Businessmen in the British Parliament, 1832-1886

A Study of Aspiration and Achievement

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Contents

Abstract

The businessmen who were elected to the British Parliament after the First Reform Act had not acquired country estates or rotten boroughs as had their predecessors. They were critical of the established aristocratic dominance and they had policies they wanted to promote. Few succeeded in exerting any real influence due to the entrenched power of the landed gentry, their older age when elected and their lack of public experience.

This thesis identifies six businessmen who were important contributors to national politics and were thus exceptions to the more usual parliamentary subordination to the gentry. They were generally younger when elected, they had experience in municipal government and with national agitation groups; they were intelligent and hard working. Unlike some other businessmen who unashamedly promoted sectional interests, these men saw their business activities as only incidental to their parliamentary careers. Having been in business did however provide them with some understanding of the aims of the urban working class, and it also gave them the financial backing to enter politics.

The social backgrounds and political imperatives of this group of influential businessmen and how these affected their actions are discussed in this thesis. Their successes and failures are analysed and it is argued that their positions on policy issues can be attributed to their strong beliefs rather than their business background. Reference is made to the achievements of contemporary aristocratic politicians and compared with those of the businessmen. It will be shown that, particularly during the period between the first two Reform Acts, the aristocratic ascendency continued. However it is argued that for the businessmen to have reached the level of influence they did was a significant achievement in itself.

Declaration

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John Michael Davey

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Introduction

The fifty years between the First and Third Reform Acts saw many changes in the political, economic and social life of the British people. Increased urbanisation, a growing awareness of social responsibility and the pride of belonging to the most powerful and wealthiest nation in the world were contributors to a different society. The years 1828 to 1834 are considered by some writers to mark the end of the *ancien regime* and the beginning of bourgeois individualism. The historian J.C.D.Clark considered that the Test and Corporation Acts of 1828, the Emancipation of Roman Catholics in 1829 and the passing of the First Reform Act in 1832 marked the end of the 'long eighteenth century' and of Anglican-aristocratic hegemony.[1] The sociologist T.H.Marshall saw the period as one in which social rights were divorced from citizenship for the first time. He contends that the Poor Law Act of 1834 'renounced all claims to trespass on the territory of the wages system or to interfere with the forces of the free market' and that the early Factory Acts followed this trend.[2] Before 1832 bankers, merchants and industrialists had become members of parliament but only after acquiring country property and essentially joining the 'landed gentry'. The majority of the members of the House of Commons were from aristocratic and land-owning families but some wealthy businessmen bought electorates and became members. It was not until the passage of the 1832 Reform Act that businessmen with different aims to those previously elected became members of parliament. Many of these new men espoused reform principles – of parliament, trade, education, the military and more – quite distinct from the established Tory and Whig groupings. They called themselves 'Radicals' or 'Progressives'

1 J.C.D. Clark, *English Society1688-1832*: *Ideology, social structure and political practice during the ancien regime,* Cambridge University Press, 1985, 350-399.

2 T.H.Marshall, *Class, Citizenship and Social Development,* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1973 (first published 1964), 80-81.

and were looking to break away from the customs and traditions of the past; they believed in the advancement of the people generally and in the benefits of scientific development.[3] An evaluation of their motivations in entering politics, the difficulties they encountered, the issues that concerned them most, their achievements and their legacies will provide an insight into this transition period in British politics.

The bicameral structure of the English Parliament was established in the middle of the fourteenth century with the summonsing of the 'commons' (the knights and burgesses) together with the 'lords' to advise the king.[4] A fundamental change in the relationship between sovereign and parliament occurred following the 'Glorious Revolution' when William III and Mary II accepted the 1689 Bill of Rights which set out a new constitutional order, limiting the monarch's powers without recourse to the Parliament.[5] The typical Member of Parliament at this time was from the social elite with more than half being from titled families and few from lower than gentry status; land-holding was almost obligatory and those with 'moneyed interest' were objects of suspicion.[6]

A property qualification was mandated by the Land Qualification Act of 1711 and, although easily circumvented, the majority of eighteenth-century MPs came from the small group of the landed. There were merchant MPs but they usually owned country estates as did those who had become wealthy in India and the West Indies.[7] Perhaps not typical, but exemplars of businessmen entering the Commons before the First Reform Act, are two famous names, Peel and Gladstone, both fathers of future prime ministers. Each had accumulated considerable fortunes

[3] R. K. Webb, *Harriet Martineau: A Radical Victorian,* New York: Columbia University Press, 1960, 364-5.

[4] Chris Given-Wilson, "The House of Lords, 1307-1707", in *A Short History of Parliament,* edited by Clyve Jones, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009, 16.

[5] Paul Seaward "The House of Commons, 1660-1707", in Jones *A Short History of Parliament*, 126-7

[6] ibid, 131.

[7] Bob Harris, "The House of Commons, 1707-1800", in Jones, *A Short History of Parliament*, 172-176.

before entering parliament; Peel in the manufacture of cotton calico, Gladstone as a Liverpool merchant with slave plantation holdings.

The way most Britons lived and the way they were governed had changed little in centuries until the Industrial Revolution exploded on them in the last quarter of the eighteenth-century. It was, in Harold Perkin's words 'a revolution in men's access to the means of life, in control of their ecological environment, in their capacity to escape from the tyranny and niggardliness of nature.'[8] The rise in manufacturing and the development of the factory system led to a rapid increase in population, a generally higher standard of living, a geographical redistribution of people and, importantly for this work, the development of new social classes with a greater interest in how they were governed.[9] Industrial growth inevitably increased urban growth, largely in the north and midlands, and provided the country with two new groups – the wealthy middle-class who owned factories, mines, railways, banks and the industrial working-class who earned their livelihood through the wage system. Both groups had an impact on British politics but in the period covered by this thesis it was the businessman who played a bigger and increasingly important role in national affairs.

A few days after royal assent was given to the First Reform Act *The Times* implored electors 'to organise, and not rest until the work be accomplished, election committees in every quarter, for the effectual return to the approaching Parliament of candidates in the interest of the people.'[10] The writer warned against the election of a Tory Government which could quickly reverse the gains made. In the lead up to the first election under the new Act, *The Times* was more philosophical:

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[8] Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880,* London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969, 3.

[9] Those issues are expertly covered in Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society*; Eric J. Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State: Early Industrial Britain 1783-1870,* London: Longman, 2001 (Third Edition).

[10] *The Times*, Tuesday, June 12 1832. The third reading passed the Lords on June 4 and royal assent given on June 7.

> It cannot be too frequently repeated, or too constantly borne in mind, that the great Act of Reform, or the change in our electoral system, is not an end in itself, but the means to an end. The object to be attained is good government and wise laws, through the control which reform gives the people in the choice of their own lawgivers, and the management of their own affairs.[11]

The writer went on to discuss the men who might be elected. 'It is not a change in the rank or the class of men sent to Parliament that we look for, it is to a change in the influence by which they are returned, and in the control exercised over their conduct.' Those expressing these views clearly had hopes that extending the franchise to more property owners and the removal of some 'rotten' boroughs in favour of the enlarged manufacturing towns would provide a member more responsive to his electorate's priorities. There was the expectation that these new members would be more active in addressing the social challenges of the times and would argue for appropriate legislation.

They didn't however foresee the continued dominance of the 'governing class'.[12] 'The middle class', in G.Lowes Dickinson's view, 'was to be admitted to a certain share of political power, but their influence was to temper, by no means to control the government'[13] Several more recent historians have concurred with this view. 'When the dust had settled', according to E. A. Smith, 'the political landscape looked much as it had done before.'[14] Smith goes on to stress that although the electorate had been increased, only about one in seven adult males were enfranchised and that the prosperous middle class had allied themselves to the aristocracy to secure the existing system. Peter Mandler holds that the Whigs' idea of enfranchising the 'people' meant only those with sufficient

[11] *The Times,* Saturday, September 1, 1832.
[12] G. Lowes Dickinson, *The Development of Parliament during the Nineteenth Century,* London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1985, 40.
[13] ibid, 40.
[14] E.A Smith, *Reform or Revolution? A Diary of Reform in England, 1830-2,* Stroud, Gloucestshire: Alan Sutton, 1992, 141.

property and Norman Gash saw the Reform Act as something of a failure because many of the abuses of the unreformed system continued.[15] The gentry, both old and new, continued to supply the majority of members to parliament, whether Tory or Whig, for some years after 1832 and, as G.M.Trevelyan put it, 'people of the social standing of Cobbett, Cobden and Bright were stared at as oddities.'[16] Phillips and Wetherall employed statistical methods on what electoral data is available to argue 'the critical, indeed watershed, role of the Great Reform Act'.[17] Their main finding is that reform destroyed the old political ways and essentially introduced the modern party system because there was a new found articulation of principle by politicians.[18] This is a persuasive argument with Peel enunciating Tory principles in his famous Tamworth Manifesto of 1834.[19] Whilst the overall composition of the Commons may not have changed that much, the first election after the Reform Act saw the election for the first time of the prolific writer but inconsistent activist, William Cobbett, the first practising Quaker, Joseph Pease, and the young, and conservative, William Ewart Gladstone.[20]

The 1832 Act increased the number of voters in Britain from under half a million to over eight hundred thousand, still less than twenty per cent of adult males, let alone females.[21] The Second Reform Act, of 1867, increased this to two and a half million, about one-third of adult males in

[15] Peter Mandler, *Aristocratic Government in the Age of Reform: Whigs and Liberals 1830-1852*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, 129; Norman Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel: A Study in the Technique of Parliamentary Representation*, 1830-*1850,* London: Longmans, 1953, x-xi.

[16] George Macaulay Trevelyan, *British History in the Nineteenth Century (1782-1901),* London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1924, 241.

[17] John A.Phillips and Charles Wetherall, "The Great Reform Act of 1832 and the Political Modernization of England", *The American Historical Review,* Vol. 100, No.2 (April 1995), 411.

[18] ibid, 412.

[19] *The Times* of 19 December, 1834 commented 'Upon the whole it appears to us that Sir Robert Peel's prospectus of the policy to be pursued by his Administration is creditable to himself and satisfactory to the public.'

[20] S.F.Woolley, "The Personnel of the Parliament of 1833", *The English Historical Review,* Vol.53, No.210, (April 1938), 244, 261.

[21] Michael Brock, *The Great Reform Act*, London: Hutchinson, 1973, 311-3.

an increasing population.[22] It was an Act which for the first time enfranchised some workingmen, albeit the skilled and respectable, and not any of the great mass of labourers.[23] Reform bills had been introduced into the Commons in 1852, 1854, 1859, 1860 and 1866 but failed partly because of lack of interest and confusion, partly because a majority of MPs feared what might happen.[24] In 1867, however, a Bill was passed which has been described as 'one of the decisive events, perhaps *the* decisive event, in modern English history', and 'one of the most remarkable pieces of legislation of the Victorian period'.[25] The many changes of position both between and within the Conservative and Liberal parties has been analysed extensively[26]. Saunders labelled it 'the most perplexing' of the five reform acts which shaped the modern electoral system. Much of the argument revolved around the value of property holding which would confer the vote and how that was to be administered, particularly with regard to who actually paid the rates on the property. It therefore was much concerned with the type of person who would become a voter, and by extension which candidate they might support. There was concern that ignorance might prevail and a fear that, according to Walter Bagehot, 'a political combination of the lower classes, as such and for their own objects, is an evil of the first magnitude, the supremacy of ignorance over instruction and of numbers over knowledge.'[27] This concern was largely unfounded and parliamentary representation continued essentially as before; even the election of the first working-class members in 1874, as Liberals, presaged negligible change in the composition of the

[22] Philip Salmon, "The House of Commons, 1801-1911", in Jones, *A Short History of Parliament,* 262.
[23] F. B. Smith, *The Making of the Second Reform Bill,* Melbourne University Press, 1966, 9.
[24] ibid, 229.
[25] Gertrude Himmelfarb, "The Politics of Democracy: The English Reform Act of 1867", *The Journal of British Studies,* Vol. 6, No. 1, (Nov. 1966), 97; Robert Saunders, "The Politics of Reform and the Making of the Second Reform Act, 1848-1867", *The Historical Journal,* 50, 3 (2007), 571.
[26] See the works given in footnotes 22 and 23, and Maurice Cowling, *Disraeli, Gladstone and Revolution: The Passing of the Second Reform Bill,* Cambridge University Press, 1967.
[27] Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution,* London: Collins, 1964 (first published 1867), 277.

Commons.[28] Walter Arnstein went further by challenging any thought that even the middle class had any real political influence throughout the Victorian period.[29]

The Third Reform Act, or more accurately the Franchise Act of 1884 and the Redistribution Act of 1885, could be argued to have had a more profound effect on British political life than its predecessors.[30] Hayes suggests that with the change in size and nature of the electorate and the extensive disfranchisement of smaller boroughs democracy had been achieved in Britain.[31] The franchise was extended to many manual labourers, particularly agricultural workers and miners; the number of electors increased to over sixty per cent of the adult male population.[32] The redistribution eliminated smaller borough seats with seventy-two being absorbed into county constituencies, and, more importantly, the ratio between the smallest and largest electorates was reduced from 1: 250 to 1: 8.[33] Hayes saw these changes as 'the inevitable "passing of the Whigs'.[34] This legislation, together with the Secret Ballot Act of 1872 and the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Prevention Act of 1883, made British electors freer, less subject to pressure from landlord or employer, and perhaps indirectly led to the split in the Liberal Party in 1886. Indeed Morley and Bryce, both supporters of Gladstone and Home Rule, believed that lowering of the suffrage led inevitably to the move towards self-government for Ireland.[35]

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[28] Eugene C. Black, *British Politics in the Nineteenth Century,* London: Macmillan, 1970, 346.

[29] Walter L. Arnstein, "The Myth of the Triumphant Victorian Middle Class"*, Historian,* Vol.37, No.2, (February, 1975), 207.

[30] See for example, Mary E.J. Chadwick, "The Role of Redistribution in the Making of the Third Reform Act", *The Historical Journal,* 19, 3 (1976), 665.

[31] William A. Hayes, *The Background and Passage of the Third Reform Act,* New York: Garland Publishing, 1982, 277-8.

[32] Salmon, "The House of Commons", 262.

[33] Chadwick, "The Role of Redistribution", 683.

[34] Hayes, *The Background and Passage of the Third Reform Act*, 286.

[35] John Viscount Morley, O.M., *Recollections,* London: Macmillan, 1918, Volume 1, 182. H.A.L. Fisher, *James Bryce (Viscount Bryce of Dechmont),* London: Macmillan, 1927, Volume I, 198-199.

Alongside these parliamentary reforms the country experienced important social changes. It was a period of rapidly growing population, of gradual improvements to housing and sanitary conditions and to education and medical services. Industrial production grew considerably and exports increased as the principles of free trade became accepted by most. Working conditions improved as centralised regulation and inspectorates were introduced. It was also a period of relative peace with the Crimean War of 1857-59 being the only continental conflict; there were of course the disasters of 1839-42 in Afghanistan, the Zulu War of 1879 and the Khartoum massacre of 1884. Nevertheless by mid-century Britain was clearly the most powerful and prosperous country in the world. The population of the United Kingdom probably doubled in the fifty years to 1831 ('probably', because the first full census of Great Britain was not conducted until 1801, and that for Ireland until 1821). This rate of increase continued for England, Wales and Scotland but not for Ireland because of the potato famine and the consequent huge numbers who emigrated. For the period covered by this study the British population increased from 16.4 million in 1831 to 29.8 million in 1861 and 33.1 million in 1881.[36] At mid-century (1851 census) agriculture was still the most important industry, employing more than two million people, but by 1871 there were more people in domestic service than in agriculture, and more in commerce and finance than in either.[37] This clearly shows the increasing affluence and sophistication of a significant section of the population in the last quarter of the century. Despite the economic recession experienced in the 1830s and 40s the British economy, as measured by Gross National Product, rose by fifty per cent between 1831 and 1851, and really took off with the prosperity of the fifties, sixties and seventies. GNP tripled between 1831 and 1881, with not only increases in

[36] All the figures quoted are taken from Phyllis Deane and W.A. Cole, *British Economic Growth 1688-1959 Trends and Structure,* Cambridge University Press, 1969, 5-9. The dates used are of course census years.

[37] All statistics from Deane and Cole, 143.

manufacturing and mining but even greater rises in trade and transport.[38] There is an indication of the change from an essentially production based economy to that of a finance and investment one. Average money wages followed a similar pattern, essentially remaining constant until mid-century then rising quite steeply until the 1880s.[39] Deane and Cole examine several major industries to evaluate wage variations, showing often different trends. For example both the cotton and woollen industries showed declines in wage rates in the early years, but from 1850 'no industry shows so great a proportionate advance'. A different pattern occurred in the engineering, shipbuilding and building industries with employees enjoying 'a marked increase of real wages throughout the century.'[40]

Alongside this increase in activity and wealth was another side to Britain. At the beginning of his book on the late Victorian period, John Harrison quotes from a book written by an American, Henry George, published in 1881, titled *Progress and Poverty,* which asserts that 'in the midst of the most bounteous material conditions the world had ever seen there remained widespread want.'[41] Harrison describes, somewhat graphically, the working and living conditions of the 'working class', essentially those living in London and the northern and midlands industrial towns. The size of the new urban areas, and their congested living conditions, increased the incidence of disease which eventually saw political action, often prompted by philanthropists or scientists.[42] The late sixties marked the change from what Dicey calls the 'Period of Individualism' to the 'Period of Collectivism', with increased state intervention in social and workplace matters previously considered of

[38] ibid, see Table 37, p 166.
[39] ibid, 22-26.
[40] ibid, 26.
[41] J.F.C. Harrison, *Late Victorian Britain, 1875-1901,* London: Routledge, 1991, 13.
[42] Oliver MacDonagh, *Early Victorian Government, 1830-1870,* London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1977, 133.

private concern.[43] Many businessmen politicians resisted such developments, believing that they contrary were to free trade principals and damaging to workplace efficiency. Despite such opposition the reform of social issues continued, often with the support of aristocratic members. It could be argued that central government involvement started much earlier with the passage of the Factory Act of 1833. Before this government confined itself to 'administering justice, collecting taxes and defending the realm.'[44] The Poor Law Act of 1834 was an early national initiative but many others followed – the Ten Hours Act of 1847, the Public Health Act of 1848, the Education Act of 1870 – being only a few of them.

