

Tony Little examines the meaning of terms in the political spectrum in the Victorian era.

VICTORIAN

By today's standards, Victorian politics were extraordinarily fluid. Lord Derby, the leader who led the Tories back from their Corn Law wilderness, began ministerial life as a Whig. Lord Palmerston, the first Liberal premier, served for more than two decades in Tory governments and the dominant Victorian Liberal, William Gladstone, was initially hailed as 'the rising hope of those stern unbending Tories'.¹ To complete the circle, the leaders of two clashing schools of Liberalism, Joe Chamberlain and the Duke of Devonshire,² were serving in Salisbury's Conservative Cabinet when Victoria died.



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Yet, despite the frayed edges and personal journeys, participants in the political process could place themselves securely within it and clearly recognise friend and foe. As W. S. Gilbert put it:

... every boy and every gal,
That's born into the world
alive,
Is either a little Liberal
Or else a little
Conservative!³

Central party organisation might have operated out of the back room of a Pall Mall club but, in the constituencies, election campaigns were fought with more expense, more vigour and more antagonism than is commonly found today.

Division was not limited to the two parties. Factions competed for the spirit of Liberalism giving identifiable, if fluid, left and right wings. The origins of this article lie in an editorial suggestion that Richard Cobden should be included as an exemplar of the right within the Liberal Party. Since the Victorian establishment regarded Cobden as a dangerous Radical and since *The Orange Book*⁴ has created a debate on the ideological roots of the Liberal Democrats, the spectrum of nineteenth-century Liberal opinion is worth further exploration.

Before the 1832 Reform Act, the dominant parties were the

Tories and Whigs, leavened by groups of Radicals and independents. As a further complication, there were around 100 Irish MPs in Westminster sometimes labelled Whig, Tory and Radical. But while the Irish Tories consorted easily with mainland Conservatives, the other Irish groups were likely to put tenant, nationalist or religious beliefs before party allegiance.

Under Peel, the Tories assumed the name Conservative and the parties representing the respectable left gradually adopted the Liberal label, even before the famous 1859 meeting in Willis's Rooms which formally brought together Whigs, Radicals and Peelites.⁵ However, the terms Whig and Radical did not fall out of use.

In a narrow sense, 'Whig' describes the descendants of the aristocratic families who backed the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and their adherents. To those in the more 'advanced' or 'independent' sections of Liberalism, Whig described a Liberal to their political right. Similarly, the term 'Radical' could be confined to those who professed Benthamite Utilitarian beliefs. However, any advanced Liberal could adopt Radical as a badge of honour, while more timid Liberals used Radical as a term of notoriety for those to their left. Since the terms left and right were not generally used by nineteenth-century politicians,

and at the acute risk of oversimplification, Radical and Whig will be used in this broader sense.

From right to left

Examining the perceptions of extreme left and right at the beginning of the Victorian period lifts some of the fog from the battles which the parties fought and also helps an understanding of how the Liberal factions were perceived.

The extreme right – ultra-Tories – defended an aristocratic, Protestant state. The established, national – Anglican – Church was the anchor of national unity linking the four kingdoms, providing a moral basis for law and order and lending a 'patina of sanctity' to institutions such as the universities, the monarchy and the electoral system, which justified resistance to change. Secondly, 'Land was a source of nationhood, stability, hierarchy, order and traditional values.' This justified the power and participation in politics of the aristocracy, whose wealth derived from land, and warranted a protected position for agriculture. But these privileges also obliged the ruling group to care for the deserving poor and to use the power of government to intervene against the abuses flowing from the industrial revolution.⁶

The extreme left, represented by the Chartists, acknowledged

His Favourite Part:
'Mr Gladstone is ever happy to appear in the character of a Scotsman.'
– Letter from the Premier's Secretary. (*Punch*, 2 December 1871) – the two claymores are inscribed 'Radicalism' and 'Toryism'

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that power was exercised by a landed elite:

The aristocratical government under which this country groans can only be subdued and changed by constant and vigorous efforts on the part of the people. Unless the controlling power of the State shall be speedily rendered decidedly popular, there is little hope that property can be made secure, industry free, and labour protected against the aggressions of the powerful.⁷

The Six Points demanded by the Chartists were the vote for all adult males, a secret ballot, annual parliaments, payment for MPs, elimination of property qualifications for candidates and equal-sized electoral districts – constitutional rather than economic objectives.

