again, Melbourne took steps to keep Russell on the rails; in this he was assisted by the mediation of Normanby who saw both Russell and Palmerston.[10] It was arranged that Melbourne should propose to the Cabinet some new approach to France as a compromise to satisfy both sides. Consequently, on 1 October the Cabinet agreed that Palmerston should consult the Convention Powers about such an approach.[11]

This move had been forced upon Melbourne by Russell's threats and by the agitated state of the Queen, who felt that she could not stand political upheavals whilst expecting her first child.[1] Melbourne made it clear to Russell on 29 September that he did not like seeming to yield to French menaces. Nor does he seem to have thought that the French government was on the brink of declaring war, even if he obviously needed to make such an assertion to Russell; and he could cite as evidence some pacific remarks of Louis-Philippe.[2] The only other new factor may have been signs of weakness displayed by Metternich, to whose conciliatory mood Melbourne referred at the 1 October Cabinet.[3] But Greville was hardly justified in describing Melbourne, at the end of this Cabinet, as 'swaggering like any Bobadil, and talking about "fellows being frightened at their own shadows" and a great deal of bravery when he began to breathe freely from the danger.'[4] Whatever incident Greville had got hold off to distort, Melbourne's alarmism before 1 October had not been extreme. Nor did he show excessive relief after the Cabinet's decision. The fact that Melbourne, as Greville himself noted, 'hopped off to Windsor the moment the Cabinet was over ... instead of remaining here, trying to conciliate people and arrange matters' suggests that he was interested in the diplomatic initiative mainly in so far as it quietened Russell.[5] At the least, he cannot have seen it as the only means of averting an unnecessary war.

In the event, the initiative ran into considerable delays because Brunnow, the Russian envoy, refused to act without authority from the Tsar.[6] This left Palmerston in a dominant position. He evaded suggestions from Melbourne that he instruct Granville to sound out Thiers unilaterally.[7] In this way

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1. Q. V. to Melbourne 26 September; Letters of Queen Victoria, I. 230.
2. Melbourne to Russell September (1), 30 September, MP 15/1,7.
3. Greville diary 1 Oct; IV, 335.
   Webster, op.cit., p. 714.
4. loc.cit.
5. ibid.
6. Webster, op.cit., p. 720.
7. Melbourne to Palmerston 6 October (1), (2), GC/MB/434, 435.

Melbourne may have revealed himself incapable of directing Palmerston or he may simply have shown a tepid appreciation of the overture to France. More damaging, perhaps, to his reputation as a proper prime minister is his failure to enforce his view, expressed to Palmerston on 4 October, that the British and Turkish forces should not risk an attack on Acre.[1]

Nothing was heard from Russell for several days. Indeed, he even changed his tune and proposed an immediate attack on Acre.[2] But by the time the Cabinet met again on 10 October he had recovered and was ready for 'another flare-up', according to Lady Clarendon, even though Melbourne allegedly told him that 'it was too late to do anything.'[3] In fact, responding to a French note of 8 October, the Cabinet had little difficulty in deciding to make the Sultan revoke his recent deposition of Mehemet Ali from Egypt. Palmerston had not expected to be able to expel the Pasha from Egypt as well as Syria[4] but he still delayed informing Guizot of this concession. Normanby told Melbourne on the night of 11 October that Guizot had not heard from Palmerston, and that Russell knew this also.[5] Melbourne endorsed this letter as follows:'He was to have gone to him directly in consequence of the resolution of the Cabinet. This remissness is too bad.'[6] Melbourne was now in his most anxious mood about France so he decisively enjoined Palmerston to live up to their agreement of 10 October.[7] His efforts from 11-13 October belie the statements of Greville and, more recently, Ziegler that Melbourne did nothing to galvanise his brother-in-law into action.[8]

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1. GC/ME/432.
2. Greville diary 7 October; IV, 340.
   Lady Clarendon's Journal 5 October, Clarendon Papers, ed. Maxwell, I.211.
3. Journal 8 October; ibid., I.212.
4. Webster, op.cit., p. 722.
5. MP 10/125 (This letter is misattributed to Russell by Ziegler, who also ignores the endorsement: Melbourne, pp. 326, 399 n.20)
6. ibid.
7. Melbourne to Queen Victoria 12 October, Letters of Queen Victoria, I. 240-1
   Melbourne to Palmerston 13 October, GC/MB/440.
   Webster, op.cit., p. 722.
8. Greville diary 17 October; IV, 350.
   Melbourne, p. 326.