Throughout the period people's attitudes were partially shaped by many, usually well organised, extra-parliamentary organisations. The Birmingham Political Union was founded in 1830, by 'respectable men' to seek a number of economic reforms but recognised that this would require political reform first.[45] The economic depression in the late 1830s saw the development of working-class societies all over the country who demanded acceptance of the six point 'People's Charter'. A petition with over one million signatures was presented to the Commons and there was loss of life in various demonstrations. Although there was concern that revolution could break out, agitation died down by 1842, perhaps because of the middle-class Anti-Corn Law League's campaign.[46] By 1838 the Corn Laws were seen by Radicals as a symbol of the power of the landed class especially in regards to unfair taxation and a limitation on trade, and it supplanted the campaign for the ballot as the Radical rallying point.[47] Although the Irish potato famine was the ultimate reason for Peel pushing through repeal, it was generally acknowledged that the adoption of free

[43] A.V. Dicey, *Lectures on the Relation between Law and Public Opinion in England during the Nineteenth Century,* London: Macmillan, 1962 (first published 1905), 63-4.

[44] David Roberts, *Victorian Origins of the British Welfare State,* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960, 13.

[45] Nancy D. LoPatin, *Political Union, Popular Politics and the Great Reform Act of 1832,* Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999, 33-36.

[46] Derek Beales, *From Castlereagh to Gladstone 1815-1885,* London: Thames Nelson, 1969, 103.

[47] Norman McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League 1838-1846,* London: Unwin University Books, 1968, 20.

trade principles greatly helped increase Britain's prosperity in subsequent years.[48] One final example of 'pressure groups' is that in the field of education. The most significant was the National Education League, formed in Birmingham in 1869 to promote 'universal, compulsory, non-sectarian and free' primary education and called 'the most powerful engine of agitation since the Anti-Corn Law League'.[49]

Against this background of social, economic and parliamentary change it would be expected that the composition of the House of Commons would change. That the dominance of the landowning class continued is asserted by many historians.[50] Perkin however detected some change after the First Reform Act and, whilst still accepting the continuance of aristocratic rule, suggested it was now 'by consent not by prescription'.[51] The cliometrician William O. Aydelotte analysed data on some eight hundred men who sat in the House of Commons from the general election of 1841 to that of 1847.[52] He found that this Parliament was heavily dominated by the nobility and landed gentry and their relatives; he calculated that this group constituted seventy-one per cent of the membership.[53] The counting of businessmen was, Aydelotte admits, difficult mainly due to defining who actually was one; nevertheless he estimates those who were 'actively engaged in the operation or control of major business enterprises' was twenty-two per cent of the members. He concludes that:

> Throughout the detailed research I have constantly been impressed by the comparative homogeneity of this parliament by any of the ordinary standards of social measurement. These men were for the most part wealthy,

[48] ibid, 208-9.
[49] J.L. Garvin, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain,* London: Macmillan, 1935, 94.
[50] See for example W.D. Rubinstein, *Britain's Century: A Political and Social History, 1815-1905*, London: Arnold, 1998, 44-5; T.A. Jenkins, *Parliament, Party and Politics in Victorian Britain*, Manchester University Press, 1996, 102; M.L. Bush, *The English Aristocracy: A Comparative Synthesis,* Manchester University Press, 1984, 54.
[51] Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society,* 315.
[52] William O. Aydelotte, "The House of Commons in the 1840s", *History,* Vol.39, No.137 (October, 1954), passim.
[53] ibid, 254.

> persons of consequence in their own communities, an *elite* who in their general character and composition differed profoundly from the population of England as a whole.[54]

The extensively quoted work of W.L. Guttsman, written some ten years after that of Aydelotte, essentially confirms the earlier findings, showing that the aristocratic-gentry group continued to contribute over seventy per cent of members at least up until the Second Reform Act.[55] In a more recent statistically based work Ellis Wasson studied over eighteen thousand individuals, members of two thousand eight hundred families, who provided most hereditary members of the Lords and up to four out of five members of the Commons from the Middle Ages to the Second World War.[56] His work shows that a small group of elite families exercised a remarkable continuity of political service over a long period of time. The importance of the aristocrat was not confined to the Commons. Throughout the period covered by this thesis the Lords was crucial to the passing of legislation.

Listings of members of parliament, often with background information, were published during the nineteenth-century.[57] Both Dod and Bean provide much detail and occasional useful, if only tempting, snippets of information; neither writer discussed the electoral results nor the motivations and achievements of the members. Perhaps the first to do this in a scientific way was Sir Lewis Namier in his classic study of an eighteenth century parliament.[58] He showed that less than a quarter of the 1761 Parliament had no parliamentary ancestry, and the majority of

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[54] ibid, 257-8.

[55] W.L. Guttsman, *The British Political Elite,* London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1965, Table III, 41.

[56] Ellis Wasson, *Born to Rule: British Political Elites,* Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2000, passim.

[57] For example, Charles R. Dod, *Electoral Facts From 1832-1853 Impartially Stated,* (edited by H. J. Hanham), Brighton : The Harvester Press, 1972 (First published 1852), and William Wardell Bean, *The Parliamentary Representation of the Six Northern Counties of England from 1603 to the General election of 1886,* Hull : The Author, 1890.

[58] L.B. Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III,* London: Macmillan, 1929.

these were merchants and financers.[59] But these were quite different times and they were quite different men to their counterparts in the nineteenth century. Some fifty or fifty-one merchants were returned to the 1761 Parliament with at least thirty-seven having extensive business dealings with the government; the ministry often encouraged merchants to stand for constituencies which would be costly to contest with the expectation that such expenditure would be re-couped through government contracts.[60] Of the twenty-two financiers who underwrote government loans at this time fifteen had sat in Parliament – and four could not, being either Jewish or foreign born.[61]

The leader writer in *The Times* quoted earlier expected a more responsive, and perhaps more dedicated member than previously sat but not a different type of man.[62] The businessmen who were elected in the election after the First Reform Act were generally from the 'most wealthy, gentrified and patrician industrial families'.[63] Some simply continued an eighteenth century style of politics, entering parliament simply to promote the industry of their area. George Hudson, 'the Railway King', represented Sunderland for over twenty years, using his position to promote the extension of the rail system and to protect the shipbuilding industry of the borough.[64] Sir Daniel Gooch was Chairman of the Great Western Railway, centred at Swindon in the electorate of Cricklade, and believed that 'the Railway Company should have as one of the members for Cricklade one who will give his attention to their interests.'[65] This thesis however deals with businessmen who do not fit either the gentrified or the self-interested Member of Parliament. Neither were they, like the majority of businessmen members, complacent

[59] ibid, 208.
[60] ibid, 61-2.
[61] ibid, 69-70.
[62] *The Times,* Saturday, September 1, 1832.
[63] J. P. Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain,* Yale University Press, 1993, 99
[64] Richard S Lambert, *The Railway King, 1800-1870: A Study of George Hudson and the Business Morals of his Time,* London: George Allen and Unwin, 1934, 182, 226.
[65] H.J. Hanham, *Elections and Party Management Politics in the Time of Disraeli and Gladstone,* London: Longmans, 1959, 41.

back benchers whose only value to their party was to support it in divisions of the House.

After reviewing the members of parliament listed by Dod and Bean discussed earlier, more recent works that address the entry of businessmen into politics,[66] books on specific industrial families,[67] and the many contemporary and modern biographies of the famous, and not so famous, politicians of the period, six men have been identified for analysis in this thesis. The writings of these men, their parliamentary and public speeches, and the later analyses of generations of historians allow a detailed evaluation of these six men's values and aspirations, what they hoped to achieve and what they actually did. This study of the personal side of the lives and political fortunes of six prominent businessmen presents an alternative approach to the earlier prosopographical studies mentioned. It analyses them as individuals who chose to enter politics for reasons that were important to them. It goes on to show how they went about their mission and what they were able to achieve. It suggests that it was their personal beliefs and ambitions rather than their common business background that influenced their actions. All were successful businessmen acquiring sufficient wealth to be able to develop their political careers over a relatively long period of time. Unlike most businessmen elected to the parliament five of the six became influential cabinet ministers and the sixth, Richard Cobden, refused offers from two prime ministers. Each of them played an important role in determining his party's policies by virtue of his position and access to the prime minister of the day. Their motivations for entering national politics, the difficulties that confronted them in doing this, the successes, and

[66] For example, H.L. Malchow, *Gentlemen Capitalists: The Social and Political World of the Victorian Businessman,* Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991 and G.R. Searle, *Entrepreneurial Politics in Mid-Victorian Britain,* Oxford University Press, 1993.

[67] Such as W.G. Rimmer, *Marshalls of Leeds: Flax Spinners, 1788-1886,* Cambridge at the University Press, 1960; M.W. Kirby, *Men of Business and Politics: The Rise and Fall of the Quaker Pease Dynasty of North-East England, 1700-1943*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984; Jack Reynolds, *The Great Paternalist: Titus Salt and the Growth of Nineteenth-Century Bradford,* London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1983.

failures, they had and what, if any, legacy they left is discussed in the body of this thesis.

Richard Cobden and John Bright were Lancashire cotton manufacturers, although Cobden was born in Sussex and returned to live there in later life. They are often discussed together because of their work with the Anti-Corn Law League and free trade; and indeed they were close friends and political allies. Cobden was only sixty when he died, and consistently refused ministerial appointments. Bright lived into his eighties and became a respected senior statesman. William Edward Forster and Anthony John Mundella owned fabric manufacturing businesses; Forster a factory producing worsted in Yorkshire, Mundella one making stockings in Nottingham. Both became prominent cabinet ministers. William Henry Smith became a partner in his father's London newspaper distribution business; he turned it into a very profitable enterprise and himself into a wealthy man. He too was long a cabinet minister. The youngest of this group of businessmen turned politician is Joseph Chamberlain, the 'screw king' of Birmingham. A partner in the first British company to mass produce wood screws he made enough money from selling his interest in the business when just forty to spend the rest of his life in politics.[68]

Cobden, Bright, Forster, Mundella and Chamberlain were all radical or advanced Liberals and were usually associated with reform causes. Smith however was a Conservative and his political career was marked by the support of established institutions. Each man's political development and how it affected their priorities and legacies is discussed in some detail. In particular their achievements in relation to those of the aristocratic politician are evaluated. It will be argued that Forster's 1870 Education Act was the only major national initiative that can be directly attributed to any of these men and that overall their legislative record was not as impressive as that of the gentry. This thesis analyses the reasons why this was so. Nevertheless that these men reached the upper levels of

[68] The many contemporary and modern biographies and analytical works of these men are provided in the body and bibliography of this thesis.

British nineteenth century politics marks them as outstanding contributors and the precursors of a very different parliamentary representation in later years. An assessment of how each of them was viewed by later generations is made showing that Cobden's free trade and non-interventionist views survived for many years and that Chamberlain's name, through two parliamentary sons, continued. Forster, however, had a significant influence on British life overall by the introduction of universal primary education.

Many of the speeches and letters, and some diary entries, of Cobden, Bright and Chamberlain have been published and this material is still being added to; for example Anthony Howe is currently editing volumes of Cobden's letters with only the early years yet published. These have been invaluable primary source material for this thesis. In addition to these the considerable manuscript sources of the three men have been consulted; all held in archives of the city of their residence – Cobden's in Chichester, Bright's in Rochdale and Chamberlain's in Birmingham.

Forster, Smith and Mundella are less well served both through published primary material and in manuscript form. Many of Forster's papers were destroyed by his widow after they had been used by his first biographer, T. Wemyss Reid, but a small amount of manuscript material was found in the Bradford and Trinity College, Dublin archives. The manuscript sources for Smith and Mundella are largely of correspondence. Those of Smith were consulted at the W.H. Smith company archives at Swindon.

These primary sources have been supplemented by extensive reading in the secondary literature on nineteenth-century politics and biography, and in the relevant newspapers and magazines.

1
Getting There

The passing of the First Reform Act in 1832 is the starting point for this analysis of businessmen entering the British parliament. The Act saw the enfranchisement of the middle-class and the beginning of a fairer distribution of electorates. It also saw a new type of MP – the working businessman. These were often manufacturers, closely associated with their electorates[69]. The first election under the new Act, in December 1832, resulted in a massive defeat for the Tories who had opposed its passage, and the election of some industrialists 'of great respectability'.[70] They came from some of the wealthiest and most gentrified of the great industrial families; names like Philips from the Manchester cotton industry, Wedgwood synonymous with porcelain and Stoke, Marshall and the Leeds flax industry, and Guest of iron founding fame. There were few nonconformists despite the Duke of Wellington's complaint that the Reform Act had handed England from Anglican gentlemen to dissenting shopkeepers.[71] But it was at this election that the first Quaker entered parliament. Until that time Quakers were forbidden by their sect from taking any interest in politics even to the extent of reading political reports in the newspapers.[72] Joseph Pease came from an influential North-East England family which had interests in woollen manufacture, railways and coal-mining. He resisted the opposition of his family to take the seat of South Durham as a Radical-Liberal.[73] His parliamentary career was undistinguished, highlighted by his support for the anti-slavery cause and his strong opposition to restricting the hours of work for factory children.[74]

[69] Rubinstein, *Britain's Century*, 44-46.
[70] Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government,* 99.
[71] ibid, 100.
[72] Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers,* Oxford University Press, 1970, 189.
[73] Kirby, *Men of Business and Politics,* passim.
[74] ibid, 58.

He retired from politics in 1841 to give his full attention to his business activities.

The first of the new breed of activist businessmen-politicians were those who entered parliament to further the repeal of the Corn Laws. The initial stance of the Anti-Corn Law League from its foundation in 1838 was to be above politics.[75] By 1840 however it was recognised that a parliamentary presence was needed to promote repeal and it was agreed that the League should support free trade candidates in radical constituencies.[76] John Benjamin Smith, a Manchester cotton merchant and one of the founders of the Anti-Corn Law League, contested a by-election in Walsall in February 1841 and was narrowly defeated. However at the general election of June that same year a more important figure, Richard Cobden, was elected for Stockport. He was soon joined at Westminster by the man with whom he was associated with until his death, John Bright. Bright was elected to represent the city of Durham in July 1843 but only after a petition had unseated his opponent at an earlier by-election.

Both Cobden and Bright had involved themselves in local politics from an early age, initially as advocates of an improved education system, a common cause amongst Radicals throughout the middle years of the nineteenth century. However it was in the area of municipal government that they first achieved political success. Cobden had moved from London to Manchester in 1832 to establish a calico printing business and soon became actively involved in many educational and business organisations.[77] He was one of the principal advocates of the establishment of the Manchester Corporation and was amongst the first

[75] Paul A. Pickering and Alex Tyrrell, *The People's Bread: A History of the Anti-Corn League,* Leicester University Press, 2000, 58.

[76] McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League, 83.*

[77] Cobden biographies include John Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden,* London: Chapman and Hill, 1881 and the more recent, Nicholas C. Edsall, *Richard Cobden: Independent Radical,* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986 and Wendy Hinde, *Richard Cobden: A Victorian Outsider,* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.

aldermen elected when this occurred in 1838.[78] Bright was born and lived all his life in Rochdale, working in the family's cotton spinning business. As a Quaker he was not encouraged to get involved in matters political, but he did so when in his early twenties as a founder-member of the Rochdale Reform Association, one of the country's first local electoral registration associations.[79] The passing of the Municipal Corporations Act in 1835 was important in the development of Radical politicians firstly because it allowed the non-landed to stand for elected office, and secondly because it complemented the 1832 Reform Act in reducing the political influence of Anglican Tories.[80] The increasing size of the industrial cities in the northern and midland areas of England meant that local government became more important than it had been due to the more complex issues being faced by high density living. It was often the local businessmen who were elected to councils that attacked these problems. This experience provided some with both the expertise and the desire to see changes on a national stage.

The ambitions and achievements of Joseph Chamberlain are a classic example of this progression. He went from being a wealthy screw manufacturer to Mayor of Birmingham to Cabinet Minister in less than 10 years.[81] Like many others of his kind, his first public interest was in education, initially with the Birmingham Education Society in 1867 but more importantly with the National Education League, its successor in 1869. Garvin calls the League the 'most important engine of agitation since the Anti-Corn Law League' and Chamberlain, its vice-chairman, its

[78] Hinde, *Richard Cobden,* 48-49.

[79] There are numerous biographies of Bright – George Macaulay Trevelyan, *The Life of John Bright,* London: Constable, 1913; Herman Ausubel, *John Bright: Victorian Reformer,* New York: Wiley, 1966, Keith Robbins, *John Bright*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979.