A common Liberal ideology

Liberals too accepted aristocratic participation in government – where else would be found men with the education and wealth to undertake government when schooling was not universal and MPs received no salary? The Lords exercised considerable authority over the Commons through patronage of candidates at elections, the funding of campaigns and the presence of family members as MPs. In 1859, 60 per cent of the Liberal Party's MPs were connected to the aristocratic and landed classes; barely more than 16 per cent had been involved in business.⁸

However, Liberals differed from Tories in promoting class harmony by incorporating those raised up by the Industrial Revolution. As Gladstone put it in a debate on Reform, 'I venture to say that every man who is not presumably incapacitated by some consideration of personal unfitness or of political danger, is morally entitled to come within the

pale of the constitution.'⁹ Thomas Babington Macaulay laid great stress on this element of Whig-Liberal philosophy:

A great statesman might, by judicious and timely reformations, by reconciling the two great branches of the natural aristocracy, the capitalists and the landowners, and by so widening the base of the government as to interest in its defence the whole of the middle class, that brave, honest, and sound-hearted class, which is as anxious for the maintenance of order and the security of property, as it is hostile to corruption and oppression, succeed in averting a struggle to which no rational friend of liberty or of law can look forward without great apprehensions.¹⁰

In time, this process was applied as successfully to the labouring classes as to capitalists.

Liberals were united by a belief in progress, reform to limit the power of arbitrary government and the landed oligarchy, religious toleration and the growth of popular self-government. By this reasoning, Liberals promoted free trade against sectional economic interests, sought reform and efficiency in the administration of government or church and saw retrenchment of government expenditure as reducing corruption, freeing individuals for self-improvement and preventing military adventures overseas.

A different purpose

Whigs divided from Radicals on the question of intent rather than economic egalitarianism. The Whig 'was willing to improve but anxious to avoid reconstructing. For him political change involved patching-up and improvising, and this was achieved by being pragmatic and flexible.'¹¹ As Macaulay

argued, 'Reform that you may preserve'¹² and 'we know of no great revolution which might not have been prevented by compromise early and graciously made.'¹³

Radicals embraced the Utilitarian aphorism that 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number is the foundation of morals and legislation'.¹⁴ From this they concluded that 'if we desire the people to be well governed, we must allow them to govern themselves',¹⁵ which led inevitably towards democracy. A narrowly based government regulated the economy primarily for the benefit of the elite and government expenditure was undertaken for the same purpose, John Bright claimed when he described foreign policy as 'a gigantic system of out-door relief for the aristocracy'.¹⁶ By attacking on the three fronts of electoral reform, de-regulation of the economy and retrenchment of spending, Britain would see 'a people building up the edifices of their liberties'.¹⁷

Whigs and Radicals shared overlapping views of what represented progress sufficient to form an alliance, but the difference of purpose, which showed in tactics, priorities and the details of legislation, was crucial. Attempts to take the party too far in a Radical direction were always vulnerable to a Whig revolt. Too much timidity left the leadership vulnerable to Radical rebellions and mass demonstrations. Both of Russell's governments were brought down by party revolts, three of Gladstone's administrations were destroyed by Liberal disagreements and Palmerston failed to construct a stable Liberal coalition for most of the 1850s. Riding the Whig and Radical horses in tandem was no easy task.

The following sections examine electoral reform and religion, both critical areas of friction where the Radical agenda was clearest; economic policy, where agreement prevailed; and Irish policy, which split the party apart in the 1880s.

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Democracy, that bare and level plain

The Whigs intended the 1832 Reform Act to be a lasting settlement which would enfranchise the middle class and provide representation for the newly industrialised cities but preserve the small borough seats which gave them their hold on the Commons. For a while, Russell was known as 'Finality Jack'¹⁸ for refusing to consider further reform. In the 1850s, when he needed Radical support, Russell regained his enthusiasm, but his bills for extending the franchise met with a poor response in 1851 and 1853, while an 1859 Tory bill was defeated on a motion proposed by Russell, paving the way to the first Liberal ministry. Despite a Liberal majority, for the next six years, Palmerston avoided bringing the issue to the test. As Cobden explained in 1859:

I rather think there is quite as much agitation about parliamentary reform in the House of Commons as in the country. It has got into the House of Commons, and they don't know what to do with it. It is bandied from side to side, and all parties are professing to be reformers; everybody is in favour of an extension of the suffrage; and, upon my honour, I think in my heart no one likes it much, and they don't care much about it.¹⁹