Having squared Russell and the rest of the Cabinet, Melbourne rounded on the French. He was by now exasperated by Thiers' threats and military programme, and probably angered at the pressure on the Queen from her continental relatives. Around 16 or 17 October, and knowing that his words would be conveyed to Louis-Philippe, Melbourne warned King Leopold of Belgium that if France's bellicose preparations continued, he would recall Parliament and demand the means to resist them. There exist several accounts of the now-vanished letter. A French minister of the day reported Melbourne's words to have been:

> 'If France persists in her hostile armaments, England will take very summary measures to 'balayer' them at once.' [1]

At any rate, it was powerfully-worded enough to contribute appreciably to Louis-Philippe's decision of 21 October to dismiss Thiers rather than accept the warlike speech which the latter proposed for the opening of the French Assembly.[2] Melbourne's action has always caused surprise but it should not do so. It was simply the logical culmination of what he had practised since early July.

Despite the end of the international tension, there was still one domestic incident to come. Probably unaware of the effect of Melbourne's letter to Leopold, Russell continued to make barbed remarks about his inactivity and indecision.[3] In this mood Russell then discovered that Palmerston had, on his own authority, rejected an Austrian suggestion of a conference of the Convention Powers at Wiesbaden. Russell objected to the lack of consultation as much as to the decision itself and once again threatened to resign.[4] Melbourne appealed to him not to 'sacrifice the interests of the country to an offence of your own'[5] and simultaneously asked Palmerston to bring him round.[6] Palmerston personally apologised to Russell, who thought his behaviour

1. Sanders p. 487.
2. Webster, op.cit., p. 723.
3. Russell to Melbourne 25 Oct.; GC/ME/543.
4. Russell to Melbourne 31 October, MEL/RU/127.
5. 31 October, MP 15/16.
6. 31 October, GC/ME/447.

'very handsomely civil', and there the matter ended.[1]

In the course of arguing Russell out of resigning, Melbourne made some interesting remarks which are worth exploring. On 1 November he wrote of his expectations that the military operations in Syria would fail (presumably because he thought Acre could not be taken quickly) and that the Cabinet would thereupon insist on settling matters by negotiation.[2] He went on:

> 'To these measures Palmerston, I think, would very likely not have agreed; but that, in my opinion, would have been the time for bringing matters to the decision to which you are bringing them now.'

This must be read in the light of his assertion earlier in this letter that he would be 'unwilling' to continue in office

> 'under the impression which would be created in France and Europe by your retiring and Palmerston's remaining and acquring additional weight and influence.'

Assuming that Melbourne meant what he said - and he was not noted for dissembling on this scale - it looks very much as if he was preparing himself to accept Palmerston's resignation rather than Russell's.

Such an interpretation must remain speculative because of course the news of complete military success in Syria came within three weeks. However, later in November Melbourne had a brush with Palmerston which suggests that he was still capable of exercising authority over his brother-in-law. On 14 November Palmerston had instructed Admiral Stopford (C.-in-C. Syria) to send an emissary to Mehemet Ali offering the governorship but not the hereditary tenure of Egypt if he surrendered at once.[3] Since this went against the decision of 10 October, it was, as Melbourne said, 'irregular' that

> 'no mention was made in the Cabinet ... and that I should only have been made aware of the fact by an article in the Morning Chronicle.'

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1. Russell to Melbourne 2 Nov., Walpole, Life of Russell, I. 360.
2. Melbourne to Russell 1 November, MP 15/18.
3. Webster, op.cit., p. 733.