[80] G.B.A.M. Finlayson, "The Politics of Municipal Reform, 1835", *The English Historical Review,* Vol. 81, No. 321 (Oct., 1966), 673-5.

[81] Chamberlain's life is well chronicled: initially by Garvin, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, 1935, later by Richard Jay, *Joseph Chamberlain: A Political Study,* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981, and Peter T. Marsh, Joseph *Chamberlain: Entrepreneur in Politics,* Yale University Press, 1994.

'mainspring'.[82] The League wanted primary education to be universal, compulsory, non-sectarian and free and as such opposed the official policy of the Liberal Party, the party Chamberlain was later to represent in the parliament. Chamberlain's term as Mayor of Birmingham from 1873-76 was a period of frenetic activity in which he used his business skills to improve the town's financial base. He took the gas and water utilities out of private hands, improved the service provided and increased profitability, he improved the social environment with better libraries, concert halls and public parks, and started the removal of slum dwellings.[83]

By taking a leadership role in the new municipalities the businessman adopted a role similar to that of the gentry in the counties, occupying positions of both authority and responsibility. Involvement in local government provided a logical link to parliamentary representation particularly if the individual espoused a national cause such as education. The provincial businessman was invariably well known in his area and often had a supportive, or least acquiescent, workforce to help his political aims. It was different in London with its multiple electorates and more diffuse population. London businessmen entered parliament of course, often in later life and often combining it with metropolitan politics. William McArthur was an Irish woollen merchant who moved to London and expanded his business into banking and insurance, became a wealthy man and eventually Lord Mayor. He entered parliament in the 'restlessness of middle age, rather than great political principle' and became a confirmed backbencher.[84] Robert Fowler, a Quaker banker, and also a Lord Mayor of London, entered politics as 'a matter of conviction' but his parliamentary life was, according to one historian, only 'time serving and heckling'.[85]

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[82] ibid, 94, 97.
[83] Garvin devotes a chapter entitled "The Great Citizen in Action" to Chamberlain's achievements as Mayor, op. cit., 185-214.
[84] Malchow, *Gentlemen Capitalists*, 94.
[85] ibid, 160, 182.

Of a rather different character was William Henry Smith, the London newspaper distributor. He seems to have had political ambitions early in his life and was elected to the Metropolitan Board of Works, essentially the predecessor of the London County Council, when he was just thirty and working long hours in his father's business.[86] He was involved in charity work with the Bishop of London's fund to alleviate the living conditions of the poor and first stood for parliament, although unsuccessfully, when he was forty. His address to the electors of the City of Westminster on that occasion was short but interesting. He declared himself to be a 'man of business resident amongst you' and to be 'prepared to devote myself to your interests', being 'unconnected with either of the great political parties'. He was ambivalent in regards to electoral reform but wanted to maintain the supremacy of the Church of England, including the continuation of church rates. He claimed to be 'desirous of extending the utmost liberty of thought and action in matters of conscience'. His final paragraph reveals his attitude to social issues:

> To the many social questions which occupy the public mind at the present day I should desire to give most careful attention, as I believe the prosperity of the nation to be dependent, under the blessing of God, upon the education, morality, and providence of all orders and classes amongst Her Majesty's subjects.[87]

This statement of belief seems to be almost an afterthought but it does show something of the influence of religious thinking amongst the middle class and their almost compulsory concern with the behaviour and improvement of the working class. The significance of religion in shaping the careers of the 'new' men entering parliament and the influence it had on policy decisions is a factor in understanding their motivations and actions.

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[86] Sir Herbert Maxwell, *Life and Times of the Right Honourable William Henry Smith, M.P.,* Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1893, 99.
[87] WHSP, PS 1/72, April 1865.

Writing in the *Oxford History of England* series in 1936, Sir Robert Ensor was quite firm about the importance of religion in the mid-nineteenth century; 'no one will ever understand Victorian England who does not appreciate that among highly civilized countries it was one of the most religious that the world had known.'[88] He goes on to identify the type of Christianity developed, at least amongst Protestants, as laying most emphasis on conduct – 'a doctrine of salvation by works'. This position is also taken by Max Weber in his classic work on Protestantism and Capitalism, where he writes that the Reformation moved men's thinking towards 'fulfilment of duty in worldly affairs' and 'obligations imposed upon the individual by his position in the world.'[89] It was a feature that permeated the middle class, including the businessmen discussed here, irrespective of religious affiliation. The development of Evangelicalism which stretched beyond its origins in Methodism to include the Low Church group in the Church of England and some parts of other Non-conformist churches brought a new dimension to religious activism.[90] The evangelicals were prominent in national public campaigns such as the abolition of slavery in 1833 and the passage of factory legislation in 1847 which limited the working hours of women and children. They were also much involved in private philanthropy and founded dozens of societies to help poor children, 'fallen' women, animals and much more. Melnyk estimates that three-quarters of the charitable organisations of the period 'were Evangelical in character and control.'[91]

It might be assumed that Anglicans and Dissenters worked comfortably together in these reforming issues but it was not a grouping of equals. The Church of England was still the established church and its

[88] R.C.K.Ensor, *England 1870-1914,* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963 (first published February 1936), 137.
[89] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* London : Unwin Paperbacks, 1985 (first published 1904-5 ; first translated into English 1930), 80.
[90] For more detail on Evangelicalism see, for example: John Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland 1843-1945,* London: Routledge, 1994, 20-30, and Julie Melnyk, *Victorian Religion: Faith and Life in Britain,* Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2008, 19-22.
[91] Melnyk, *Victorian Religion,* 21.

numbers enjoyed privileges which the nonconformists − and Roman Catholics and Jews − did not. Although the Test and Corporation Acts which prevented Dissenters from holding any public office were repealed in 1828 and other discriminating matters, such as allowing marriage to be celebrated in other then Anglican churches, were removed in the 1830s, Anglicans were still dominant in areas such as education and politics. It has been argued that such disadvantages led the nonconformists into significant industrial and commercial activity.[92] Neither is it surprising that they played a leading role in campaigns to limit the Anglican grip on education from primary level to the universities and in endeavours to limit the political influence of the Church. It has long been said that the Church of England was 'the Tory party at prayer' and there was some truth in this in the nineteenth century. The Church itself generally believed that the Conservatives would be more likely to sympathise with their concerns and in the case of major issues such as disestablishment they did. It can be argued that this may have been more a case of preserving the constitutional and social systems as they were than pious zeal.[93] But it was Conservative administrations that enacted reforming legislation reducing the power of the Church. The alignment of Whigs and Radicals, which became the Liberal Party in the 1860s, whilst generally in favour of religious reform, contained diverse groups ranging from the traditional land-owning Whig who wanted the Church of England maintained as the established church even if its privileges were somewhat curtailed, to the nonconformist businessman, lawyer or intellectual who wanted an equality of state support and opportunity.[94]

The Radical wing of the Liberal Party, J.P. Parry argues, largely because of its significant nonconformist membership, provided a major impetus to the Party both in terms of policy and popular appeal.[95] The

[92] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic,* 39-40
[93] Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain,* 130.
[94] ibid, 131-2.
[95] J.P Parry, *Democracy and Religion: Gladstone and the Liberal Party 1867-1875,* Cambridge University Press, 1986, 199-257.

nonconformists brought a moral fervour into politics which was shared by few Anglicans, although Shaftesbury and Gladstone were important exceptions, the first an evangelical, the second High Church. Such was the diversity of religious views and political action in the Victorian era. The dominant themes of nonconformist political action were not surprisingly disestablishment and secular education. In a survey of radical MPs' voting patterns on these issues after 1867, Parry concludes that a solid bloc of 115 members consistently supported both these aims.[96] This is a substantial number in a House of just over 600 and those members would have expected to have some influence on the decisions of a Liberal government of which they were members. Parry goes on to query the religious commitment of the urban radicals – especially the industrialists and commercial men – and suggests that 'it is probable that most urban MPs supported disestablishment in large because nonconformists and working men both pressed for it.'[97] This is an assertion that will be tested by examining the religious and political imperatives of the small group of important businessmen-politicians discussed in this thesis. There is surprisingly little emphasis on the influence of religion on political beliefs in the writings and biographies of any of the politicians discussed in this thesis. In a letter to George Combe in 1846 Cobden writes 'I have a strong religious feeling, a sympathy for men who act under that impulse; I reverence it as the great leverage which has moved mankind to powerful action'.[98] But in the same letter he insists that secular teaching is a necessity. He is less than enthusiastic about a simplistic reliance on Christian principles in a letter to John Bright in 1849: 'If I wished to do as little work as possible, I should wish to be able to convince myself that I was in the path of duty when I folded my arms and exhorted people to pray for the triumph of Christian principles.'[99] Morley concludes that: 'It was thus from the political and not from the religious or humanitarian side

[96] ibid, 229-30.
[97] ibid, 231
[98] Quoted in Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden,* Vol. I, 200-2.
[99] ibid, Vol. II, 55-6.

that Cobden sought to arouse men to the criminality of war.'[100] When assessing Cobden's character Morley is firm in noting that Cobden said little on religious questions; 'politics were the commanding interest of his life.'[101] Cobden was a life-long Anglican thus this picture is consistent with a non-evangelical member of that Church.

John Bright, Cobden's long-time friend and close associate in the Anti-Corn Law League, in opposition to the Crimean War and support of the North during the American Civil War, was born a Quaker and remained one all his life. His earliest biographer does note that: 'Mr Bright admitted that he had been greatly influenced on the subject of peace by his training in the principles of the religious body to which he belonged.'[102] In a long description of Bright's person, his style and his character Robertson, however, says nothing about the influence of his religion on his public life.[103] Even a more analytical biographer comments that Bright never spoke at meetings of the Society of Friends, and criticized other Quakers for supporting the anti-slavery cause whilst ignoring the plight of the English poor and agitating against state funding for Church education but refusing to act against the Corn Law.[104] Writing in 1843 about his perception of the Quaker lack of sympathy for the poor he asks, 'can these men be blind to the causes of the miseries of the people?' He was however supremely confident in his Christianity, writing to his son in 1866 about his friendship with a Parsee: 'Thou might show him how the power and greatness of the world seems to go with Christian faith, and how the nations most eminent and most extending, as England and America, accept it in its purest and simplest form.'[105]

William Edward Forster was born and educated a Quaker but was expelled from the Society when he married an Anglican, Jane Arnold,

[100] ibid, Vol. II, 71.
[101] ibid, Vol. II, 478.
[102] William Robertson, *The Life and Times of the Right Hon. John Bright,* Rochdale: The Author, 1877, 204.
[103] ibid, 487-512.
[104] Trevelyan, *The Life of John Bright*, 103,105,106.
[105] JBP F/5/1/BRI-6 John Bright to his son John Albert, 1 Oct. 1866.

daughter of the famous Rugby School headmaster, Dr Thomas Arnold.[106] He did not rejoin the Society when the marriage ban was lifted, nor was he baptised into the Church of England, although he attended their services with his wife. At a time when the religious allegiance of politicians was regarded as important, Forster's lack of formal ties was of some significance.[107] William Henry Smith came from a family whose religious affiliations were 'curiously difficult to unravel.'[108] Both his biographers record his attendance at Methodist services in his early years but note his lifetime commitment to the Church of England and his onetime wish to be an Anglican priest.[109] He seems to have had a real dedication to the established Church. Anthony Mundella's father, an Italian political refugee, was a Roman Catholic, but Mundella himself was educated at a Church of England school. W.H.G.Armytage, his only biographer, quotes him as saying of his schooldays, 'creeds and catechisms were my special abomination, and even the beautiful collects of the Church of England were imposed on me so often that they became distasteful.'[110] The last of the group of businessmen who had successful political careers, and arguably the most controversial, was Joseph Chamberlain. He came from a Unitarian family, 'the extreme left of the dissenters', and maintained his membership into adulthood, although several of his biographers note his lack of interest in religion.[111] More significantly, Beatrice Webb (at that time still Beatrice Potter), who had an

[106] WEFP TD MS 4986/50 Otley Monthly Meeting, Oct. 21, 1850 :

> W.E. Forster having married in a manner contrary to our rules, this meeting has seriously considered his case, and is of the judgement that it is needful to disown him. We therefore hereby discontinue his membership with us. At the same time the Meeting inclines to express a feeling of continued interest in his welfare, and also wish, that at some future time he may be re-united with us in religious fellowship.

[107] Patrick Jackson, *Education Act Forster: A Political Biography of W. E. Forster, (1818-1886),* Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1997, 31.

[108] Viscount Chilston, *W.H. Smith,* London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965, 8.

[109] Maxwell, *William Henry Smith,* I, 107; Chilston, *W.H. Smith*, 8-9.

[110] W.H.G. Armytage*, A.J.Mundella 1825-1897: The Liberal Background to the Labour Movement,* London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1951, 16, (the source of this quotation is not given)

[111] For example, Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain,* xii.

intellectual and romantic relationship with Chamberlain, wrote of his bitterness and rejection of religion because of the early deaths of his first two wives.[112] In 1884 she records him as saying: 'I have always had a grudge against religion for absorbing the passion in man's nature.'[113]

It seems fair to conclude that, although these men were brought up in Christian households, were educated in Christian schools, and for the most part observed some Christian practice throughout their lives, the influence on their actions and political thought was of a secular rather than a religious nature. They were driven by factors outside the teachings found in the Bible and Church dogma. This somewhat shallow respect for religious principles was reflected in the attitudes of many of the population. The only official religious census ever undertaken in Great Britain was conducted on Sunday 30th March 1851. It was aimed at establishing the number of buildings used for public worship, the number of sittings provided and the number of people present. The results were startling to contemporaries: of the 10.4 million people who could have attended worship that day over five million did not, and those that did were almost equally divided between the established Church and others, largely Christian dissenters.[114] The reliability of the figures was questioned but there is clear evidence that the bulk of the non-attendees came from the labouring classes in the industrial towns.[115] The results of the census do show the lack of religious commitment by many and questions the assertions of earlier commentators, such as Ensor, that religious thinking was of overriding importance during this period.

In the early part of the nineteenth century it was generally accepted that the landed gentry had some responsibility for the welfare of their

[112] Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie, *The Diary of Beatrice Webb,* Volume One 1873-1897, *Glitter Around and Darkness Within,* London: Virago Press, 1982, 266-7.
[113] Beatrice Webb, *My Apprenticeship,* Penguin Books, 1971 (first published 1926), 176.
[114] Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church,* London: Adam and Charles Black, 1970, 363-369.
[115] David M. Thompson, "The 1851 Religious Census: Problems and Possibilities", *Victorian Studies,* Vol II No. 1 (Sept. 1967), 88.

tenants.[116] It was often applied in a condescending and admonitory way which exercised control and guidance rather than benevolence.[117] But it did provide the sustenance needed for tenants on agricultural properties in times of illness or poor harvests. This personal approach was weakened and became more arbitrary following the introduction of the new Poor Law in 1834. This law introduced central government oversight of poor law institutions, providing a reason for the landowner to reduce his contribution. Some industrialists followed the paternalist path of the landed gentry; the prime example is Titus Salt. In many ways he was typical of radical, dissenting woollen manufacturers of his time, deeply committed to political reform yet strongly opposed to improvements in working conditions embodied in the Factory Act of 1844 and the Ten Hour Act of 1846.[118] He did however show an almost aristocratic benevolence to his workmen, financing the establishment of a local building society, and famously building the town of Saltaire between 1850 and 1875 which housed 4-5,000 people on a greenfield site when completed.[119] The very naming of the town shows something of his character as does his parliamentary candidature in 1859 as 'he was in no real sense politically ambitious, but his social ambitions had taken flight; he wanted to create an industrial dynasty and needed a parliamentary seat to confirm his prestige.'[120] The *Reynolds News* of 1 May 1859 dismissed him as a 'breeches pocket' candidate. Ultimately he only sat for two years and contributed nothing to national political policy.