Frustrated by this lack of progress, Bright, Cobden's closest parliamentary ally, organised a campaign to demonstrate the popular demand for the vote, 'the question that will not sleep'. Speaking at Birmingham in 1865, he claimed that 'England is the mother of parliaments', before arguing that 'An Englishman, if he goes to the Cape, can vote; if he goes further, to Australia, to the nascent empires of the New World, he can vote ... It is only in his own country, on his own soil, where

he was born, the very soil which he has enriched with his labour and with the sweat of his brow, that he is denied this right.'²⁰

When Russell took office, after Palmerston's death at the end of 1865, he proposed a moderate extension of the vote only to suffer a defeat at the hands of a Whig clique, dubbed the Cave of Adullam by Bright. Led by Lords Lansdowne, Grey and Grosvenor, its spokesmen were Horsman and Robert Lowe.

The right-wing Whigs feared being swamped by an uneducated working class unable to distinguish their partisan interests from the interests of the nation, and the loss of Whig seats that might follow a redistribution to reflect an enlarged electorate. They were willing to contemplate an extension of the franchise only provided that it was accompanied by 'cumulative voting schemes, life memberships of the House of Lords, indirect election procedures, and other mechanical devices designed to preserve the ascendancy of the minority'.²¹ As Lowe maintained in a *Times* editorial:

We had a dream of an England made up of a society rising by distinct and well-marked gradations from its base to its summit, each part discharging its destined functions without envy and without discontent, with absolute personal freedom, under an equal law, divided between thinkers and workers, between owners and producers of wealth, with all that inequality between man and man which is the result of unrestricted freedom.²²

Later, in the Commons, he wound up a speech against Russell's bill by declaiming:

We are about to barter maxims and traditions that have never failed, for theories and doctrines that have

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never succeeded. Democracy you may have at any time. Night and day the gate is open that leads to that bare and level plain, where every ant's nest is a mountain and every thistle a forest tree.²³

The discontented Whigs reaped a poor reward from their rebellion, as Russell resigned and Derby's minority government allowed Disraeli to 'dish the Whigs' by carrying, in 1867, a bill more radical than anything Russell planned. The case against democracy was lost. In 1872 Lord Hartington, a Whig, introduced the secret ballot, to protect the new voters from bribery and intimidation and, in 1884, the anomalies in Disraeli's Act were eliminated in another large-scale increase in the electorate. Chastened by their experience of Tory duplicity in 1867, the 1884 reform act passed without further revolt by right-wing Liberals.

The greatest blessing

In Victorian Britain, the established Church enjoyed privileges for which members of other denominations paid, through tithes, while some professional posts required adherence to the Anglican Church. Before 1829, Catholics were unable to vote; it was 1858 before Jews could sit in the House of Commons and a non-believer, Charles Bradlaugh, fought for more than five years to take the seat he won as a Radical in 1880.

Whigs broadly supported the established Church, though assigning it a more subordinate position than the Tories, and the great Whig families enjoyed the patronage of Anglican church livings at a time when its vicars were an important part of the local power and educational structures. Palmerston helped to reconcile nonconformists to his government by appointing evangelical bishops and was also concerned to conciliate Irish Catholics. As

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he wrote to Russell, 'To raise and improve the condition of the Catholic clergy is an object which all rational men must concur in thinking desirable.'²⁴

The politically active nonconformists tended to be associated with the Radicals, campaigning for a 'free trade' in religion by removing all the special privileges enjoyed by the Anglican Church. It was the Radicals who pressed for the abolition of tithes, disestablishment and the abolition of religious tests for university posts. The nonconformist Radicals wanted to end state funding for church schools and backed the tighter control of alcohol licensing.

After the splits and failures of the 1866 Reform Bill, Gladstone reunited the party and won the 1868 general election with calls for the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland (which represented no more than 10 per cent of the Irish population). Disestablishment righted an injustice to Irish Catholics (80 per cent of the population) in a manner that reunited the Liberal Party – the nonconformists welcomed the weakening of Anglicanism and the Whigs averted the provision of state funding for Catholicism. Optimistically, Gladstone believed disestablishment would renew the Church of Ireland's missionary vocation. The accompanying disendowment of church funds provided for the relief of Irish poverty.

The comparative ease with which the Irish Church was disestablished gave a misleading sense of Liberal religious accord. Gladstone never contemplated disestablishment of the English Church and campaigns for the disestablishment of the Welsh and Scottish Churches became increasingly significant as Liberalism relied more heavily on Welsh and Scottish MPs after the split of 1886.