He concluded acidly:

> 'It seems to me that you and not Mr. Black[1] ought to have communicated with me on this important subject.' 2

There is no space here to examine the merits of Palmerston's Near Eastern policy; such as they were, they mainly belonged to the foreign secretary, who had master-minded British diplomacy since late 1839. Melbourne's share in the achievement, if it was that, was a minor one. His doubts and hesitations, which he was too sensible not to have and too candid not to express, hardly make his role heroic. But he had much more of a broad strategy than Greville, ever prone to miss the wood for the trees, allowed him. And that strategy encompassed more than the mere preservation of Cabinet unity, the sole motive ascribed to Melbourne by Webster and Ziegler.[3] He had fairly definite views about Mehemet Ali and France, and was quite prepared to act on behalf of them. By the middle of 1840 he scarcely had such a high opinion of the intrinsic virtues of his government as to put its unity and survival above what he conceived to be fundamental interests of British foreign policy.[4]

An overall estimate of Melbourne's relations with Palmerston and his contribution to foreign policy must be mixed. Not only Greville thought little of the prime minister in these respects. Lady Palmerston's verdict on her brother was not flattering:

> 'his plan is always to put off everything (not thinking much of foreign questions, or understanding them well; he is so influenced by all people say to him) ...' 5

There is some truth in this but allowance must be made for Lady Palmerston's violent partisanship on behalf of her husband. Enough examples have been given to show that Melbourne had a mind of his own in foreign affairs: it often coincided with Palmerston's; sometimes it did not. In either case he

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1. Editor of the 'Morning Chronicle'.
2. 28 November GC/ME/460.
3. See above p.338
4. See above pp.190 -3
5. Lady Palmerston to F. Lamb 17 December 1840, Letters of Lady Palmerston ed. Tresham Lever, p. 244-5.

was capable of effective intervention if it was needed, though it may well be objected that his sense of timing was excessively fine. At least Melbourne achieved a better balance in his relations with Palmerston than any of those who subsequently had to work with this most difficult of Foreign Secretaries. Indeed, much as he did with Russell, Melbourne harnessed the abilities of someone who was in many ways his superior. Finally, in the context of British foreign policy throughout the nineteenth century, Melbourne's moderate, pragmatic and supple approach has a definite, if small place, now that Castlereagh and Salisbury are at least as much admired as Canning and Disraeli respectively.

If Melbourne achieved a certain success in his relations with Russell and Palmerston, he failed resoundingly when it came to Howick. This was in its own way a significant test-case: Howick was an opinionated, angry young man who got on badly with most of his colleagues but who had reforming ideas, personal drive, and administrative ability. In no way a Radical, he was apparently just the kind of person needed in the government. Melbourne, however, had experienced Howick's shortcomings whilst the latter had been Under-Secretary at the Home Office.[1] In 1835 he made him Secretary at War with a seat in the Cabinet more to placate Grey than as a spontaneous recognition of Howick's merits.

In turn, Howick respected Melbourne as an unusual man but could not stand his style as prime minister.[2] After the first Cabinet of 1835, Howick commented to his father:

> '... there seemed to me a strange want of method in our proceedings, we sat for about two hours without coming to any very definite conclusions.' 3

On 16 November 1835 the choice of a governor for Upper Canada was discussed by the Cabinet for a long time, but no decision reached until after it broke up,

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1. Melbourne to Holland 27 August 1834, Add. Mss. 51,558 ff. 63-4.
2. Howick diary 16 December 1835.
3. Howick to Grey 20 April, Grey Papers.

when, as Howick noted in his diary, 'I got Ld. Melbourne to give a grumbling consent to Sir F. Head's being chosen.'[1] Other Cabinets were deemed too short. On 5 May 1836 Howick entered in his diary that the Budget was 'discussed in a most hurried and unsatisfactory manner' just a day before Rice introduced it in the Commons.[2] For 14 July 1838 Lady Howick's share of their journal records a final example of a Cabinet (more amusing now than then)

> 'at which Henry was beyond measure provoked at the desultory do nothing way in which the business was gone through. ... Ld. Melbourne who was partly engaged with the newspapers now and then putting in a few of his sceptical remarks.' 3

Apart from his own department, Howick was most interested in colonial questions, particularly those of Canada. This was perhaps inevitable when he had been Under Secretary at the Colonial Office in Grey's time and when Glenelg failed in his responsibilities. But it caused constant friction between himself and Melbourne. The two major outbreaks of trouble will be examined here.