Of the more influential businessmen-politicians only Forster appears to have indulged in anything approaching paternalism. He was fortunate to have been in partnership with William Fison in a worsted mill at Burley-in-Wharfedale, near Bradford, Yorkshire. Although Fison was an Anglican Tory he and Forster worked well together for over forty years, with Fison

[116] David Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England*, London: Croom Helm, 1979, 4, 130.
[117] ibid, 275.
[118] Reynolds, *The Great Paternalist*, 117, 130.
[119] ibid, 256-305.
[120] ibid, 201.

running the day-to-day activities of the business when Forster entered into national politics.[121] But in addition to operating a factory they built a school, library and lecture hall to provide educational and social facilities for their workers and their workers' children.[122] Whilst this might appear as simply another act of benevolence from the wealthy to the poor, Forster was to carry through his dedication to provide accessible education to the wider community with his Education Act of 1870. The positions taken by both Cobden and Bright show no evidence of paternalism. Bright wrote to Cobden:

> We differ from others, or from many other politicians in this – we propose not to make a trade of politics, and not to use, as may best suit us, the ignorance and the prejudices of our Countrymen for our own advantage – but rather to try to square the policy of the Country with the maxim of common sense and of plain morality.[123]

Their rationale for reform was exactly that – 'common sense' and 'moral principles'. Cobden became almost entirely divorced from his business during the hectic years of the Anti-Corn Law League and after repeal devoted himself entirely to politics. He was not in favour of regulating factory working hours, and in response to being asked to present a petition to the Commons supporting the Ten Hours Bill, he wrote: 'I am opposed to all legislative interference with the labour of working men; not because I wish them to work too many hours, but in order to leave them free agents to work as much or as little as they please.'[124] An article in the local paper reports on a meeting in Rochdale in 1867 which was held to refute 'the attacks upon our townsman, Mr Bright.'[125] Several employees spoke supporting Bright's performance as an

[121] Jackson, *Education Act Forster,* 27.
[122] Margaret and Dennis Warwick, *Eminent Victorians : the Forsters of Burley-in-Wharfedale,* Burley-in-Wharfedale : Burley-in-Wharfedale Local History Group Publications, 1994, 8.
[123] RCP, 20, April 16 1857.
[124] RCP, 69D82/7/4/6, 11 April 1854.
[125] *Rochdale Observer*, Saturday, January 26, 1867.

employer, rebutting the 'malignant slanders' that had circulated, asserting that 'Your conduct, as our employer, has been such as to meet with our entire approval. You have always endeavoured to improve our moral, social, and intellectual well-being.'[126] This attitude contrasts remarkably with the Earl of Shaftesbury's opinion of Bright's attitude to factory working conditions. Shaftesbury recorded in his diary in 1844 that a speech of Bright's opposing the Ten Hour Bill was 'perhaps the most vindictive towards the working classes ever used in the British Parliament.'[127]

Smith became a partner in his father's wholesale newspaper business on turning twenty-one and developed the railway station bookstall business which laid the foundations of his fortune. He became the legal head of the business when just thirty-two.[128] The business was based in central London, a different social environment to that of the northern factories with the workers' houses usually grouped around the mill, but little is said by his biographers about his relationship with his employees and neither do his personal letters, which revolve around family matters and politics. He seems to have taken an interest in the welfare of his employees, being one of the first to introduce the Saturday half-day, organising excursions and forming a debating society.[129] There is no evidence that his experiences as an employer impacted on his political agenda.

Joseph Chamberlain entered politics thirty-five years after Cobden did and thus represented a new generation of businessmen-politicians. Attitudes towards employees were slowly changing. Chamberlain started work 'on the tools' in his father's shoe-making factory and thus according to Garvin, 'began to acquire insight into the political mind of the working

[126] ibid.
[127] Edwin Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, K.G.,* London: Cassell and Co. Ltd., 1887, Vol. II, 27.
[128] Charles Wilson, *First with the News: The History of W.H. Smith, 1792-1972,* London: Jonathon Cape, 1985, 81-6.
[129] Chilston, *W.H. Smith,* 33.

class'.[130] He moved to Birmingham when he was eighteen to oversee his father's investment in a screw making business, and although his main work was in the financial area he made it a practice of mixing and talking to the factory workers.[131] Chamberlain's interest in politics was stimulated within the family circle, again a difference to the older men. He early expressed an ambition to become Prime Minister, and indeed Jay considers that 'his devotion to the creation of a personal fortune was an expedient prelude'[132]. His whole career was one of a search for power – first in business, then in local affairs and finally in national politics. However he did tell Beatrice Potter that 'his creed grew up on a basis of experience and sympathy; how his desire to benefit the many had become gradually a passion absorbing within itself his whole nature.'[133] There is nothing contradictory about seeking personal power and using it to improve the conditions of the less well off, but in Chamberlain's case it seems to have been a means to achieve political advancement rather than the product of a deep-seated moral position. His subsequent political life, whilst largely outside the time frame of this thesis, confirms that the achievement of power was his prime aim in life.

Anthony Mundella was the one who took his social responsibility seriously. He progressed from an apprentice stockinger to a partnership in a modern hosiery factory which made him a wealthy man.[134] In his youth he was influenced by the Chartist movement and later by Cobden's free trade arguments. On entering parliament at the age of forty-three he consistently fought for improvements to workers' conditions, especially in the recognition of trade unions and further factory reform.[135] He was also much involved in advancing educational standards, supporting Forster over the divisive Education Act of 1870 and recognising the need for

[130] Garvin, *Joseph Chamberlain,* 40.
[131] ibid, 65.
[132] Jay, *Joseph Chamberlain*, 4.
[133] Webb, *My Apprenticeship,* 14.
[134] Armytage, *Mundella,* 15-16, 21.
[135] ibid, 67-72, 123.

better technical education.[136] Mundella was the only self-made man amongst the businessmen-politicians discussed in this thesis; he had direct experience of the factory system as opposed to the more sheltered working lives of the others. His career demonstrates a genuine desire to contribute to better times for working people.

Nineteenth-century England produced some great novelists who wrote about their times, providing vivid descriptions of class differences, political attitudes and social conditions. Anthony Trollope wrote of both ecclesiastical and political life and his 'Palliser' novels contain much on political ambition. He asserts: 'The highest and most legitimate pride of an Englishman [is] to have the letters MP written after his name. No selection from the alphabet confers so fair an honour.'[137] This lofty attitude was a considerable change from that of the eighteenth-century MP, and perhaps most members up until the First Reform Act. For many it was simply a means to an end. 'For the aristocracy a natural stepping stone to the Lords', an historian of the British political elites writes, 'for the country gentlemen enhanced prestige in his county, for the Civil Servant a sinecure office, for military officers promotion, for merchants and bankers lucrative contracts.'[138]

Before 1832 the entry into parliament of other than the aristocracy and the gentry was preceded by making enough money to buy the country estates that provided the basis for an electorate. These new men became part, however reluctantly accepted, of the landed. Entry into parliament inevitably followed in the same way as for the traditional landowners. The businessmen who entered parliament after the reforms of 1832 were the first not to turn their back on their source of success; in fact 'the test of business success ceased to be the ability to leave it.'[139] An increased social acceptance by those that had made their money was no

[136] ibid, 75, 207-211.
[137] Anthony Trollope, *Can You Forgive Her?,* London: Oxford University Press, 1948 (First published in monthly parts from January 1864 to August 1865), Vol. II, 44-415.
[138] Guttsman, *The British Political Elite,* 17.
[139] Anthony Howe, *The Cotton Masters 1830-1860,* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984, 310.

longer a driving force for seeking a parliamentary position. Few of the businessmen who entered parliament achieved cabinet rank in the period under review. With only the half-dozen already mentioned out of probably a total of one hundred at any time doing so, it can only be surmised that either they could not adapt to the different imperatives of parliamentary life or that they were there simply for the prestige conferred. Some of those to whom this applies have already been briefly mentioned – Salt, Philips, Wedgewood, Marshall, Guest, Pease, Holland, McArthur – who were not only successful businessmen but the leaders in their industries and communities; the addition of 'MP' to their name was an inevitable upwards progression. Perhaps because they were successful in public life there was less emphasis on status amongst the group discussed and, if this is any measure of social satisfaction, both Cobden and Smith refused titles. Cobden and Bright were repeatedly critical of the aristocracy although, somewhat surprisingly, John Bright seems to have been flattered by the attention of the aristocracy. His diary entries for 1886 contain repeated entries about dining with titles, often with favourable comments.[140]

Discussing W.H. Smith, Guttsman comments that he 'clearly sought recognition and status when he attempted to get elected. But after he had twice failed to obtain nomination as a Liberal candidate he changed his politics.'[141] He goes on to attribute this change to the often repeated, but not substantiated, claim that Smith was blackballed at the Liberal, Reform Club. In fact Smith was elected a member of the Conservative, Carlton Club in 1865 some three years before he contested and won the seat of Westminster.[142] It would be naive to assert that being a member of parliament did not engender some pride in any man, even one as modest as Richard Cobden. He entered parliament for one reason only – to ensure the repeal of the Corn Laws and when that happened he wrote

[140] JBP, F/BRI/3/3.1,5
[141] Guttsman, *The British Political Elite,* 175.
[142] Carlton Club Members' Lists (accessed 16 September 2010)

to his wife, 'Hurrah! Hurrah! The corn bill is law, and now my work is done.'[143] But he remained in parliament, and returned again after he lost his seat because of his opposition to the Crimean War. It was a powerful drug.

One final aspect of the imperative which drove these middle-class businessmen into politics was their abhorrence of the aristocracy and their conviction that their removal or at least side-lining was a necessity. As early as 1835, some years before his involvement with the Anti-Corn Law League, Richard Cobden wrote 'If the aristocracy can flourish in harmony with the economy of political amendments that we are desired, well and good, we shall not molest them, if not I fear we, the workers shall not be found content to labour for their permanent support.'[144] He continued to attack the landlord class after the repeal of the Corn Laws when there was talk of a return to protectionism. He warned that there would be an even greater struggle in which, 'the whole aristocratic system [would be] torn to pieces'. He went on to predict that 'they will come out of the conflict right happy to abandon the law of primogeniture, and the whole feudal system which exists in this country.'[145] And in his very last speech he returned to his attack of the land ownership system in England: 'If I were five-and-twenty or thirty, I would like to take Adam Smith in hand, and I would have a league for free trade in Land just as we had a League for free trade in Corn'.[146] In the same speech he complained that the House of Commons was 'becoming more and more a rich man's club.'[147]

During the Anti-Corn Law League campaign and in his early years in parliament John Bright was an ardent junior partner of Cobden, although often more violent in his speaking. He pursued the 'free land' issue well after Cobden's death, writing an explanation thus: 'It means the abolition

[143] RCP, 78, 26 June 1846.
[144] RCP, 19, 24 April 1835 – to Mr Cole.
[145] Richard Cobden, *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy,* (Edited by John Bright and James E. Thorold Rogers), London: Macmillan and Co., 1875, 216, (Leeds, December 18, 1849).
[146] ibid, 493, (Rochdale, November 23, 1864).
[147] ibid, 495.

of the law of primogeniture, and the limitation of the system of entails and settlements, so that "life interests" may be for the most part got rid of, and a real ownership substituted for them.'[148] He also echoed Cobden in claiming that land reform would complete the work of the Anti-Corn Law League. Earlier, in a letter to the Birmingham Liberal Association he criticises the Lords' 'childish tinkering':

> Instead it would be as well if the peers would bring themselves on a line with the opinions and necessities of our day. In harmony with the nation they may go on for a long time, but throwing themselves athwart its course, they may meet with accidents not pleasant for them to think of.[149]

Bright's position on the aristocracy was well known, and deplored by some of his contemporaries. Sir James Graham thought that 'England is not prepared to follow him in repeating the Experiment of a Commonwealth; and "noisy John" is not a second Cromwell.'[150] 'Bright has avowed his purpose', he went on, 'He is dissatisfied with the mixed form of Government, under which we live; and he seeks to change it. He considers an hereditary Peerage and landed Aristocracy, and an independent House of Lords inconsistent with Liberty.'[151] Henry Adams, the son of the United States minister in London during the American Civil War, perhaps summed up conservative English opinion of Cobden and Bright, writing that 'They were classed as enemies of order – anarchists – and anarchists they were if hatred of the so-called established orders made them so.'[152] Neither Forster, the Radical nor Smith, the Tory, showed this kind of antipathy to the aristocracy and both were ardent monarchists. In their later life, as senior cabinet ministers, they had direct dealings with the Queen; her private secretary, Sir Henry Ponsonby,

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[148] John Bright, *Public Letters,* (Edited by H.J. Leech), New York: Klaus Reprint Co., 1969 (first published 1895), 187 (letter to Mr G.W. Sanders, November 2, 1873).
[149] ibid, 224 (June 9, 1869).
[150] JRP, PRO 30/22/13G, Sir James Graham to Lord John Russell, 4 January, 1859.
[151] ibid, 21 January, 1859.
[152] Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography,* Boston: Houghton Miffin Co., 1918, 125.

thought Forster: 'Rough, uncouth but agreeable and pleasant and I should imagine the cleverest of all. But he was always firm in his opinions and though anxious beyond measure to do the Queen's bidding and to please her, always let her know his opinion.'[153] Ponsonby was amused by Forster's 'thirst for knowledge on Royal and Aristocratic affairs.'[154] Temmel describes him as 'hotly anti-republican, at least in a social climbing sense.'[155] Smith was a Conservative and so supported the existing social and political hierarchy. After Queen Victoria's criticism of Smith's appointment as First Lord of the Admiralty a mutually high regard developed between them. It is particularly apparent in the letters they exchanged during Smith's term as Leader of the House when he reported to the Queen on the day's transactions.[156] He would not accept a peerage, although his widow did, but he did become Warden of the Cinque Ports, a most prestigious appointment.[157]

Joseph Chamberlain as usual presents an anomaly. He sometimes supported republicanism but thought 'a free constitutional monarchy' equal to it.[158] He was however often outspoken in public and was called to account by Gladstone for his intemperate criticism of the royal family in a speech celebrating Bright's twenty-five years as a member for Birmingham.[159] The historian and Liberal politician, Reginald Brett (later the 2nd Viscount Esher), admired Chamberlain and wrote that 'in *private* I have never heard you say a malevolent thing of a class or individual.'[160] When Chamberlain was first appointed to Cabinet Disraeli wrote to Lady Bradford deploring the fact that 'the Queen must take in an avowed Republican for a Cabinet Minister.'[161] Lord Hartington thought that a

[153] Arthur Ponsonby, *Henry Ponsonby, Queen Victoria's Private Secretary: His Life from His Letters,* London: Macmillan, 1943, 241.
[154] Jackson, *Education Act Forster*, 132.
[155] M.R. Temmel, W.E. Forster and Liberal Politics 1847-1875, Maryland Ph. D., 1974, 354.
[156] Chilston, *W. H. Smith,* 242-265.
[157] Maxwell, *William Henry Smith,* Vol. II, 307.
[158] Garvin, *Joseph Chamberlain,* 152.
[159] Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain,* 166.
[160] JCP, JC5/6/5, 7 February, 1886, Letter from R.B. Brett to Chamberlain.
[161] Garvin, *Joseph Chamberlain,* 304.

Chamberlain speech which talked of the Liberal policy as 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' 'almost amounted to Socialism.'[162]

It can hardly be expected that a simple or uniform explanation for businessmen entering politics after the passing of the First Reform Act would be found. There does however seem to be a difference between most of them and those who achieved cabinet status. The larger group stood for parliament as a natural progression from business and local affairs success, as the acknowledged leader of their industry or region, or for the prestige it conferred. They were usually in their forties or fifties, even sixties, when first elected. It appears they expected to have to do little and their lack of political advancement shows this.

The successful businessmen-politicians differ from most of the other businessmen entering parliament by wanting to achieve something, particularly for the more disadvantaged in English society. Cobden and Bright fought for cheaper bread for the working class through the Anti-Corn Law League, championed free trade to increase British manufacturing and opposed interference in foreign issues, especially war. Forster's first impact in parliament was his strident defence of the Northern Cause during the American Civil War which highlighted his commitment to a more 'democratic' England. He also drove through the Education Act of 1870, which, although much criticized by nonconformists was a genuine attempt to provide better schooling for working- class children. Forster did become more of a senior party politician in his later career as his support for Gladstone shows – he took on the impossibly difficult job of Chief Secretary for Ireland reluctantly and only at the insistence of the Prime Minister. Chamberlain's rise to political power was rapid. After only three years in parliament he was in cabinet as President of the Board of Trade; no-one had risen so quickly since the younger Pitt.[163] At the Board of Trade Chamberlain showed his administrative ability and carried through a reform programme in

[162] ibid, 550-2, in Birmingham Town Hall, 5 January, 1885.
[163] Garvin, *Joseph Chamberlain,* 302.

such diverse areas as shipping cargoes, seaman's wages, bankruptcy and patents. He was a strong supporter of electoral reform and deserves some credit for the Third Reform Act. Smith, a Conservative, was less active in pursuing reforming legislation and was a loyal party man but he did support improvements to education and municipal regulations.[164]

This will, to be actively involved in reform, whether of the parliamentary process, tariffs and trade, education, foreign and colonial policy, is the defining characteristic of the businessman who did achieve legislative or lobbying success. There is little commonality in family backgrounds, religious adherence or even where they lived. Only John Bright lived his life in the place of his birth, Rochdale, and he never represented the borough in parliament. Mundella was from the Midlands and lived there until he sold his business, then moving to London. Cobden, Forster, Smith and Chamberlain were all born in the south of England but three of them moved north to establish their businesses. They did however enter parliament at a relatively early age which might have been a contributor to their success. Bright was only thirty-one, Forster and Smith the oldest at forty-three. This gave them the time to understand the workings of parliament and establish alliances, make some mark, but it was their drive for change that was most important. Forster encapsulated this in a speech to the electors of Bradford during the 1868 election campaign, when he said:

> Why do I wish to continue as a politician? It is not a very easy life − it is very hard work. Now, I will not deny that an ambition, a wish to take part in the discussion of great questions, has something to do with my desire to continue as a politician. I do wish to leave the world better than I found it because I wish to further the principles of truth and justice. I know that it is a high standard, and I

[164] Maxwell, *William Henry Smith,* Vol. I, 240.

want you to judge me by that standard, and if you think I am deviating from it, then refuse me your support.[165]

[165] *The Times,* 10 October, 1868 (Saturday), reporting on a meeting the previous Thursday.

2
Surviving

Businessmen entering parliament in the nineteenth century encountered obstacles largely unknown to the aristocrats and gentry who still dominated British politics. In 1864 *The Economist* believed that:

> English society is aristocratic with reservations, and one of the reservations is this : if a really wealthy man, and we mean by that anybody with more than ten thousand a year clear, displays political ability, all barriers disappear, and the greatest in the land *admit* one who as they think may be greater still.[166]

The article goes on to assert that political corruption is still common through 'the direct purchase of a borough under cover of public spirited benefactions,' and concludes that, 'if matters advance in the same direction a little longer, England will be governed by Peer's sons and men with £20,000 a year.'