The religious disharmony was more publicly exposed in squabbles over education, the other issue hinted at in Gladstone's

manifesto of 1868. In 1870, primary education was largely in the hands of the Anglican Church but, even with some government funding, only 1.3 million out of 4.3 million children attended adequate schools.²⁵ W. E. Forster introduced a bill to create elected boards to fund schools from local taxation but preserving 'anything of the existing system which was good'.²⁶ Nonconformists and Radicals pushed hard for such state schools to be secular, or at least undenominational. Radical and Unitarian, Joe Chamberlain led a deputation to Downing Street comprising forty-six MPs and 400 members of the National Education League, declaiming that:

The Dissenters object to this measure, which they conceive will hand over the education of this country to the Church of England – entirely in many parts of the Kingdom, especially in agricultural districts ... Any Conscience Clause will be absolutely unsatisfactory.²⁷

Ultimately the bill, one of the great achievements of Gladstone's government, was pushed through with Conservative support despite 132 Liberal MPs voting against the leadership in one division and 133 abstaining.²⁸ The dual system of voluntary aided church schools and state schools with non-denominational religious education still survives but the disappointment of the Radical nonconformists contributed to the 1874 Liberal defeat and undermined Forster's chance of becoming leader in 1875.

Chastened but undeterred by the Radical mutiny over elementary schools, Gladstone upset the other wing of the party, in 1873, by tackling the even more complex problem of Irish university education. Trinity College, Dublin, was well funded but Protestant, while the Catholic equivalent was poorly endowed. Gladstone proposed

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a neutral umbrella university to which both Catholic and Protestant colleges could affiliate though controversial subjects, including theology, philosophy and modern history, were not to be taught.

To Lord Hartington, a leading Whig and Chief Secretary for Ireland, the proposals appeared tantamount to robbery of Trinity and its Fellows of their funds.²⁹ Horsman, one of the Adullamites, thought that the University Bill would hand education to the Catholic priests and 'aimed a deadly blow' at 'the greatest blessing that the British Legislature ever conferred upon Ireland'.³⁰ In contrast, nonconformists thought it acceptable, with Osborne Morgan stating it combined 'concession to the Roman Catholics with the strictest maintenance of the secular principle in State education'.³¹

This view was backed by neither the Conservatives nor the Catholic hierarchy. Ten 'English and Scotch' and thirty-five Irish Liberals voted against the bill, with a further twenty-two Irish Liberals abstaining. The University Bill was lost by three votes.³²

The monster monopoly

The key economic achievement of the left in the Victorian period was free trade. The Anti-Corn Law League did not repeat the Chartists' mistakes of using mass demonstrations to intimidate Parliament and threatening public order. Cobden and Bright, its Radical leaders, worked through Parliament to persuade the government to remove the duties on imported grain. In 1845, Russell announced that the Whigs had accepted Cobden's argument.

The Radical case for free trade, supported by the Whigs and more liberal Conservatives, was that indirect taxes on the necessities of life, such as bread, tea and sugar, weighed most heavily on the poorest, for whom the cost of food consumed the highest proportion of income. Free trade was redistributive, particularly

as government revenue became more dependent on income tax, paid only by the better off.

More importantly, the campaign leaders aimed to broaden the distribution of power and undermine privilege. As Cobden argued in 1844:

A band of men united together – the selfish oligarchy of the sugar-hogshead and the flour-sack ... have got together in the House of Commons, and by their own Acts of Parliament have appropriated to their own classes the very privileges, the self-same monopolies, or monopolies as injurious in every respect to the interests of the people, as those monopolies were which our forefathers abolished two centuries and a half ago ... We advocate the abolition of the Corn Law, because we believe that to be the foster-parent of all other monopolies; and if we destroy that – the parent, the monster monopoly – it will save us the trouble of devouring all the rest.³³

The repeal of the Corn Laws by Peel, in 1846, split the Tories rather than the Liberals, effectively keeping them out of power for nearly three decades. Peel's chief supporters were slowly absorbed into the Liberal Party. The Peelite William Gladstone, as Chancellor of the Exchequer under Aberdeen and Palmerston, completed the free trade reforms, as Cobden foretold.