In April 1836 Howick involved himself in the problem created by the refusal of the Assembly in Upper Canada to vote revenues. Wishing to conciliate the French Canadian majority in the Assembly, Howick proposed to reform the British-dominated Legislative Council which was responsible to the Governor and not to the elected Assembly.[4] Melbourne and the Cabinet seemed prepared to let Howick, assisted by 'Mr. Over-Secretary' Stephen, do Glenelg's work for him.[5] But they then backed down when the King opposed what he saw as an attack on the royal prerogative.[6] Howick was furious and told Melbourne that his 'irresolution' would lead to 'inevitable and disgraceful failure.'[7] The Cabinet next accepted despatches to Lord Gosford

1. Diary, Grey Papers.
2. ibid.
3. ibid.
4. Howick diary 18, 20, 21 April.
5. ibid., 23 April
6. ibid. 29, 30 April.
7. Howick to Melbourne 30 May, Grey Papers.

1. Howick diary 3 June.
2. ibid. 8 June.
3. Howick to Melbourne 15 June, MP 7/55.
4. Howick diary 17 June.
5. Melbourne to Howick 17 June, Grey Papers.
6. Howick to Grey 19 November 1836.
   Howick diary 12 May 1837.
7. Melbourne to Russell 19 January 1837, MEL/RU/295.
8. 31 December 1837 MEL/RU/432.
9. Howick diary 28 December 1837.
10. Russell to Melbourne 31 December 1837, Grey Papers.
11. Melbourne to Howick 2 January 1838, Grey Papers.
12. Howick diary 3 January.
13. ibid. 5 January
14. ibid. 6 January
15. Howick diary 13 January.

(the Governor) which Howick had drafted, having been allowed to do so by Melbourne.[1] But the King objected to this course also.[2] Howick therefore could do no more than denounce the final instructions as totally vague and 'unmeaning' and warn Melbourne that 'the loss of the colony will very probably be the result of the weakness and indecision which has marked the whole policy of the government'.[3] Despite these attacks, Melbourne returned what Howick called 'a very good natured answer'[4] in which he observed,

> 'Somehow or other I do not think ... that the Catastrophe is so near in Canada, nor am I of opinion that the course to be taken in order to prevent it is clear.' 5

Over the next year Howick continued to slate the hapless Glenelg[6] whilst Melbourne continued not to see his way in Canadian affairs.[7] In October 1837 Howick seemed to be vindicated when the French Canadians rose in revolt. They were suppressed but it was clear that something decided had to be done about the Canadian constitution or the government would have to resign, as Melbourne admitted to Russell.[8] He even agreed with Lady Howick that he had not exercised enough control over Glenelg.[9]

Howick's solution at this juncture was an assembly of delegates from all the Canadian provinces with power to recommend wholesale constitutional changes.[10] Melbourne was ready to consider this but warned him, 'don't make pictures in your own mind. Don't fall in love with the beautiful creation of Mr. Stephen's fancy'.[11] In return Howick stigmatised Melbourne as favouring only coercive measures.[12] However, on 5 January 1838 he secured the creation of an advisory body for the new Governor, even if it was to be circumscribed more than he wished.[13] He also moderated the coercive measures, with Melbourne's agreement, and was pleased by the appointment of Durham as the new Governor.[14] Lady Howick thought that he had 'had his own way most remarkably.'[15]

But he ran into trouble when he re-drafted Durham's instructions (at Russell's request, Howick claimed) so as to leave Durham free to choose for himself the delegates from Upper Canada rather than have them elected by the Assembly there. This went against a Cabinet decision and was objected to by

Poulett Thomson and Palmerston. At the Cabinet on 20 January 'a most vehement and angry debate ensued and lasted till near seven o'clock', as Howick recorded.[1] That evening Melbourne asked Howick to be accommodating and to make 'mutual allowance.'[2] But, according to Lady Howick, this annoyed her husband 'exceedingly' so that 'he wrote a very sharp answer ending by throwing his place at his head.' She concluded despairingly, 'he was in a tantrum and would not heed me.'[3] Melbourne took Howick's letter in his stride and replied in what Lady Howick called an exceedingly good humoured way.[4] Having vented his anger, Howick accepted the Cabinet's rejection of his instruction to Durham, though with much grumbling.[5]

Melbourne's handling of Howick during these weeks had been a skilful exercise in restraint and tact. His true feelings came out only in a letter to Normanby on 24 January:

> 'we have had Cabinet upon Cabinet and the Devil and all to do with Howick about Canada, upon which he is as obstinate and wrong headed as possible.' 6