This merging of the aristocracy and the plutocracy can be argued in a general sense, and certainly most cabinets, whether Tory/Conservative or Whig/Liberal, were dominated by such men. Guttsman's analysis of the social structure of cabinets between 1830 and 1951 confirms the continued dominance of this group at least until the end of the Second World War[167]. He shows that the first cabinet which contained no aristocrats was that of Clement Attlee in 1945, surprising as there were labour administrations between the wars. During the period covered by this thesis Guttsman provides a composite picture for the period 1830-1868 showing that cabinets of the period were made up sixty-six per cent by 'large territorial lords, their sons and country gentlemen', twenty per cent by the 'mercantile and administrative upper class,' and fourteen per

[166] *The Economist,* April 16, 1864, 479-80.
[167] Guttsman, *The British Political Elite,* Table II, 38; Table I, 78, Table II, 79.

cent by the *hommes nouveaux*, mainly lawyers. Of the cabinets between 1868 and 1886 only that of Gladstone's in 1868 contained less than fifty per cent aristocrats and even in that exception seven of the fifteen was from that class.

The proportion of aristocrats in cabinets always exceeded that of aristocrats in the Commons as a whole but they had the advantage of being able to continue their political careers when moving to the Lords if they succeeded to an English peerage. This is an important difference with the middle-class businessmen entering the parliament; firstly they were invariably older than a peer's son or a landed gentleman when they became an MP and secondly it was unlikely that many would be elevated to the Lords. Many businessmen were in their fifties or sixties when elected after a successful commercial career. Searle illustrates this with four examples – Samuel Morley and Titus Salt, both elected when aged fifty-five, Thomas Bazley at sixty-one and Duncan McLaren at sixty-five – and quotes McLaren's biographer, that 'he was unhampered by official connections or the desire for office'.[168] Howe shows that the cotton manufacturers returned to parliament between 1832 and 1859 did so at an average age of forty-six against the thirty-three for the landed gentry.[169] For some members of the aristocracy an involvement in politics was a family tradition and a seat was found for sons on reaching twenty-one, or in some cases before that. The great Whig families were notorious in this regard. Lord Robert Grosvenor was returned for Shaftesbury when only twenty, Lord Leveson replaced an older cousin in a family borough seat within weeks of turning twenty-one and Lord William Cavendish contested, and won, a seat representing Cambridge University also at twenty-one.[170] They came into parliament immersed in political lore through exposure to older parliamentarians and family discussions and they were often given some training to help them succeed.[171] On entering

[168] Searle, *Entrepreneurial Politics*, 5.
[169] Howe, *The Cotton Masters*, 95.
[170] Mandler, *Aristocratic Government in the Age of Reform* Press, 53.
[171] ibid, 63.

parliament they found themselves amongst people to whom they were related, people whom they knew well from school and university and many of their own class. When having difficulty in forming a ministry in 1834, and opposed by Lord John Russell's Whigs, Sir Robert Peel is said to have exclaimed 'Damn the Whigs, they're all cousins.'[172] Russell himself is a good example of the aristocratic parliamentarian. He was the third son of the sixth Duke of Bedford, and first entered parliament when twenty-one, presented the Reform Bill to the Commons in 1831-2 when thirty-nine, and became Home Secretary when forty-three.[173] This path was also open to the very wealthy non-aristocrat and so it was with two of the greatest nineteenth-century prime ministers. The second Sir Robert Peel was the eldest son of a Lancashire calico printer, albeit a very wealthy one and also a member of parliament. After education at Harrow and Christ Church, Oxford, where he achieved first class degrees in both Literae Humaniores and Mathematics and Physics, he was returned for the corrupt Irish borough of Cashel City when he had just passed his twenty-first birthday. He received his first ministerial post when twenty-two, was Home Secretary at thirty-four and Prime Minister at forty-six.[174] William Ewart Gladstone followed a surprisingly similar career pattern to that of Peel. The son of a wealthy Liverpool merchant and sometime politician, he was educated at Eton and Christ Church, also taking a double first. He was first elected to parliament when just twenty-one and became a minister at twenty-six; however he had to wait until he was fifty-nine to first become prime minister.[175] With the benefit of a public school and university education both men associated with members of the aristocracy and would have found many friendly faces when they first entered the Commons.

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[172] Mabel Airlie, *Lady Palmerston and Her Times,* Vol. I London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 1922 – reprinted in a General Books On Demand edition, 2011, 82.
[173] John Prest, *Russell, John,* ODNB. (accessed 23/02/2011)
[174] Norman Gash, *Mr Secretary Peel: The Life of Sir Robert Peel to 1830,* London: Longmans, 1961, passim.
[175] John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone,* London: Macmillan, 1903, passim.

By contrast the businessmen entering parliament after the First Reform Act did not have a public school and university education, were generally much older when first elected, seldom came from families with a history of political involvement and certainly saw few familiar faces when they first entered the House of Commons. They were however wealthy, which was a basic requirement to be an MP in the era before the payment of salaries. Of the six considered to have exercised some real influence in the country's political life, four were over forty when first elected; Chamberlain was in his fortieth year, Smith, Mundella and Forster all forty-three. Cobden and Bright were in their thirties, Bright being the youngest at thirty-two when elected for the City of Durham in 1843. Both Cobden and Bright had achieved national stature through their activities with the Anti-Corn Law League. Cobden himself commented on this age disparity, feeling that, 'the misfortune is generally that men of business come into Parliament too late in life, after their powers are exhausted.'[176]

The background and education of these men may not have been the same as that of the gentry, but they had travelled, written on business and social issues, been involved with extra-parliamentary activities and perhaps most importantly had served, often with considerable distinction, in municipal government. Well before his involvement with the Anti-Corn Law League Cobden had involved himself in public affairs through letters to newspapers and the publication of several pamphlets.[177] He also travelled extensively, initially throughout Britain when selling fabrics.[178] Later he visited several European countries and different parts of the Ottoman Empire, and the north-eastern states of the U.S. These travels provided the source material for a number of pamphlets including *England, Ireland and America,* published in 1835, which argued against British involvement in European affairs. He believed internal issues like

[176] In a letter to Absalom Watkin, 6 March 1857, quoted in Searle, *Entrepreneurial Politics*, 6.

[177] See, for example, Edsall, *Richard Cobden,* 16-20 and Hinde, *Richard Cobden,* 16-36.

[178] RCP, 19, 21 August 1825 to his father, 'I shall be absent for two months and shall go to Dublin and visit Scotland as far as Aberdeen.' (He was twenty-one at this time).

the Irish problem required addressing and ties with the United States needed strengthening. He returned to the matter of dabbling in foreign issues during the dispute between Russia and Turkey in another pamphlet, *Russia,* published in 1836.[179] He turned to municipal politics in 1837 with the publication of the pamphlet *Incorporate your Borough* and became one of Manchester's first alderman upon incorporation in 1838. That same year Cobden joined the newly established Anti-Corn Law Association – which became the Anti-Corn Law League the following year – and thereafter it consumed most of his energies. On entering parliament in 1841 he was therefore a man who had addressed major issues both in print and in public speeches, a man with credibility and authority amongst his contemporaries. Nevertheless going into the Commons must have been something of an ordeal. Some years later when describing John Bright's entry the *Illustrated London News* noted that 'Cobden, if we recollect correctly, was rather sneered at than welcomed on his appearance in the House.'[180] Even after some years in the Commons Cobden wrote to his wife that, 'it is discouraging enough to be bullied in the House, and sneered at out of doors, but time will put me right with the snobs.'[181] The *News* article commented on Bright that 'his dress is rather more *recherché* than that of the 'Friends' of a generation back, differing but slightly from the ordinary costume of the day'. This contrasts with the description of the first Quaker to enter parliament only ten years before Bright. Joseph Pease was arrayed in 'handsome Quaker dress of collarless coat, knee breeches, silk stockings and buckled shoes.'[182] *Punch*, however, could not get past Bright's Quaker origins and always portrayed him in the distinctive flat crowned hat which he never wore. The article also refers to Bright's 'distinct enunciation free from any unpleasant

[179] Cobden persisted with his denunciations, writing to Francis Place (11 May 1838) 'Nothing can be more mischievous, or better calculated for upholding the aristocratic army and navy, and otherwise obstructing the growth of democratic government, than this insane advocacy of national interference', BL Add 37949 f. 386.

[180] *Illustrated London News,* October 7, 1843, 228.

[181] Letter to Kate 24 March 1848, BL Add. 50749 f. 118

[182] Kirby, *Men of Business and Politics,* 57.

peculiarity or mannerism.' Perhaps the *News* was too polite to comment on accent as Bright, at least in his early years presumably had a distinct Lancastrian speech.[183] In his writings Bright frequently used the Quaker 'thee' and 'thou' as late as 1857.[184] Each of these successful businessmen-politicians had some experience in local government before entering parliament but Joseph Chamberlain's three years as mayor of Birmingham 'became the most outstanding mayoralty in English history' in the view of one historian.[185] He had developed his speaking skills over twenty years from first joining the Edgbaston Debating Society at the age of eighteen, through his involvement as principal speaker for the National Education League and finally during his term as Birmingham's mayor.[186] Chamberlain was not only an accomplished and fervent speaker by the time he was elected but he looked the part, always immaculately dressed, invariably wearing an orchid and sporting an aristocratic looking monocle.

Even by the late 1860s Bagehot believed that the businessmen who sat in the Commons were without the social cohesion that characterized the landed gentry and this reduced their influence and effectiveness.[187] In particular the non-conformist MP was 'different'. The majority of MPs were still members of the Church of England and thus were at odds with the dissenting groups over the issues of disestablishment and church rates, at least up until 1868 and the passing of the Compulsory Church Rates Abolition Act. The Quakers were in the forefront of opposition to the rates and many refused to pay. Several had their possessions distrained, including Jacob Bright, John's father. Both father and son became active with other nonconformists in campaigning against the rate in their home town of Rochdale.[188] Quakers perhaps alone faced the difficulty of their sect forbidding any interest in politics although this was

[183] Both Peel and Gladstone spoke with Lancashire accents despite a public school education – see Roy Jenkins, *Gladstone,* London: Macmillan, 1995, 12.
[184] Letter to Joseph Sturge, 9 October 1857, BL Add. 43845 ff. 12-59. (Sturge was also a Quaker, however)
[185] Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain Entrepreneur,* 58.
[186] Garvin, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain,* passim.
[187] Bagehot, *The English Constitution,* 174.
[188] Robbins, *John Bright,* 11-12.

changing in the 1830s. It was 'one of the most rapid and complete reversals of attitudes in Quaker history [and] contemporaries, with much justice, saw the 1832 Reform Act as the Charter of Dissent.'[189] Of the six successful businessmen-politicians identified herein Cobden, Mundella and Smith were Anglicans and Forster, although born and brought up a Quaker, attended Church of England services after marrying an Anglican. Chamberlain was brought up as a Unitarian but 'lost his faith' after the deaths of his first two wives. Only Bright was a committed dissenter but he was one who seems to have worn his religion lightly despite his life-long adherence to it.[190]

As a somewhat broad generalization it can be argued that the landed gentry entered parliament to govern, the businessmen to facilitate change. For most of the period between the First and Second Reform Acts the majority of businessmen elected described themselves as 'Radicals'. Before that it had not been so; both the first Sir Robert Peel and Sir John Gladstone, fathers of future prime ministers, were very wealthy businessmen who sat as Tories. It was the enfranchisement of the middle class in 1832 that saw the influx of the manufacturing and commercial radical. Exceptions there were. George Hudson sat as a Tory from 1845 to 1859 for the borough of Sunderland which had previously been consistently Whig.[191] He was the infamous 'Railway King' whose manipulation of railway stocks would eventually lead him to goal; but he was also involved in shipbuilding which was Sunderland's main industry. He was an industrialist who did not support free trade and argued strongly against the repeal of the Corn Laws. After the Tory split of 1846 he sat on Disraeli's front bench but was never a minister.[192] He was also instrumental in having Robert Stephenson, son of George and a great

[189] Isichei, *Victorian Quakers,* 193.
[190] 'The labours of my life have taken me out of the way of sacrifice for our little church, and have, to a large extent, unfitted me for it.' Quoted in Trevelyan, *The Life of John Bright*, 103.
[191] Lambert, *The Railway King,* 150-2.
[192] ibid, 191.

railway engineer in his own right, elected as a Tory for Whitby.[193] Hudson eventually retired in disgrace due to his dubious business dealings and cannot be considered to have been an influential politician, except in his own interests. William Henry Smith, the only Conservative businessman-politician to exert any real power during this period, was of quite a different character. He was called "Old Morality" by *Punch* in recognition of his straightforward and honest nature.[194] Smith's early political inclinations were those of a moderate Liberal, influenced by his Wesleyan father, but when in his twenties he transferred his allegiance to the Church of England and even contemplated taking holy orders.[195] It may be that the church's association with the Tory party persuaded him towards the conservative side of politics although both his biographers attribute it to his being blackballed for membership of the Reform Club in 1862.[196] Neither cites any evidence of this and a recent request to the Club produced no reference to it. Chilston writes that the 'Whig patricians were outraged when the young man's name was put up' but many other businessmen, including Cobden, Bright and Forster, had been elected before this. The suspicion of the businessmen who achieved high office continued for many years. When Smith was elevated to the cabinet in 1877 as First Lord of the Admiralty the Prime Minister, Lord Beaconsfield, had some difficulty with the Queen who, he said 'fears it may not please the Navy in which service so many of the higher rank serve, and who claim to be equal to the Army – if a man of the Middle Class is placed above them in that very high post.'[197] It is a measure of Smith's personality and demeanour that eventually the Queen came to respect him highly and insisted that his widow accept the peerage which Smith himself had refused.

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193 ibid, 213.
194 Maxwell, *Life and Times,* Vol II, 199.
195 ibid, Vol. I, 112.
196 ibid, Vol. I, 116 and Chilston, *W.H. Smith,* 48.
197 Chilston, 94.

Although Smith had his problems with acceptance of his 'trade' background he did not face the difficulties some others did. Firstly he was an extremely wealthy man and was able to keep his business operating successfully by bringing in partners and employing competent managers.[198] His wealth was such that at his death in 1891 his estate was valued for probate at over £1,773,000.[199] Perhaps Smith was skilled, or lucky, in selecting men to run the business as his time and energy become more dedicated to politics. He had the advantage of having a business centred in London and he sat for London constituencies. Thus his personal life was less interrupted than for those with businesses and families not in London. These men had to leave their businesses in the care of others whilst the parliament was in session and even more when they took on ministerial responsibility. Chamberlain had created a virtual monopoly over the manufacture and sale of screws, and his solution to the difficulty of combining business and politics was to sell the one in order to concentrate on the other. Following his defeat in his first tilt at national politics, when in 1874 he contested Sheffield, his dedication to politics hardened and he sold his interest in Nettlefold and Chamberlain that year. It left him with more than enough capital to provide an affluent lifestyle for his family whilst he became a full- time politician. Although not in Smith's league Chamberlain was still a wealthy man when he died in 1914.[200] John Bright's father, Jacob, established his own cotton spinning business in Rochdale in 1823 and over the years several of his sons, including John, joined the firm which they eventually ran. The business prospered despite the economic recessions of the 1830s and 40s. Bright was fortunate in having competent brothers to operate it which allowed him to concentrate his intellect and energy on first the Anti-Corn Law Campaign and then on wider national politics. Nevertheless he seems to

[198] Wilson, *First with News,* passim, is a comprehensive history of the Company and details how Smith brought in partners and managers.

[199] Richard Davenport-Hines, *Smith, William Henry,* ODNB, (accessed 21/02/2011)

[200] Peter T. Marsh, *Chamberlain, Joseph*, ODNB, (accessed 05/11/2010), Chamberlain left £126,000.

have continued to be involved in some business decisions. As late as 1859 he wrote to his brother Thomas concerning a loom patent, advising him 'to retain Webster and Hindmarsh at once – both of them – as they are the chief men at this kind of business.'[201] He then reverted to political talk, discussing speculation that Cobden would take a position in Palmerston's ministry. Bright was able to enjoy a long political life of over forty years and still leave the not inconsiderable sum for that time of £86,000. Forster too was fortunate in his business partner, William Fison, who ran their worsted mill throughout Forster's political career. According to Jackson, Forster always maintained a close interest in the performance of the business to the extent of having weekly reports sent to him.[202] But as with Bright he had the benefit of a continuing and adequate income; at his death leaving about the same as Bright. Mundella was the only self-made man to become a minister in this period. He progressed from an apprentice stockinger when aged eleven to a partnership in a hosiery firm at twenty-three. He and his partner, Jonathon Hine, were at the forefront of technical advances in the industry, particularly by identifying new inventions and taking them through to commercial success.[203] Mundella was able to maintain a very active political life for thirty years without any apparent financial hardship and left well over £40,000 when he died in 1849.[204] He however faced one problem that others didn't – his appearance. His father was Italian and the 'taint of alien blood became a taunt as he championed unpopular causes, when it often caused him acute embarrassment.'[205]

Richard Cobden did not fare as well financially as the others. He was brought up in Sussex in the south of England and worked in clerical and sales jobs in the muslin and calico industry from the age of fifteen. In

[201] JBP – F/5/1 BRI/1-4, 6 July 1859.
[202] Jackson, *Education Act Forster,* 27.
[203] Armytage, *A.J Mundella,* 22.
[204] Johnathon Spain, Mundella*, Anthony John*, ODNB, (accessed 09/04/2009).
[205] Armytage, 15; a political broadsheet, *The Fish Stall Gazette,* 1 Sept. 1860, carried an advertisement for a book on *Conkology – by Captain Bundella – with portrait and proboscis* – 'Mundella's most prominent feature which was to be repeated with deadly insistence for the rest of his political life', 29.