Similarly, union recognition posed little Liberal division. In the 1850s, unions of skilled workers which provided membership benefits in addition to agitation for higher wages began sustained growth. The Trades Union Congress held its first meeting in 1868. Gladstone recognised, in the new unions, sound working men seeking legitimate self-improvement. His 1871 Trade Union Act gave the unions legal recognition

and protection for their funds in the case of strikes, but left Disraeli's Conservative government to establish the legality of peaceful picketing.

The early union leaders, such as George Howell, first Parliamentary Secretary of the TUC, were Liberals. Henry Broadhurst, who succeeded Howell, and Thomas Burt, the miners' leader, were among the first working-class members of parliament, as Liberals. Their views would not be considered left-wing today; as Joseph Arch, founder of a successful agricultural workers' union and himself later an MP, proclaimed, 'I do not believe in State Aid and land nationalisation ... Self-help and liberty, order and progress – these are what I advocate.'³⁴ In the 1880s, the socialist Social Democratic Federation gained a foothold in the union movement but no more than a foothold. It was more in frustration at the Liberal Party's refusal to give them an adequate role than from ideological differences that men like Keir Hardie, Henderson and MacDonald founded an independent Labour Party.

The regulation of employment divided both Whigs and Radicals. Led initially by Tory evangelical Lord Shaftesbury, between 1833 and 1901 a series of acts were passed restricting the minimum age at which children could work in factories, specifying that children should receive an education and limiting the hours that women and children could work. Between 1864 and 1894 legislation began to regulate health and safety at work.

Among Whigs, Macaulay argued, as the left would today, 'that, where the health is concerned, and where morality is concerned, the state is justified in interfering with the contracts of individuals ... Can any man who remembers his own sensations when he was young, doubt that twelve hours a day of labour in a factory is too much for a lad of thirteen?'³⁵ Brougham, a former

Lord Chancellor, opposed factory legislation.

For the Radicals, Fielden worked to limit the hours of women and children to ten a day but Bright countered that, while ten hours a day was 'quite long enough', he differed 'on the point whether a reduction in time ought to be carried by the Legislature or by a regulation between the masters and the operatives themselves.' Even forty years later, he wrote: 'I still hold the opinion that to limit by law the time during which adults may work is unwise and in many cases oppressive.'³⁶ This voluntarist case proved misguided but at a time of limited wages and no social security, when restricted hours risked reducing pay below subsistence levels, not inevitably so.

In the early 1870s, Chamberlain, as Mayor of Birmingham, used municipal ownership of the gas and water supply to provide funding for the redevelopment and slum clearance of the city. Although happy to see this described as socialism, Chamberlain's schemes reflected more his skills as a profit-generating entrepreneur. Chamberlain's break with the Liberal Party came before he had the opportunity to apply entrepreneurial skills to national government, but even the most radical ideas in his Unauthorised Programme of 1885 – compulsory purchase powers to create allotments in rural communities and the funding of free primary education from graduated income tax – were only modest forerunners of twentieth-century New Liberalism. Similarly, in the Newcastle Programme of 1891, formulated after the supposed 'drag' of the Whigs had been removed by the Home Rule split, the most that Liberals proposed by way of economic intervention was to limit the hours of adult male workers and to extend the liability of employers for industrial injuries. The theoretical underpinnings of the constructive use of state power were in development at

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the end of the century, but their practical application had to wait for Gladstone's departure.

Mischievous in its effects

The 1873 University Bill defeat magnified Gladstone's Irish difficulties, as Liberal representation in Ireland sank from sixty-five MPs in 1868 to twelve in 1874, when an independent Home Rule grouping of fifty-eight was elected. After 1880, under the leadership of Parnell, these nationalists perfected parliamentary obstruction and capitalised on violent rural discontent through the Irish Land League.

Britain traditionally dealt with such Irish problems by a combination of 'coercion' and compassion. Normal legal procedures were suspended to allow agricultural protesters to be locked up when local juries refused to convict. After order was restored, ameliorative measures were offered. Coercion, tolerated by the Whigs, some of whom were Irish landowners, was unwelcome to Radical civil libertarians. The second Gladstone government initially allowed the special legal powers to lapse and in 1880 proposed a Compensation for Disturbance Bill, overriding property rights to help small tenants in financial difficulties.