Melbourne's forebearance and equanimity were, as ever, two of his greatest strengths. His achievement in this respect is underlined by Howick's own admission, some years later, that he had often been in the wrong in his disputes during these years.[7]

But the fact remains that Melbourne had been wrong about Canada and Howick as right as could reasonably be expected in such complicated circumstances. Having failed over policy, Melbourne failed in personal terms the following year. With some reason Howick felt that he deserved promotion from his minor office in the Cabinet reshuffles of 1839. In particular, he had hopes of becoming Chancellor of the Exchequer. But Melbourne passed him over completely

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1. ibid., 20 Jan.
2. Melbourne to Howick 20 Jan., Grey Papers.
3. Howick diary 20 January.
4. ibid. 21 January.
5. ibid. 21, 22 January.
6. Mulgrave MM/179.
7. Greville diary 4 July 1846; V, 412.

and chose the safe candidate in Baring as Rice's successor. Egged on by his disgruntled father, and displeased at concessions to the Radicals, Howick resigned at the end of August.[1] Melbourne had a ready-made explanation for Howick's departure in Grey's attitude. He could therefore ignore his own failure to make adequate provision for a capable and deserving minister at a time when, as Russell complained, there were 'so many dumb dogs in the Cabinet.'[2] Even the faithful Holland thought Howick's departure 'a loss of vigour and intelligence, talent and honesty to the Government' which was 'fast assuming the fatal character of Mediocrity.'[3]

On this occasion Holland was startled to be told by Melbourne that

> 'a want of genius [was] no great defect in the government of a great nation and quiet and ease more the aim of a wise statesman than popularity, authority or splendour.'[4]

These sentiments are strikingly similar to those expressed by another prime minister after six fatiguing years in office. In August 1914, Asquith remarked,

> 'I could do with less cleverness: and should feel no anxiety if I had a few more Crewes and Greys. In public politics as in private life, character is better than brains, and loyalty more valuable than either ...'[5]

In Melbourne's case at least, such feelings were present from an early stage in his premiership. It was not exactly his fault that - to adapt Disraeli's famous phrase - Peel was stealing the Whigs' bright young men as well as their clothes.[6] And Melbourne managed the hand he had left with considerable skill, even success. But, well before 1841, it was apparent that mere dexterity was not enough.

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1. Howick to Melbourne, 21,24 August, MP 8/42,43
2. Melbourne to Russell, 28,29 August, MEL/RU/545,546. Russell to Melbourne, 31 August; Early Russell Correspondence, I.263
3. Holland diary 24-29 August, Add. Mss. 51872 f.1156
4. ibid., f.1158
5. M. Asquith, Autobiography (1920), II. 202
6. see Prest, Russell p.224

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

'Let us hope they [the Tolpuddle Martyrs] lived happily ever after in a land where Lord Melbourne would probably have been kept in a museum as a curiosity.'
G. B. Shaw; The Tolpuddle Martyrs, ed. W. Citrine (1934).

'But in the end, rather than shatter their own self-image and repudiate 150 years of constitutional legality, they [the rulers of England] surrendered to the law. In this surrender they threw retrospective light back on the history of their class, and retrieved for it something of its honour ...'
E. P. Thompson, Whigs and Hunters (1975), p. 269 [on the struggle for Parliamentary Reform 1780-1832].

It is impossible to understand Melbourne's prolonged success in holding together his difficult colleagues and retaining the loyalty of his supporters in the Commons without an appreciation of his personal qualities. These have been amply celebrated elsewhere, notably by Lord David Cecil, but it is appropriate to review here those which had some political relevance.

Superficially, Melbourne's contemporaries were most struck by what Hatherton described as his 'magnificent countenance.'[1] By the time he was prime minister, middle age and a self-indulgent diet may have made him not quite so 'exceedingly handsome' as Greville remembered him in 1815; but the painter Leslie described him in the late 1830's as follows:

> 'his head was a truly noble one; I think, indeed, he was the finest specimen of manly beauty in the meridian of life I ever saw.' 2

In an age which unashamedly recognised such purely physical qualities, Melbourne started with a great advantage.