1831 when twenty-seven he, with two partners, leased a factory in Lancashire to print calico and the following year he moved to live in Manchester. He soon got involved in local politics and travelled extensively, throughout Europe, the Middle East and America, and thus could hardly have given a new enterprise the attention that was required of a hands-on owner. Nevertheless the business initially prospered.[206] By 1837 however things weren't as bright; he wrote to his bother Frederick, from Smyrna, 'the apprehensions you express about a money crisis have caused me some uneasiness.'[207] In 1840, again writing to Frederick he remarked that, 'the trade has fallen off with even more than usual suddenness, and left us with quite stock enough.'[208] This was the year in which Cobden became involved with the anti-corn law agitation which was to take up so much of his time and energy until the Corn Laws were repealed in 1846. By that time he was sorely in need of money and his admirers organised an appeal which provided him with £75,000.[209] Morley has something to say about this; 'It is not necessary to enter into a discussion of the propriety of Cobden's acceptance of the large sum of money, between seventy-five and eighty thousand pounds, which were collected in commemoration of his services to what the subscribers counted a great public service'. He then goes on to argue that, 'he had individually sacrificed good chances of private prosperity for the interests of the community, and it would have been a painful and discreditable satire on human nature if he had been left in ruin, while everybody around him was thriving on the results of his unselfish devotion.'[210]

During the months leading up to the repeal of the Corn Laws Cobden was undecided about his future. In response to a letter from a fellow calico printer and close friend, Thomas Hunter, urging him to retire from

[206] Morley, *Richard Cobden,* 15-19.
[207] Anthony Howe (editor), *The Letters of Richard Cobden, Volume One, 1815-1847,* Oxford University Press, 2007, 94 (letter dated 24 February 1837).
[208] ibid, 204 (letter dated 24 October 1840).
[209] Archibald Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn Law League,* London: W & F.G Cash, 1853, Vol. II, 444.
[210] Morley, *Cobden,* 413 (both quotations).

business and pursue politics he wrote that if the Lords passed the Bill 'then my mind is made up to accept the Chiltern Hundreds the day after it receives Royal Assent.'[211] Two months later he wrote to Joseph Sturge, a Quaker and wealthy grain importer, pointing out that, 'I have shared the fate of almost all political agitators in my private affairs – my business is one which more than almost any other requires constant attention – for the last seven years I have totally neglected it, and the result is just what could have been expected – as soon as the corn bill is safe I shall claim a respite from public life to put my house in order.'[212]

Cobden of course didn't quit politics after the repeal of the Corn Laws but together with his wife spent over a year travelling in Europe before returning to parliament. He remained an MP until his death in 1865, except for two years when defeated over his opposition to the Crimean War. Clearly money was a worry to Cobden until he received the testimonial payment which he used to pay off his debts, purchase and renovate the family's old property and keep his family during the rest of his life. There was little left at the end, less than £8,000.[213] Despite his excitement with manufacturing and politics in Manchester when he first moved there he was quick to return to his birthplace in the south and leave his business failures behind.

It is tempting to think that these men from the midlands and the north had an additional burden to carry when elected to the Commons. All were married men, most with several children, and their absence would have been felt especially at times of family tragedy. Cobden's only son died suddenly, aged fifteen, in 1856. It was a hard blow which affected his wife, Kate, terribly and meant that Cobden had to spend long periods at home.[214] Perhaps this meant that he neglected his parliamentary duties, particularly those concerned with his constituency,

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211 Howe, *Letters,* 420 (letter dated 2 April 1846).

212 ibid, 433 (10 June 1846).

213 Miles Taylor, *Cobden, Richard*, ODNB, (accessed 05/11/2009).

214 Morley, *Life of Cobden*, Vol. II, 180-183. 'My poor wife makes slow progress in the recovery of her health. She has not been able to pass a night without the aid of opiates.' (Letter to Joseph Parkes, 23 May, 1856)

which might have contributed to his loss at the general election of 1857.[215] His letters to his wife, especially during the years from his first election up until the repeal of the Corn Laws, are mainly concerned with political happenings, but he did acknowledge 'contrition for all my neglect, which I feel is a fact of my nature if not the necessity of my circumstances – I neglect everybody, even my wife and child.'[216]

Both John Bright and Joseph Chamberlain experienced the grief of the early deaths of their first wives, both within the first two years of marriage. Chamberlain's second wife also died before she was thirty. Both men found some relief in frenetic public activity, Bright with the Anti-Corn Law League, Chamberlain with education issues, which led them both into national politics. Forster, Smith and Mundella had what appear to be long and happy marriages with supportive wives. However in the early years of their parliamentary careers both Forster and Mundella had to live in London away from their families. Forster was most affectionate with his letters when first separated from his wife, addressing Jane as 'My dearest Love' and concluding 'Farewell my precious darling.'[217] Jackson characterized the marriage as 'the solid bedrock that sustained him through all the strains and vicissitudes of an arduous and controversial political career.'[218] Jane was intelligent and well educated and not only supported her husband's decision to enter politics but was often actively involved in discussing the detail of his options. His first major ministerial post was as Vice President of the Council, but with the President in the Lords, Forster was responsible for the department's business, the most important being education, in the Commons. When Forster was first asked by Gladstone to take this position, Jane wrote to her mother:

> I think he will accept and certainly for their own sakes that and the Poor Law Board are the only two offices I coveted

[215] ibid, 191-2. His attitude towards the Crimean War was the most important reason for his demise.
[216] RCP 78, 17 May 1843.
[217] WEFP, TCDMA 4986 (62), undated February, 1861.
[218] Jackson, *Education Act Forster,* 33.

> for him. It is also one of considerable weight and dignity in the House and above all I am sure he will fill it most ably and completely. The only one I should still prefer would be the Poor Law Board – for I am sure a man might do such good there – and much as I care about Education, I care about the pauper question and the treatment of the poor still more.[219]

Although no analysis of the landed gentry's family pressures has been undertaken, the range of issues, both positive and negative, which affected the businessman-politician were probably no different from those of any member of parliament in the nineteenth-century. The issues already discussed, absence from home during the parliamentary sessions, the higher incidence of women dying in childbirth than in later years, and the high child mortality rate were common to all levels of society. The businessmen who did succeed in politics were all fortunate in having supportive, intelligent wives.

Most politicians are subject to some sort of pressure from within their own political groupings - their parliamentary party, their constituency committee or some pressure group. Many historians refer to the decline in numbers of independent MPs in the period between the First and Second Reform Acts and the consequent development of the more rigid party system.[220] This period saw the founding of the Carlton and Reform Clubs, both defacto headquarters for their parties.[221] Registration societies were established and the political parties became more formalized. The Liberal Party emerged as such in 1859 following the Willis's Room agreement between Whigs, Peelites and Radicals.[222] The Conservatives can claim an earlier birth, suggested by Sharpe as 1834.[223] Most of the

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219 WEFP, TCD MS 49992 (102), December 8, 1868.

220 For example Jenkins, *Parliament, party and politics,* 28.

221 Sir Charles Petrie, Bt., *The Carlton Club,* London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1955, 44.

222 Vincent, *The Formation of the Liberal Party,* xix.

223 Michael Sharpe, *The Political Committee of the Reform Club,* London: The Reform Club, 1996, 95 (Appendix 1), n.2, 'The Administration of Sir Robert Peel is generally accepted as the first Conservative one, following his 'Tamworth Manifesto' of 1834.

businessmen who entered parliament after 1832 described themselves as 'Radicals'; they were there to effect 'change' – in the laws affecting business, in the parliamentary system, in religious affairs, in foreign relationships, in government administration. These men found Whig policy, what there was of it, more to their taste than that of the Tories and they rather quickly entered into an arrangement, later known as the Lichfield House Compact, together with O'Connell's Irish members in 1835 to oppose Peel.[224] The aristocratic Whigs consistently held the upper hand in the Liberal Party and successfully delayed further parliamentary reform for which the Radicals were agitating. The supremacy of the Whigs, although they were no longer called that, persisted through to the Gladstonian era. By the late 1870's Chamberlain believed that the Radicals had 'either lost their distinctiveness or, like Bright, had lapsed into ineffectuality'.[225] He felt that he was the only real radical left. Later he formed an alliance with that aristocratic radical, Sir Charles Dilke.[226] In 1880 together they threatened Gladstone with the formation of a pure left party if they were not included in his Cabinet.[227] The difficulty in which the Radicals found themselves in assimilating with the Whigs into the Liberal party is exemplified by the contradictory actions of two significant radical-businessmen, Richard Cobden and William Edward Forster. Cobden never compromised his principles by entering a ministry despite being invited to by both Russell and Palmerston. He told Lord John Russell in 1846 that he 'had not the most distant desire or intention to take office under any circumstances.'[228] Some years later, in 1859, Palmerston wrote to him, 'I have kept open for you the office of President of the Board of Trade which appeared to me to be best suited to your

[224] Mandler, *Aristocratic Government*, 159-166.
[225] Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain,* 135-137.
[226] David Nicholls, *The Lost Prime Minister: A Life of Sir Charles Dilke,* London: The Hambledon Press, 1995, includes much information on Chamberlain and Dilke's political relationship.
[227] Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain,* 134.
[228] Howe, *The Letters of Richard Cobden,* 442, (4 July 1846).

views and to the distinguished part which you have taken in public life'.[229] This offer was also refused and, with his consistent criticism of the aristocracy, he also refused honours – he was offered a baronetcy by Palmerston in 1861.[230] Some Radicals did however accept titles. The first Quaker member of parliament, Joseph Pease, did not but one of his sons, also a member of parliament did, a baronetcy.[231] Titus Salt, a radical dissenter but also a large Bradford woollen manufacturer, became Sir Titus in 1869 after a short and undistinguished parliamentary career, without any qualms.[232] Cobden's attachment to the developing Liberal Party was somewhat ephemeral. He seldom saw eye-to-eye with Russell or Palmerston and was ready to praise the opposition. At the time of the Corn Law repeal he wrote to Peel:

> It is said that you are about to resign. On public grounds this will be a national misfortune. Are you aware of the strength of your position with the country? I will not speak of the populace, which to a man is with you, but of the active and intelligent middle classes, with whom you have engrossed a sympathy and interest greater than ever before fostered by a minister.[233]

Obviously Cobden and at least some of the radical business community would have been happy with a ministry led by the outgoing prime minister Sir Robert Peel. William Edward Forster's career, his attitude to government and the part he wanted to play were quite different to Cobden's despite the many convictions they had in common. In his assessment of Forster's political life Jackson argues that, 'he combined, to an almost unique extent, the moral earnestness of the radical campaigner

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229 RCP, 20, 27 June 1859.

230 Morley, *Life of Cobden*, Vol. II, 332. Following Cobden's successful negotiation of a commercial treaty with France, Palmerston offered Cobden 'to be created a Baronet, or to be made a Privy Councillor, whichever of the two would be most agreeable to you.' (26 March 1861).

231 Kirby, *The Quaker Pease Dynasty,* 55. Joseph Whitwell Pease was created a baronet in 1882.

232 Reynolds, *The Great Paternalist,* 79, 'he had found parliamentary life something of a burden.'

233 BL Add. MS 40594 (123-134), 23 June 1846.

with the shrewd realism and administrative ability of the successful minister.'[234] He was an important part of the Liberal leadership group in the Commons from 1865 until 1882 and was seen as a potential leader following Gladstone's resignation after the disastrous 1874 election.[235] He had become what Joseph Chamberlain derisively called 'a centrist' having put aside his radical principals[236]. Chamberlain had conceived a deep hatred of Forster over the Education Act and used his maiden speech to Parliament in 1876 to attack Forster over the payment of school fees for poor children in denominational schools.[237] This was a continuation of Chamberlain's opposition to Forster's 1870 Education Act which did not embrace the National Education League's call for free, non-sectarian education. There was much truth in Chamberlain's assertion that Forster had lost his radical origins. Forster proved a loyal front-bencher supporting Hartington through five years of opposition and taking on the onerous job of Chief Secretary for Ireland when Gladstone returned as Prime Minister in 1880. As well as his problems with some of his colleagues in the parliamentary party Forster also had difficulties with his constituency party in the first election after the passing of the Education Act. His electorate, Bradford, was always going to vote Liberal and the Conservatives did not field a candidate there in the 1874 election. Nevertheless Forster was opposed by other Liberal candidates with the Liberal Electoral Association, chaired by Sir Titus Salt, opting to run a ticket against Forster.[238] In the event, Forster topped the poll, which led to Chamberlain declaring 'that Forster was a Conservative candidate'

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[234] Jackson, *Education Act Forster,* 318-9.

[235] When Gladstone resigned in January 1875, his replacement was soon narrowed down to Forster and Lord Hartington, the eldest son of the Duke to Devonshire. Forster had however alienated many radicals and nonconformists with his support for Anglican control of primary schools entrenched in the Education Act of 1870. See John P. Rossi, "The Selection of Lord Hartington as Liberal Leader in the House of Commons", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society,* Vol. 119, No. 4 (August 15, 1975), 307-314 for details of the contest.

[236] Marsh, *Chamberlain*, 135.

[237] ibid, 113.

[238] Michael Hurst, "Liberal versus Liberal: The General Election of 1874 in Bradford and Sheffield", *The Historical Journal,* Vol. 15, No. 4 (December, 1972), 701.

which Michael Hurst asserts had no foundation.[239] In a paper criticizing Hurst's conclusions and correcting some factual errors, Wright quotes the *Bradford Chronicle* which commented that the Tories believed that returning Forster would be a greater rebuke to the Radicals than the election of a genuine Conservative.[240] Forster's support for sectarian education and opposition to the disestablishment of the Church of England stood him in good stead at that election and emphasised his acceptance of middle-of-the road Liberal policies rather than those of the radical-dissenting left wing.

Forster was not the only prominent Liberal to have difficulties in his constituency. Both Richard Cobden and John Bright lost their seats in the election of 1857 largely because of their opposition to the Crimean War. Cobden was as usual quite down to earth about his defeat, writing to Lord John Russell: 'On personal and domestic grounds it suits me better to be out of Parliament at present, and though the process is rather nauseous, it is like a dose of medicine which is otherwise good for my health.'[241] He was however furious about Bright losing his seat, writing, 'the Manchester people have used Bright atrociously – they owe him much. And they knew he was a Quaker when they chose him. They had no grounds of grievance on account of his peace views – the worst specimen of ingratitude I ever knew.'[242] Even the national celebrity of these two men following their work for the Anti-Corn Law League couldn't help when they supported an unpopular cause.

The businessman entering parliament certainly faced some difficulties but they were probably not as severe as might have been expected. In an age when businesses were usually directly managed by the owner the effort of having to carve out a political position would have been daunting. A man had to first spend time and money on establishing his credentials in

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239 ibid, 702.

240 D.G. Wright, "Liberal versus Liberal, 1874: Some Comments", *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (September, 1973), 599.

241 BL Add. MS 38080 f. 122, 3 April 1857.

242 ibid.

municipal activities, in charity organisations or in pressure groups. Unlike many of the landed gentry he had no tied seat or family tradition to provide an easy road to parliament and had to compete against others, convincing his party association of his worth. Finally on being elected he had to spend some months each year in London, often more if he became a minister, which made management of his business somewhat difficult. Many businessmen entering politics did so later in their lives when their fortunes were made and when they had sons to run the firm, but this type seldom achieved anything of significance. This study has identified six men who influenced the direction of government in Britain during the period 1832-1886: Richard Cobden, John Bright, William Edward Forster, William Henry Smith, Anthony Mundella and Joseph Chamberlain. All owned, or part-owned, and ran substantial enterprises, and all except Cobden were able to enter politics without financial worries by one strategy or another − competent brothers, supportive partners, efficient managers − or in Chamberlain's case selling out for enough to live on for the rest of his life. Money matters do not seem to have loomed large in the decision of members of the aristocracy or the minor landed gentry as land always provided an income, although often a small return on the capital, long sunk. The problem of having sufficient income to maintain a parliamentary lifestyle mainly impacted on the young professional and the ambitious son of the village doctor or clergyman.[243]

The cost of standing for parliament was often considerable. After the changes brought about by the first Reform Act John Stuart Mill wrote that 'the old property qualification only required a member should possess a fortune; this requires that he should have spent one.'[244] Mill spoke from personal experience having been defeated for Westminster in 1868 by

[243] Anthony Trollope graphically tells the story of an impecunious young man making his way in parliament in *Phineas Finn: The Irish Member,* London: Oxford University Press, 1937 (First published in *St Paul's Magazine* as a monthly serial from October 1867 to May 1868).

[244] J.S. Mill, *Essays on Politics and Culture* (edited by G Himmelfarb), New York: Doubleday, 1963, 311.

W.H. Smith who spent £8,900 on his campaign compared with £2,296 by both Liberal candidates.[245] Expenditure varied considerably; Forster spent only £150 on his uncontested election in 1865, most of it being 'Returning Officer's and Town Clerk's disbursements.'[246] But in 1868 he, and his fellow Liberal Edward Miall, spent a total of £3,397, successfully for Forster, not so for Miall.[247] Whilst all of the cost would not have come out of the candidate's own pockets, there was still a significant commitment required.