When this was defeated by a Whig revolt in the Lords, Irish violence rose and Forster, Chief Secretary for Ireland, reintroduced coercion, which Gladstone balanced with another round of land reform to satisfy Irish tenant demands for fixity of tenure, freedom of sale and fair rent. The bill, passed in 1881, offered a legitimate method of securing rent reductions, undermining the Land League. Nevertheless, the Whig Lord Lansdowne resigned over the Compensation Bill and the Duke of Argyll over the Land Act, both concerned that interference in the rights of landowners might spread to England. Both Irish ministers, Forster and Lord Carlisle, resigned over an understanding negotiated for Parnell's release from prison in

return for co-operation with the Land Act. In addition to property, Gladstone seemed to be sacrificing law and order.

These discontents form the background to Gladstone's 1886 Home Rule proposals. The 1885 general election produced a hung parliament. Ireland had returned no Liberals but eighty-five Home Rule MPs. The minority Conservative government was ousted on a demand for 'three acres and a cow' – allotments for agricultural labourers – and Gladstone began formulating proposals for 'the establishment of a legislative body in Dublin for the management of affairs specifically and exclusively Irish'.³⁷ The establishment of a religion would be excluded. 'Matters of defence, foreign policy, and international trade'³⁸ were reserved to the imperial parliament in London. The Irish parliament would include a second chamber to offer protection to Protestants and a land bill would give landowners security. English progress would no longer be subject to Irish obstruction. Yet leading Whig Lords Hartington, Selborne, Derby and Northbrook could not be enticed to join the ministry.

As Hartington's biographer conceded, 'Liberals had for years denounced the rule of men of one race or religion over those of another in Greece, Poland, Italy, Hungary, Turkey, without admitting that these principles could be used against the government of Catholic Irish by Protestant Anglo-Saxons'. Since 'Mr Gladstone applied Liberal principles honestly, sincerely, and above all, logically, to the case of Ireland', what were the Whig objections?³⁹ Hartington had made his opposition obvious in his manifesto of 1880:

No patriotic purpose is, in my opinion, gained by the use of the language of exaggeration in describing the Irish agitation for Home Rule. I believe the demand so described to be impracticable, and considering that

any concession, or appearance of concession, in this direction would be mischievous in its effects to the prosperity of Ireland as well as that of England and Scotland, I have consistently opposed it in office and in opposition and I shall continue to oppose it.⁴⁰

Gordon Goodman's article on the Liberal Unionists gives a broader explanation. The Whigs feared that Home Rule was only a step towards full independence. Ireland's example would be the signal for similar agitation within the Empire, and end in imperial disintegration. Moderate opinion was shocked by the virulence of the nationalist movement, which included barn burning, attacks on livestock, and the murder of Frederick Cavendish, the Chief Secretary for Ireland and Hartington's brother. Home Rule would be a craven surrender to malcontents and criminal anarchy. Finally, the spectre of Protestant Ulster subject to a predominantly Catholic parliament at Dublin was reason enough to reject Home Rule.⁴¹

The rebels, as Hamar Bass stressed, had an alternative: 'I was and still am prepared to support a very liberal measure of Local Self-Government for Ireland but I fail to see why such a measure should not be equally applicable to England, Scotland, and Wales.'⁴²

When the Home Rule Bill was put to the vote, ninety-three Liberals, the majority moderates and Whigs but including Chamberlain and Bright, ensured its defeat. Gladstonian Irish policy had tested Whig tolerance to destruction. In the ensuing election, the dissidents fought as Liberal Unionists in alliance with the Conservatives and the split was never healed. In the Salisbury government, which followed, county councils were introduced across the UK.

Conclusions

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power rather than income, about inequalities of privilege rather than class. In this context, figures such as Cobden and Bright, who were in the vanguard of those seeking to break down the monopoly of power and hand it over to the whole people, should be recognised as champions of the left rather than the right.

The Whigs were not opposed to the direction of change, but their resistance to the pace of progress, their fear of Gladstone's power to arouse the masses and their desire to retain a form of paternalism suggests that figures such as Lowe, Hartington and Argyll should be seen as figures of the right. To the Whigs, the rights of aristocratic property ranked above the creation of yeoman farmers in Ireland, the Anglican influence over education needed preservation from secularisation and the unity of the Empire was more important than devolution. Chamberlain once described Hartington as a 'drag on the wheel of progress'. After Hartington had brought Home Rule to a shuddering halt, his strain of Whiggism faded. Its champions were absorbed into an alliance with Conservatism that held power for most of the next two decades.