He was more admired, however, for his honest and open manner. In the Lords his candour disarmed even his opponents; in private at Holland House he was noted for his utter freedom from affectation.[3] Creevey, who was a partisan of Grey, wrote in January 1836 that Melbourne's 'familiar, unguarded manner ... backed by perfect integrity' made him 'perfectly invaluable and invulnerable.'[4] Even the Times in its carping obituary conceded that he had possessed 'a cordial frankness of manner which ... acquired for him, on the whole, much popularity.'[5] These were important attributes at a time when Althorp's reputation for, admittedly, even more transparent honesty enabled him to sway the whole House of Commons.

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1. Hatherton diary 22 August 1835.
2. Greville diary 29 Nov. 1848; VI, 247-8.
   C. R. Leslie, Autobiographical Recollections (1860) I, 168.
3. Holland diary January - September 1836 Add. Mss. 51,871 f. 966.
4. Creevey to Miss Ord 29 Jan. Creevey Papers p. 650-1.
5. 25 November 1848.

Melbourne was also thought to be a brave leader of his party in the Lords. Holland wrote of his 'fearlessness of character' helping to 'endear him to his friends and ... ingratiate him with the publick.'[1] Another observer in the Lords, the neutral official Grant, thought Melbourne displayed great moral courage in facing the Opposition peers, whose superior numbers positively inspired him.[2] With some justice Melbourne could demand of Lady Holland in December 1839,'à propos' Ellice and other critics, 'why do they suppose the Chief is not ready to fight the battle? Has he ever flinched or shown any disposition to flinch?'[3]

For winning the affection of his party nothing could have been better calculated than his good-humour and geniality. He himself lamented to Lord Auckland in 1835 that 'the great fault of the present time is that men hate each other so damnably; for my part I love them all.'[4] His claim can be made good by reference to two incidents in 1839 when he had reason to be far from amiable. In May, after the Jamaica vote and the Bedchamber affair, Hume presented the Radicals' demands in person and 'at each item Hume made Lord Melbourne a speech, none of which he answered, but uniformly rubbed his hands, laughed, and said "What next?"'[5] In August Howick called to say farewell after resigning and noted in his diary,

> 'I wish it were possible to give the slightest idea of the frank, good humoured, manner singularly joined with a shrewd and amusing but cynical tone of observation which makes it impossible to have a conversation with him even upon a disagreeable subject without coming away pleased with him.' 6

As even the unbending Howick appreciated, Melbourne also won people simply by amusing remarks. Sometimes it was merely a case of deriding unimpressive figures, such as Manners Sutton - 'What a damnation fool that Speaker is!'[7]

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1. Holland diary January - September 1836, Add. Mss. 51,871 f. 966.
2. Random Recollections of the House of Lords, pp. 210-11.
3. Melbourne to Lady Holland 28 Dec. 1839, Add. Mss. 51,560 f. 69.
4. Torrens p. 349.
5. G. W. Featherstonhaugh to H. J. Fox 16 May, Bodleian MS Eng. Lett. c. 234 f. 152.
6. Howick diary 29 August
7. Holland diary n.d. [summer 1834] Add. Mss. 51,870 f. 758.

1. Hatherton diary 12 July 1836.
2. Melbourne to Holland, Add. Mss. 51,559 f.24.
3. MP 15/17.
4. Hobhouse diary 7 April 1838; V, 130-1.
5. Hatherton diary 25 November 1848.
6. Greville diary 29 November 1848; VI, 248-9.
7. Life and Labours of Albany Fonblanque, ed. E. B. de Fonblanque (1874), p.86.
8. Hatherton diary 25 November 1848

- or Howley, the Archbishop of Canterbury - 'He is the Damnedest fool alive.'[1] His sense of humour usually aspired higher than this, however. He confided to Holland just prior to the 1839 session of Parliament:

> 'Lord Lovelace will move the address. I hope he'll ravish us before he sets us asleep, and not set us asleep to ravish us afterwards.' 2

From Windsor on 1 November 1840 he dropped a casual line to Russell:

> 'I will take care of Jeremie, if he comes to-morrow, and see him knighted. I have forgot what he is going to be Governor of, but I suppose that he knows.' 3

Melbourne even had the distinction of making Howley and other bishops (including the earnest Blomfield) laugh, by remarking that 'the fellows now never preach less than an hour and a half.'[4]

Finally, there were characteristics which made his party aware that they served with an unusual as well as a pleasant man. Hatherton admired his 'knowledge of the world, his extensive reading, his great originality, his boldness, never departing from good taste, in expressing Prejudices'.[5] Greville noted a 'richness of talk' during which Melbourne was 'often paradoxical, and often coarse, terse, epigrammatic, acute, droll, with fits of silence and abstraction'.[6] Idiosyncrasies such as talking to himself aloud or transacting official business whilst in bed at his South Street house further intrigued all who knew him.