A number of problem areas for the businessman in politics have been identified. Religious affiliation, wealth, party issues, accent, dress, family responsibilities do not appear to loom large in any discriminatory way. The main issues which affected progression to the higher levels of government were ones of age of entry and lack of relations or friends to help when first entering parliament. Those that did succeed were all younger than the average businessmen MP when they entered parliament and they were confident in their abilities and justice of their cause. They all had had considerable experience of public speaking and asserting their convictions.

[245] Maxwell, *Life and Times,* 146.
[246] WYAB, BBD1/1/54/125.
[247] WYAB, BBD1/1/54/123.

3
Doing

With a rapidly increasing population marked by the growth of manufacturing districts and a dominant world financial position Britain's social, economic and political imperatives changed considerably in the period 1832 to 1886. The political careers of the six businessmen-politicians identified as exerting some influence on the important decisions of the day essentially fell within this period. Although Smith and Mundella continued as active politicians after the Irish Home Rule drama of 1886 only Joseph Chamberlain, the youngest of the group, remained at the centre of national affairs in subsequent years. This chapter discusses the major issues that concerned the nation during the period, the positions adopted by each of these businessmen, and how they influenced outcomes. It will be argued that although most of them were passionate about parliamentary reform, education and economic issues, and strongly argued their merits, it was only in the field of primary education that any of them played a truly pivotal role. The period encompasses the first three parliamentary Reform Acts and the Municipal Corporation Act and thus political change was receiving considerable attention. All but Smith were radicals and parliamentary reform was something of a sacred cow to men of this inclination. It was however very aristocratic governments which were responsible for the first two reform acts and thus emphasizes the ongoing influence of the gentry on the country's political development.

The First Reform Act was a tentative beginning by an aristocratic Whig government to satisfy the increasingly wealthy middle class.[248] It was an aristocratic group that conceived the Bill. Earl Grey was prime minister and the Committee of Four that prepared the proposal for cabinet was chaired by his son-in-law, the Earl of Durham, and included Lord John

[248] Brock, *The Great Reform Act,* 44 '[The Whig Reformers] planned to make aristocratic government acceptable by purging away its most corrupt and expensive features. It barely fulfilled even the minimum demands of the radical intellectuals.'

Russell.[249] The contrast between the aristocratic politicians of the early nineteenth-century and the businessmen entering parliament after the First Reform Act was considerable. The differences in age when first elected, family background and influence, and particularly the comfort of having relatives and friends already in the parliament were important differences. The achievements of these aristocrat politicians were significant and invariably superior to the successes of the businessman-politician. Their longer parliamentary careers and their dominance in cabinet are obvious reasons for this.

Charles Grey was first elected to the Commons in 1786 when only twenty-two. Despite his family being Tory he was attracted to the opposition and its leader, Charles James Fox.[250] He became a Whig, but a mainstream aristocratic one. He showed some early interest in parliamentary reform and in 1792 helped establish the Society of Friends of the People, an 'undeniably aristocratic society' with an ill-defined programme.[251] Charles went to the Lords in 1806 as the second Earl Grey and found it 'a gloomy and uncongenial place' compared to the Commons but he was to stay there in opposition for the next twenty-five years.[252] During those years he maintained the conviction that reform was needed but it was to be achieved 'without endangering by sudden change and violent disturbance, the settled institutions of the country.'[253] Grey was a staunch believer in aristocratic government; when forming his ministry in 1830 he wrote to the Princess Lieven:

> In the composition of my Ministry I have two essential objects in view: the first, to show that in these times of democracy and Jacobinism it is possible to find real capacity

[249] Leonard Cooper, *Radical Jack: The Life of John George Lambton,* London: The Cresset Press, 1959, 100-102.

[250] There are several biographers of Grey, the most recent being E.A. Smith, *Lord Grey, 1764-1845,* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990 and John W. Derry, *Charles, Earl Grey: Aristocratic Reformer,* Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.

[251] Derry, 53.

[252] ibid, 145.

[253] Parliamentary Debates, Third Series, Vol. 1, 613, November 22, 1830 – Grey's Ministerial Declaration on taking office.

> in the high Aristocracy – not that I wish to exclude merit if I should meet it in the commonality, but, given an equal merit, I admit that I should select the aristocrat, for that class is a guarantee for the safety of the state and of the throne.[254]

Of this cabinet of thirteen nine were members of the House of Lords and the four in the Commons were made up of two heirs to peerages, Althorp and Stanley, an Irish peer, Palmerston and the grandson of a duke, Russell.[255] The support for reform was not new but by 1830 responsible, generally middle-class, action was increasing with the establishment of the Political Unions and the avalanche of petitions being presented to parliament.[256] There was concern that demonstrations would not be confined to meeting and passing resolutions calling for reform and the riots of agricultural workers in the South-east counties, although for different reasons, increased that concern.[257] Grey himself emphasised this fear when he asserted that 'the principle of my reform is to prevent the necessity for revolution.'[258] Smith argues persuasively that Grey's aim was rather to preserve the role of the House of Lords, and certainly its influence continued for many years.[259]

Grey resigned as prime minister less than two years after the passage of the Reform Act and virtually retired from political life. He was always happier on his estates in Northumberland and seldom visited London after his resignation. Durham who had chaired the committee which drafted the bill had a tempestuous political career, but served his country well as ambassador to St. Petersburg and as Governor-General of

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254 10 November, 1830; quoted in E.A. Smith, "Charles, Second Earl Grey", in R.W. Davis (editor), *Lords of Parliament: Studies, 1714-1914,* Stanford University Press, 1995, 79.

255 ibid, 79.

256 For example *The Times* of October 3, 1831 listed dozens of petitions, many 'which we have not space even to enumerate', ranging from the citizens of a large city, Birmingham, to the parishioners of St Martin's-in-the-Fields.

257 Derry, *Charles, Earl Grey,* 187-8.

258 PD, Third Series, Vol. 1, 613.

259 Smith, "Charles, Second Earl Grey", 86.

Canada. In his Preface to an abridged version of the famous *Durham Report* Sir Reginald Coupland writes:

> Durham, in fact, has been recognised and honoured in Canada as one of the founders of the Canadian nation. But he was more than that. The successful application of his doctrine to the British Colonies in North America was followed in due course by its application to the British Colonies in Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Durham, therefore, must be regarded as one of the founders, the principal founder indeed, of the British Commonwealth of Nations.[260]

High praise indeed for a man frequently ill, of violent temper and extreme views who died before he reached fifty.

Lord John Russell, who was selected to present the Reform Bill to the Commons in 1831, had a long commitment to parliamentary change. As early as 1822 he moved a resolution in the Commons 'that the present state of the representation of the people in parliament requires the most serious consideration of this House.'[261] He was active in proposing reform through to the passing of the Second Act in 1867.[262]

In 1832 the eldest of the businessmen discussed here was Richard Cobden who was twenty-eight and in the process of establishing himself as a calico merchant in Manchester. He needed to be financially secure before becoming involved in public issues but by 1835 he had published his first pamphlet, *England, Ireland and America,* which was a condemnation of British foreign policy over the previous fifty years.[263] He moved into local politics before getting involved in the cause that made him famous, the Anti-Corn Law League. His chief lieutenant in that campaign, John Bright, was just twenty-one and starting work in the family cotton spinning business when the Act was passed. Being a

[260] Sir Reginald Coupland, *The Durham Report,* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945, iii.
[261] Parliamentary Debates, New Series, Vol. VII, 51, (April 25, 1822).
[262] John Prest, *Lord John Russell,* London: Macmillan, 1972, 389, 406.
[263] Hinde, *Cobden,* 16.

Quaker, Bright was banned from political activity and within the Society even the discussion of politics was frowned upon. His earliest public activity was in support of the temperance movement. Forster, Smith and Mundella were young boys and Joseph Chamberlain was born four years after the passage of the Act. It was over thirty years before the Second Reform Act was passed but there was considerable agitation in the intervening years and parliamentary reform often seemed close.

The Political Unions of the 'industrious classes' which were active between 1830 and 1832 played an important role in convincing the Grey government that public – largely middle-class – opinion could not be ignored.[264] The First Reform Act may have satisfied some but it certainly did not satisfy the majority of radicals nor the working class. This dissatisfaction led to the formation of the Chartist movement. The demands of the *Peoples Charter* of 1838, except for the call for annual parliaments, seem unremarkable today – universal suffrage (men only of course), secret ballots, removal of the property qualification for members of parliament, payment for members and equal sized electorates. Richard Cobden was seldom in tune with the Chartists. However in his election address to the voters of Stockport in 1837 he declared himself in favour of the ballot, shorter parliaments and household suffrage.[265] But by 1839 he was complaining of the Chartists 'insane ravings.'[266] He cannot have become any more sympathetic towards them after the large Kennington Common assemblage on 10 April 1848 and subsequent demonstrations in several northern towns. An editorial in the *Halifax Guardian* on 27 May roundly criticized his position:

> Mr Cobden declares the Chartists to be a 'small, insignificant and powerless party'. There are a few people in Lancashire and Yorkshire who can tell him a different story. We have no wish to over-rate the numbers or the import of the

[264] LoPatin, *Political Unions,* 15-19.
[265] Morley, *Cobden,* Vol. 3, 117.
[266] BL Add. Ms 43665, letter to Mr Tait (Edinburgh publisher) 2 April, 1839.

> Chartist body. But men who muster in tens of thousands to demonstrate their attachment to a political principle are neither 'small' nor 'insignificant'.[267]

The promulgation of the *People's Charter* and the formation of the Anti-Corn Law League coincide. Cobden was concerned at both a possible diversion of effort by League supporters to parliamentary reform activity and the lack of support for the repeal of the Corn Laws from the very people it was supposed to benefit. The Chartist movement essentially appealed to the working man who viewed, perhaps with justification, the League as a middle-class organisation more concerned with enhancing trade for themselves than doing much for their employees.[268] In the opinion of Sir Louis Mallet, Cobden was an unusual politician in that he 'adhered to general principles, was free from class and party views and was indifferent to the popular clamour of the hour, which brought him into collision with all classes.'[269] He was consistent in his view that espousing political reform during the years of campaigning for repeal of the Corn Laws would only divert manpower and funding and provide additional ammunition for its opponents. He did not join the *Complete Suffrage Union* formed in 1842 although John Bright did and urged Cobden to be part of the movement.[270] Once the Corn Laws were repealed Cobden felt he could give some of his time to promoting political reform. In 1848 he helped launch Joseph Hume's *Little Charter* which called for household suffrage, a secret ballot, triennial parliaments and the redistribution of electorates, all consistent with Cobden's long held views. Hume's bill was resoundingly defeated in the Commons and Cobden spoke against universal suffrage.[271] He consistently called for the introduction of the

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[267] Quoted in Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A New History,* Manchester University Press, 2007, 318.

[268] Hinde, *Cobden,* 69.

[269] Sir Louis Mallet in an "Introductory Essay" to *The Political Writings of Richard Cobden,* London: William Ridgway, 1878, ii.

[270] Hinde, *Cobden,* 98.

[271] *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: Third Series,* London: Hansard, 1848 (Kraus Reprint Co. New York, 1971), Vol. 100, 183 'I do not stand here to support it.' (July 6, 1848).

secret ballot, believing it was the most important reform to the political process that could be made.[272] Parliamentary reform was debated annually in the Commons up to the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1854, without any measure of success, but Cobden continued his advocacy of the secret ballot. He told his audience at a meeting in Manchester in 1851 that:

> I come to another question, to which I confess I attach great importance − I mean the ballot. Give us the franchise extended, with the other points alluded to, and yet they will be comparatively worthless unless you have the ballot. In no country in the world, where constitutional government exists, is there so great an inequality of fortune as in this country, and so great an amount of influence brought to bear upon the poorer class of voter.[273]

The issue of parliamentary reform, or rather the timing of action supporting it, led to one of the few times that Cobden and John Bright were in disagreement. In late 1853 Bright was organising meetings to promote political reform but received no encouragement from Cobden who even refused to attend any of them. Cobden was more concerned with the developing crisis between Russia and Turkey, with some justification as it took Britain into the Crimean War.[274] For Cobden it was a matter of priorities and whilst always supportive of political reform in principle it had to be in its place. During the American Civil War he, and others, used that conflict almost as a surrogate argument for political reform in England.[275] The outbreak of civil war in a country so much admired by Cobden was a great shock to him and he found it difficult to reconcile his life-long

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[272] ibid, 'Upon the ballot I will say but few words, and for this reason − because it stands at the head of those questions which are likely to be carried in this House.'

[273] Richard Cobden, *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy,* (Edited by John Bright and James E. Thorold Rogers), London: Macmillan, 1878, 559 (December 4, 1851).

[274] Robbins, *Bright,* 101-102.

[275] Michael Davey, English Attitudes to the American Civil War*,* unpublished BA (Honours) thesis, University of Adelaide, 2008, 56-7.

campaign for peace with the Federal Government, his epitome of democracy, resorting to force.[276]

The start of the Crimean War, a strenuous opposition to it, a lengthy illness and the loss of his Manchester seat at the election of 1857 curtailed Bright's activities on political reform. He was soon back in the Commons taking a seat unopposed for Birmingham at a by-election later in the year. His first speech in Birmingham was something of a sensation being his first important one in nearly three years. He wrote in his journal: 'Attended meeting and dinner at Birmingham. Speeches. Reporters more numerous than at any meeting ever held before in the country. Telegraph and special trains – as if some very important person were to utter words of great import!'[277] In this speech he laid out his plans for parliamentary reform. He pursued these relentlessly until most of them were incorporated into the Second Reform act of 1867. He did this almost single-handed, many believing that 'if Bright had not kept his light burning through the thick darkness of the Palmerston regime, I know not whether the nation would have emerged from its political apathy during this generation.'[278]

Russell, by this time sitting in the Lords, became Prime Minister once more in 1865 following the death of Palmerston; Gladstone became Liberal leader in the Commons. Together they started preparing a new Reform Bill. This was opposed by a small group of Liberals whose actions were ridiculed by Bright in his famous Cave of Adullam speech.[279] However he failed in his efforts to discredit them and they joined with the Conservatives to defeat the Bill and in so doing brought down the Russell government. The incoming Derby-Disraeli Conservative government embraced political reform again with an aristocrat as prime minister. Edward George Geoffrey Smith Stanley was born into an ancient

[276] Hinde, *Cobden,* 304-5.
[277] *The Diaries of John Bright,* (edited by R.A.J. Walling), London: Cassell, 1930, 234 (27 October, 1857).
[278] Trevelyan, *Bright,* 328 – quoting a speech by T.H. Green to the Oxford Reform League in 1867.
[279] Hansard, Vol. 182, 219 (13 March 1866).

aristocratic family and 'began life as an ardent Whig, passed into a Tory, and ended his political career by using all his power to pass a Radical measure of Parliamentary Reform.'[280] Disraeli summed up Derby's political life succinctly: 'He abolished slavery, he educated Ireland, and he reformed Parliament.'[281] He was the ultimate aristocratic politician, first elected to the Commons when twenty-three and leaving the Lords when sixty-nine, only one year before he died; he was prime minister three times and led his party for twenty-two years, all from the Lords. He was an intelligent and single-minded man; *The Times* said 'he was the only brilliant eldest son produced by the British Peerage for a hundred years.'[282] Disraeli thought 'his mind always clear - his patience extraordinary - he rises in difficulty, and his resources never fail.'[283] Stanley soon achieved ministerial rank, first as Under Secretary for Ireland in a Liberal Government. His actions whilst in this role are typical of his entire political life. He introduced an Irish Education Act in 1832, well ahead of a similar measure in England; this provided government grants for schools of all denominations but he also pushed through the Irish Coercion Act the following year to counter the lawlessness arising from O'Connell's call for the repeal of the Act of Union. He disliked unrest and forced change and had an 'unshakeable faith that law and property were the prerequisites to civilized progress and the blessings of reform.'[284] He followed these principles when as Colonial Secretary he negotiated with the planters and abolitionists the compensation for freeing the slaves in the West Indies. His political principles were made clear quite early in his career:

> In me you find one ready to assist in removing all blemishes and deformities from the best and holiest institutions of the

[280] *The Times,* October 25, 1869, reporting Lord Derby's death.
[281] W.F Monypenny and G.E Buckle, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield,* London: Murray, 1910-20, Vol. II, 412.
[282] *The Times,* October 25, 1869.
[283] John Vincent (editor), *Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party: Journals and Memoirs of Edward Henry, Lord Stanley 1849-1869,* Hassocks, Sussex: The Harvester Press Ltd, 1978, 72.
[284] Angus Hawkins, "Lord Derby", in Davis, *Lords of Parliament,* 145.