The attempt to carry Home Rule marked the high-water mark of Gladstonian Liberalism. The party needed a new direction. Attempts, by Rosebery and other rightward-leaning Liberals in the 1890s, to promote imperialism and national efficiency enjoyed only limited electoral appeal. The alternative, which proposed that Liberalism should 'concern itself with the liberation and utilisation of the faculties and potencies of a nation and a municipality, as well as those of individuals and voluntary groups of citizens',⁴³ proved more fruitful. The Liberals returned to government in 1905 principally as a result of Tory quarrels over protectionism and this New Liberalism, which promoted the constructive use of government intervention to rectify social problems, proved a

success under Asquith's leadership. From this new approach and from the new Labour Party came a redefinition of what it meant to be on the left.

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- 1 Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Critical & Historical Essays* (Dent, 1963 edn.), Vol. 2, p. 237.
- 2 Known as Lord Hartington for most of his career.
- 3 Sir William Schwenk Gilbert, *Iolanthe*.
- 4 Paul Marshall & David Laws (eds.), *The Orange Book* (Profile Books, 2004).
- 5 Norman Gash suggests that by 1841 newspapers were classifying MPs as Conservatives and Liberals in reports of election results; Norman Gash, *Aristocracy and People: Britain 1815–1865* (Edward Arnold, 1979), p. 163.
- 6 This paragraph and its quotations are derived from D. G. S. Simes, *A Long and Difficult Association: The Ultra Tories and the 'Great Apostate'*, http://www.archives.lib.soton.ac.uk/wellington/pdfsforall/pol_simes_ed.pdf, pp. 4–8.
- 7 Geo. Huggett, Address to the People of Lambeth, 1839, *Pro Ho* 44/32/114.
- 8 T. A. Jenkins, *The Liberal Ascendancy* (Macmillan, 1994), p. 105.
- 9 In the House of Commons, 11 May 1864.
- 10 Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Hallam* (1828), reprinted in *Critical & Historical Essays*, (Everyman, 1966 edn.), Vol 1, pp. 74–5.
- 11 Joseph Hamburger, *The Whig Conscience*, in Peter Marsh (ed.), *The Conscience of the Victorian State* (The Harvester Press, 1979), p. 20.
- 12 Thomas Babington Macaulay, Speech in the House of Commons, 2 March 1831, in Duncan Brack and Tony Little (eds.), *Great Liberal Speeches* (Politico's, 2001), p. 70.
- 13 Macaulay, *Hallam*, op. cit., p. 75.
- 14 Jeremy Bentham, *The Commonplace Book* (1843).
- 15 John Roebuck, quoted in David Roberts, *The Utilitarian Conscience*, in Marsh, *The Conscience of the Victorian State*, p. 56.
- 16 John Bright, Speech at Birmingham, 29 October 1858, in Brack and Little, *Great Liberal Speeches*, p. 139.
- 17 Lord John Russell, quoted in Jonathan Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (Yale, 1993), p. 189.
- 18 See Spencer Walpole, *Life of Lord John Russell* (Longmans, 1889), Vol 1, p.

The Victorian parties were fighting about the distribution of power rather than income, about inequalities of privilege rather than class.

- 290, and his speech to the Commons, 20 November 1837.
- 19 Speech at Rochdale, 18 August 1859, from John Bright and J. Thorold Rogers (eds.), *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy by Richard Cobden* (1870).
- 20 J. Thorold Rogers (ed.), *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy by John Bright MP* (Kraus Reprint 1970), Vol. 2, pp. 112–114.
- 21 James Winter, *Robert Lowe* (University of Toronto Press, 1976), p. 197.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 198.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 225.
- 24 James Chambers, *Palmerston: 'The People's Darling'* (John Murray, 2004), p. 218.
- 25 J. L. Garvin, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain* (Macmillan, 1932), Vol. 1, p. 103.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 106, quoting from T. Wemyss Reid, *Life of the Rt Hon W. E. Forster*, Vol. 1, p. 461 (1888, reprinted by Adams & Dart, 1970).
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 112.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 116.
- 29 Bernard Holland, *Life of the Duke of Devonshire* (Longmans, 1911), Vol. 1, p. 110.
- 30 Quoted in J. P. Parry, *Democracy and Religion: Gladstone and the Liberal Party 1867–1875* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 361. Parry gives a detailed analysis of the religious affiliations and problems which beset Gladstone's first government.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 362.
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- 33 Richard Cobden, speech of 8 February 8 1844, London, in Brack and Little, *Great Liberal Speeches*, p. 97.
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