Melbourne may have fallen far short of being a compelling leader but it was enough that, as even so radical a figure as the journalist Albany Fonblanque testified in 1843, few men could have been more popular in all circles.[7] More specifically, Melbourne's enjoyment of office was, in Hatherton's words,

> 'continued to him longer than it would have been to any other man by the support of his Party in the House of Commons in consequence of his personal Popularity with them.' 8

An obvious but telling contrast can be drawn between him and Peel, whose personal limitations were a dreadful handicap in managing his followers long before the 'débâcle' of 1846.

After Melbourne's death in 1848, it was principally the memory of his personality which lasted. By 1867 Bagehot could not be sure of the facts about the famous Cabinet on the 1841 Budget and was obliged to add: 'Lord Melbourne's is a character about which men make stories.'[1] By the 1890's, despite the works of Torrens and Lloyd Sanders, Gladstone could do little more than muse, 'Wished we knew more of Melbourne. He was in many ways a very fine fellow.'[2] If he was remembered for anything else, it was usually for his success as Queen Victoria's tutor; even his latest biographer seems to rate this as his most positive achievement.[3] Melbourne may well deserve credit for this but the rapid decline in royal power after 1839 makes it a rather minor matter in any except a Court context.

His political role was not entirely forgotten: it was recalled by Hatherton and others on his death; and Torrens wrote his biography mainly to pay tribute to Melbourne's liberal Irish policy.[4] But Melbourne himself had done much to ensure his oblivion as a politician. He failed either to look after his correspondence[5] or to complete the autobiography he started in 1813. Above all, he had left behind - and more than half-cultivated - the image of a man indifferent to serious politics. He provided the necessary material right to the end of his premiership. On 8 July 1841 the Times reported an encounter between Melbourne and a deputation of discontented Scottish ministers: he re-stated their case to them, 'while the civil court protects you in the emoluments, the General Assembly prohibits your discharging the duties of office', and then added, 'would to God it were possible for me to become similarly situated.' When he walked down Pall Mall to attend the Lords for the first time after resigning office, Hatherton noted how

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1. W. Bagehot, The English Constitution (1867), p. 16.
2. J. Morley, Life of Gladstone (1904), III, 472.
3. Ziegler, Melbourne, pp. 363-4.
4. Torrens to Lady Monteagle n.d. [1877], Monteagle 13,380.
5. Sanders p. xvi.

> 'he evidently liked the Parade of displaying a 'poco curante' air before the Club Houses. As we came before the Carlton Club, he moderated his pace into a saunter.' 1

The reality behind this pose has been exposed, however, from the moment Sydney Smith published his 'Second Letter to Archdeacon Singleton' including the following passage:

> 'I am sorry to hurt any man's feelings, and to brush away the magnificent fabric of levity and gaiety he has reared; but I accuse our Minister of honesty and diligence: I deny that he is careless or rash: he is nothing more than a man of good understanding, and good principle, disguised in the eternal and somewhat wearisome affectation of a political Roué.' 2

It could, indeed, be only an affectation since Melbourne would certainly have agreed with Bagehot that 'politics are the only occupation a peer has worth the name'[3] and politics in the 1830's were anything but a game.

But, recently, Ziegler has gone even further and for the picture of an agreeable political lightweight substituted that of a man 'ambitious, cynical and almost wholly without political principle.'[4] Such words must of course be purely relative but it does not seem particularly apposite thus to bracket Melbourne with, say, Lyndhurst at the height of his career in the 1830's or Disraeli at the beginning of his. Melbourne had greatly modified the eager ambition of his first six years in the Commons by the time he became Irish Secretary.[5] He certainly acquired a taste for office but would probably have settled for something less than the Home Office in 1830; and it has been argued above that he became prime minister in 1834 and 1835 for larger reasons than private ambition. He came to enjoy his position and by 1841 did not like the prospect of being 'out'. But his feelings about his last two years in office were ambivalent. At moments of decision - May 1839, November 1840, May-June 1841 - he was not prepared to throw all other considerations to the winds for the sake of hanging on to office.

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1. Hatherton diary 6 September 1841.
2. S. Smith, Collected Works (1850), p. 625.
3. The English Constitution, p.144.
4. Melbourne, foreword.
5. Howick diary 29 August 1839.

His political principle, or lack of, also requires careful evaluation. Hatherton recalled how Althorp had often observed that

> 'Melbourne was generally supposed to be unfavourable to "progress" ... so he might be to any unnecessary change, and yet on every occasion on which the degree of any particular change was discussed in the cabinet at that time, Lord Melbourne had always sided with him.' 1

He perceived with great clarity where reform was really necessary. And he was not unsympathetic to many reforms. But if reform was not a necessity as a result of social or economic change, he often doubted if it was expedient to press for it. He hated encouraging agitation for anything which he could not deliver or which, if delivered, would merely disappoint. His government could not have done as much as it did, especially in Ireland, if Melbourne had not been essentially liberal. But such feelings were secondary to his overriding concern for the continuity of government and the orderly development of society. This was the great, unspoken thought behind his major decisions. He revealed it most graphically, if rather oddly when he described Lord Ashley, his nephew-in-law, to Queen Victoria as 'the greatest Jacobin in Your Majesty's dominions.'[2] To him it seemed that Ashley campaigned for factory reform without the slightest regard for the well-being or even the continued functioning of the country's economy. Such a sense of priorities was infinitely destructive and dangerous in the eyes of Melbourne who was, above all, a man of government.

These principles, allied to his abilities and personal gifts, made Melbourne well-equipped - perhaps uniquely so - to be, first, Home Secretary and, then, Prime Minister in a decade when, as he saw it, everything established was faced with advocates for its destruction.[3] Given the limited electorate of the 1830's, the short-term interests of the government did not necessarily

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1. Hatherton diary 25 November 1848.
2. E. Hodder, Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury (1886), I. 420-1
3. Hansard, li. 542 (24 Jan. 1840)

coincide with those of the governed, as the latter perceived them; but, by upholding these short-term interests, Melbourne probably also served the interests of the country at large. Given the balance of political feeling, and the inescapable limitations of administrative machinery,[1] governmental stability and a series of uninterrupted reforms were not (and are not) to be undervalued.

He was unwise, at least for the sake of his reputation, not to have resigned for good in 1839. But Ziegler's statement that, by clinging on to power, Melbourne 'debilitated his own party and allowed the country to drift rudderless towards disaster' appears a trifle melodramatic.[2] It may be more relevant to notice how his outlook and methods were no longer appropriate to the political scene. (The only exception is that Peel and Graham may have been unconsciously guided by his example when dealing with the Chartists in 1842.[3]) It is remarkable how Melbourne did not merely retreat into those negative and reactionary attitudes which marred Grey's retirement. But, equally, he could not learn new tricks. As Peel's 1841-46 government demonstrated, successful politicians now had to master economic, financial, even social questions. Even Stanley lost that pre-eminence which he had held during the great constitutional debates of the 1830's. It was not a world in which Melbourne had anything to offer. One small incident helps to pinpoint his limitations: in 1837 he criticised the intention of the English Tithe Commissioners to survey every parish, arguing that 'commuting the Tithes is the first object, Statistics are bu secondary.'[4] However justified Melbourne may have been in this particular case, his words seem to reveal a general attitude which was not shared by the new generation of politicians. The latter had a strong inclination to pretend, even if they did not believe, that statistics were of primary importance.

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1. B. Harrison, Eng. Hist. Rev., lxxxvi (1971), 576-9.
2. Melbourne, p. 363.
3. See: Gash, Peel, pp. 343-5, 350; Mather, Public Order, pp. 32-3, 208.
4. Melbourne to Russell 17 February, MBL/RU/310.

It was, however, a tribute to Melbourne as much as to any single politician that the main immediate issues of the Reform Bill era had been exhausted by 1841. In himself he was, and remains an unusually interesting example of that perennial phenomenon, the intelligent liberal conservative caught up in a period of violent change.

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