> country with the most compromising zeal – while, at the same time, I will oppose, with all the might and energy of which I am capable, those whose measures, whose objects, and whose intentions are not to reform, but to destroy.[285]

He expressed similar views at the beginning of his second premiership in 1858 affirming that whilst he would 'strenuously maintain the great institutions of the country' he would 'not hesitate to propose and support measures of undoubted improvement and progress.'[286] He went on to criticize previous governments for talking about parliamentary reform but not enacting legislation and declared 'we will direct our attention to the defects which exist in laws regulating the representation of the people in Parliament.'[287] A moderate reform bill was introduced in 1859 but was defeated when Russell engineered the vote in order to oust the Government.[288] Derby was still firm about reform when returning to power in 1867 saying: 'As our political opponents had failed in carrying a measure, the carrying of which was of vital importance to the interests of the country, I felt it to be my duty to undertake this difficult task.'[289] Derby was the ultimate conservative aristocrat. Disraeli , although admiring him and being grateful for the support Derby provided for Disraeli's own political career, always felt that Derby was too aloof and, by not often meeting members of his own party socially, adversely affected their morale.[290] Nevertheless it was Derby who made parliamentary reform a priority and used his considerable influence amongst his follow peers to get the Bill passed. Disraeli resisted for a while but finally accepted it and cleverly manoeuvred the Bill through the Commons.[291] Derby spent nearly fifty years in parliament, in both the Commons and the

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285 *The Times*, December 22, 1834, speech on Stanley's inauguration as Lord Rector of Glasgow University.
286 Hansard, Third Series, Vol. 149, March 1, 1858, 41.
287 ibid, 43.
288 Wilbur Devereux Jones, *Lord Derby and Victorian Conservatism,* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956, 251-2.
289 Hansard, Third Series, Vol. 188, July 122, 1867, 1738.
290 Jones, *Lord Derby and Victorian Conservatism,* 197.
291 Smith, *The Making of the Second Reform Bill,* 135.

Lords, but, according to the famous political and social diarist, Charles Greville, he:

> Never would look upon politics and political life with the seriousness which belonged to the subject; he followed politics as an amusement, as a means of excitement, he plunged into the melee for the sake of the sport which he found it made there, but always actuated by honourable and consistent principles and feelings, never sacrificing anything that honour or conscience prescribed.[292]

The idea of politics as fun or a sport would not have occurred to the dedicated businessmen-politicians discussed in this thesis and illustrates the gulf between the two groups.

Bright was constantly lobbying Disraeli and giving him advice. In March 1867 he sent Disraeli a memorandum entitled *Suggestions on the coming Reform Bill* which contained somewhat obvious comments.[293] Bright was most pleased with the Bill that was passed in July which was much more radical than the earlier Russell proposal. Bright's interest in extending the franchise to agriculture workers was revived in 1875 when he met Joseph Arch of the Agricultural Laborer's Union, and later a member of parliament himself, and discussed the condition of farm labourers, and the question of giving them votes.[294] He was still active enough to speak at a Liberal Conference in Leeds on October 1883 when he brought forward his 'famous proposal' to curb the powers of the Lords by allowing them to delay but not reject a bill passed by the Commons.[295] Eventually both the County Franchise and the Redistribution Bills were passed and Bright had achieved most of his political reform objectives.

W.E. Forster was elected to Parliament in 1861 and made an early impact with his support of the Northern cause during the American Civil

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[292] Charles C.F. Greville, *A Journal of the Reigns of King George IV, King William IV, and Queen Victoria,* London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1905, 256 (entry for April 9th , 1835)

[293] Trevelyan, *Bright,* 381-2 for complete memorandum.

[294] JBP F/BRI/3.1.8, July 6, 1875.

[295] Trevelyan, *Bright,* 439.

War. He was a great admirer of John Bright's policies and followed him in the campaign for political reform. Like many of the northern manufacturers interested in politics he was a radical, at least in his early years, and actively advocated political reform. In 1858, before the beginning of his parliamentary career, he delivered a lecture to members of the Bradford Mechanics Institute on 'The House of Lords'. He posed the question: 'How Englishmen valuing themselves above all things upon self-government, and upon self-government by means of representative institutions, could yet allow some 450 men to govern them, simply because these 450 men were the sons of their fathers?'[296] He concluded that the peerage was of 'one race with the People' thus if they continued to set themselves apart they 'would quickly die away as an exotic plant, too sickly to thrive in the keen air of British freedom.' Forster continued his support for reform after being elected to the Commons, speaking at many meetings on the subject and supporting Gladstone and Bright in their efforts. By 1865 he was becoming impatient at the lack of progress and challenged the leaders of his own party during an inconclusive debate on the borough franchise:

> The chief point we want to know is, not what the Ministers will do in the support of this particular Bill, but to know whether, at the election speedingly coming, they are or are not a Reform Ministry? But supposing that the election had taken place, and that the large majority of the Liberal Party remain pledged upon this question, what is to be done then? Are these pledges to be trifled with again in another Parliament as they have been in this?[297]

It was still high on his agenda after the defeat of the Liberal Government bill for reform and the accession of a Conservative administration. In his annual address to his constituents in October 1866 he commenced : 'I intend to act rather differently than I have formerly done in these

[296] *Bradford Observer,* Saturday, 6 November, 1858.
[297] Hansard, Vol. 178, 1640-2 (May 8, 1865).

addresses, and to confine myself to one question – the question of Reform – (hear, hear, and cheers) – on account of its present most critical position (hear, hear).'[298] He went on to pledge co-operation with the Conservative Government to ensure that a Reform Bill of some sort was brought to the Parliament. He was not however an adherent of Chartist principles, declaring: 'I think that in the presently densely-peopled state of the country, and with the present want of education, that there would be a manifest unfitness in every grown man in England having a vote.'[299] This statement received some 'no, nos' from the crowd as well as the 'hear, hears'. Forster intervened on thirty-five occasions during Commons debates on the 1867 Reform Bill putting forward matters of detail dear to his Bradford constituents, but probably making little difference to the final outcome.[300] Ultimately Disraeli included some more radical measures into the Act than the earlier Liberal bills had proposed. Forster's final effort was to reverse some Lords' amendments when the Bill returned to the Commons, and he was well satisfied with the result and his work on it.[301]

Forster resigned from the ministry in 1882 following his controversial tenure as Chief Secretary of Ireland and retired to the back bench. He did not speak publicly for some time but when he did it was to support the Government's Franchise Bill. An editorial in *The Times* criticizing agitation in support of the Bill noted : 'Mr Forster at Otley made his first public appearance since his return home, and broke silence with a carefully reasoned, convincing, and common-sense address, such as the opponents of the Bill will find no easy manner to refute.'[302] He spoke similarly at other public meetings in the north of England and appears to have been genuinely supportive of the legislation.[303] Jackson however notes an autobiographical fragment written by Gladstone in 1897 accusing Forster

298 *Bradford Observer,* Thursday, October 25, 1866.
299 ibid.
300 Jackson, *Forster,* 108.
301 ibid, 109-10.
302 *The Times,* Monday, 29 September, 1884, 9.
303 T. Wemyss Reid, *Life of the Right Honourable William Edward Forster,* London: Chapman and Hall, Vol. 2, 495.

of making 'every possible objection in a manner which would have been dangerous had he commanded sympathy in any noticeable section of the House.'[304] This is difficult to believe as Forster showed long sympathy towards political reform.

William Henry Smith was a Conservative politician, although a moderate one. Political reform does not seem to have rated highly on his agenda but in his letter to the electors of Westminster when he first stood, unsuccessfully, in 1865 he did take a position of some sort: 'Although not opposed to a carefully considered scheme for the extension of the suffrage, I deprecate violent or hasty changes, and am not prepared to acquiesce in proposals which might have the effect of swamping the existing voters upon whom the great burden of taxation rests.'[305] Smith was elected MP for Westminster in 1868 in the first election conducted under the reforms introduced by Derby and Disraeli in 1867. Chilston suggests that Smith benefitted through the extended franchise as his reputation was as a 'good and paternalistic employer.'[306] Maxwell points out that parliamentary experience lessened his independent stance and he 'yielded unwavering loyalty to those who directed the party.'[307] Smith followed his party's initial opposition to and then compromise on the Reform Bills of 1884 and 1885, but was not prominent in debate or discussion. He did however suggest 'that if Chamberlain's "auxiliaries" were brought by the millions into the electorate they might "devaluate" the existing votes of other people.'[308]

Anthony Mundella was the only one of the group of politically successful businessmen identified who was an active Chartist. He did not have an established family business or wealthy relations to help his early career and started his working life as an apprentice stockinger in Leicester. Following his fellow workers he embraced the Chartism as

[304] Jackson, *Forster,* 355 n. 50 (in Gladstone Papers, British Library, 44791 (131-66).
[305] WHSP, PS 1/72 (April 1865).
[306] Chilston, *W.H. Smith,* 57.
[307] Maxwell, *Smith,* Vol. 1, 179.
[308] Garvin, *Chamberlain,* Vol. 1, 460.

preached by Thomas Cooper, the Leicester Chartist and religious lecturer, and made his first political speech at the age of fifteen in support of the Charter.[309] Mundella's next few years were occupied in advancing his business activities, getting married, and with education – he taught at a large, poor Sunday School which marked the beginning of his life-long dedication to education. He briefly returned to Chartism during the agitation of 1848, delivering a rousing speech in which he called for the middle and working classes to combine to reform the House of Commons.[310] His only biographer, W.H.G. Armytage, subtitled his work *The Liberal Background to the Labour Movement,* and records in detail Mundella's business activities and his involvement as an arbitrator in management-union disputes. From his early days in parliament he acted as an intermediary between the trades' union movement and the government. When the 1871 bill, which was finally to give unions the same rights as joint stock companies, reached an impasse due to the inclusion of an 'intimidation and molestation' clause Mundella persuaded the government to divide the bill into two, one enshrining the rights of unions, the other dealing with offences under criminal law not applying specifically to unionists.[311] He was a facilitator and fixer rather than an innovator; nevertheless he played a very real role in the areas of legislation important to the people he represented. Armytage says little of Mundella's attitude to political reform but his early activities and his political orientation as a Radical Liberal indicate that he would have been a strong supporter. He was first elected to parliament in the election following the passing of the Second Reform Act and would therefore have benefitted from the enfranchisement of the urban workers in his Sheffield electorate. By the time of the Third Reform Act he was a minister in Gladstone's government, and a fervent supporter of the Prime Minister, so

[309] Armytage, *A.J. Mundella,* 18.
[310] ibid, 20.
[311] Armytage, *A. J. Mundella, 95*-96.

with no evidence to the contrary it can be assumed that he supported those measures wholeheartedly.

Joseph Chamberlain's first venture into national politics was when he joined the committee of the Birmingham Education Society in early 1867. This led to the formation of the National Education League and his role as spokesman opposing the terms of the 1870 Education Act. It was his first exposure to national affairs but by 1876 he was a member of parliament and by 1880 a cabinet minister. As a Radical Liberal he favoured parliamentary reform; speaking at a meeting at Bristol in 1883 he asserted:

> The Tories are always deaf and blind on this question of Reform until they get thoroughly frightened. In 1832 they allowed the country to get almost to the verge of revolution; in 1867 they resisted all proposals until the Hyde Park railing went down, and on both occasions they yielded to panic more than they had refused to reason and to argument![312]

Later in the same speech he declared that 'I have never concealed my opinion – I have expressed it on many occasions – in favour of absolute manhood suffrage.' In the Commons he spoke out strongly for the interests of agricultural labourers, arguing that because they had no voice in the parliament they had been robbed of their lands.[313] When the House of Lords refused to consider the Franchise Bill after its approval by the Commons, Chamberlain embarked on a series of public meetings to denounce the action. Speaking in Birmingham he declared 'We will never be the only race in the civilised world subservient to the insolent pretentions of the hereditary caste.'[314] This and similar pronouncements incurred the wrath of the Queen who more than once suggested to Gladstone that Chamberlain should be dismissed from the Cabinet; the

[312] *Mr Chamberlain's Speeches,* (edited by Charles W. Boyd), London: Constable, 1914, 109-11 (November 26, 1883).
[313] Hansard, Vol. 286, 950 (March 27, 1884).
[314] Quoted in Garvin, *Chamberlain*, Vol. 1, 467 (August 4, 1884).

Prime Minister judiciously resisted and a 'tacit truce' was declared.[315] Eventually a compromise was reached and both Bills were passed. Chamberlain felt that he had triumphed.[316] He had championed universal male suffrage for some years and in some ways was prepared to put his political career at risk by opposing Gladstone's temporizing. Perhaps not; Chamberlain's speeches and writings show a supremely confident man who was convinced of his destiny for high office; he expected to win. Chamberlain's antipathy towards Gladstone and official Liberal policy reached new heights during the 1885 general election. Speaking at a meeting in Ipswich he:

> concentrated attention on four points, viz. local government, land for labourers, free education and a revision of taxation. These four points constituted the so-called 'Unauthorized Programme' of 1885 on which about two-thirds of the Liberal Party fought the election in that year, the remainder adhering to Mr Gladstone's much more limited manifesto.[317]

This speech led to a complaint from Gladstone, to which Chamberlain, in his usual combative way, replied that the recently enfranchised voters needed to 'be assured that their interests are a constant object of concern to the Liberal Party and the Liberal Government.'[318] In what Lord Hartington thought almost amounted to socialism Chamberlain concluded his speech by proclaiming 'We are told that this country is the paradise of the rich; it should be our task to see that it does not become the purgatory of the poor.'[319] His obvious concern for the wellbeing of the working-class poor was apparent and his consistency shows real sympathy.

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315 ibid, 474-5.
316 ibid, 436.
317 Joseph Chamberlain, *A Political Memoir, 1880-92,* London: The Batchworth Press, 1953 (Edited from the original manuscript by C.D.H. Howard), 110 (speech at Ipswich, 14 January, 1885).
318 ibid, 117.
319 *The Times,* Thursday, 15, January,1885 ('Mr Chamberlain at Ipswich',7)

Passing reference has been made to Lord John Russell's commitment to parliamentary reform, and it was a constant theme throughout his political life. He was an aristocrat, but a younger son in the Whig family of the Duke of Bedford. Like many others from political landowning families Russell was just twenty-one when he entered the Commons for an electorate controlled by his family. He was to stay in the parliament throughout his long life, although moving to the Lords when he was given a peerage in his own right. Russell's parliamentary record – twice prime minister, Whig/Liberal leader in the Commons, Home Secretary, Foreign Secretary – is highlighted by his long term advocacy of political reforms. Ten years before the passing of the First Reform Act he spoke in the House of Commons urging reform 'in a speech which passed into the annals of English oratory.'[320] He told members that 'at the present period the ministers of the Crown possess the confidence of the House of Commons, but the House of Commons does not possess the esteem and reverence of the people' and that 'we cannot confine liberty in this country to one class of men.'[321] In the thirty-five years between the First and Second Reform Acts Russell repeatedly proposed further reforms to extend the franchise and to provide fairer representation, but he was unsuccessful, partly due to the indifference of his colleagues and partly to his disputatious personality. Prest considers that Russell 'never understood restraint.'[322] Nevertheless his contribution, and constancy, to political reform is significant.

Parliamentary reform was not of course, the only matter which was of importance throughout the period. Extending educational opportunities to all of the population, fixing the problems that beset Ireland and improving the working and living conditions of the working class were repeatedly debated and legislated on. The first two issues have particular interest in the context of this thesis because of the conflict they generated between

[320] John Prest, *Russell, John,* ODNB.
[321] PD, New Series, Vol. VII, 73-74 (April 25, 1822) – see also n. 20 p...).
[322] Prest, *Lord John Russell,* 419.

Forster and Chamberlain. Reid's somewhat hagiographic biography of Forster talks of 'the great work of Mr Forster's life, that with which his name will always be associated, was the Act which gave the people of this country a national system of education.'[323] Forster had long been an advocate of comprehensive and competent primary education and as early as 1849 was involved in a group in Leeds which aimed to promote a national education scheme.[324] In 1856 he and his business partner, William Fison, established a school for the children employed in their factory at Burley-in-Wharfedale.[325] It was set up using the model of the non-denominational British and Foreign School Society rather than that of the Anglican National Society, but nevertheless indicates an early attachment to religious education in schools. His commitment to improving education throughout the country continued through the years including his involvement with various committees and commissions and with assisting with drafting of legislation. This continuum is well covered by both his biographers, T. Wemyss Reid and Patrick Jackson, and convincingly shows Forster's long interest in that cause. He became responsible for education policy following his appointment as Vice-President of the Council after the sweeping Liberal victory of 1868 and introduced his Education Bill to the House of Commons on 17 February 1870 to, initially a least, general approbation. *The Times* editorial felt that 'when Mr Forster sat down last night he had achieved a genuine triumph.'[326] It praised the Bill for putting the 'elements of Education within the reach of every home in England' and that religious difficulties had been 'surmounted with ease'. An editorial in his local newspapers, the *Bradford Observer*, written by Forster's friend William Byles, congratulated him on 'the passage of an imperfect but plausible measure' but warned of the problem of 'denominationalism [taking] possession of the land.'[327]

[323] Reid, *Forster,* Vol. 1, 435.
[324] ibid, 436-7.
[325] Jackson, *Forster,* 136.
[326] *The Times*, February 18, 1870.
[327] *Bradford Observer,* February 19, 1870.

Perhaps not what Forster might have hoped for. In the same edition the *Observer* reported on a meeting of the Executive Council of The National Education League in Birmingham the previous day when 'a general feeling of satisfaction was expressed' but 'the provisions for compulsion were regarded as unsatisfactory'. Relatively mild criticism perhaps but attacks on the Bill from the League and from other nonconformists increased thereafter. At a meeting at Bradford in the month after the first reading of the Bill two prominent nonconformists and Liberal MPs were outspoken. Edward Miall, Forster's fellow member for Bradford, 'could hardly conceive of anything so disastrous as the general tendency of this bill.' Alfred Illingworth, the member for Knaresborough but a Bradford manufacturer, 'feared that the Government was demented' and had conceived the Bill 'in a spirit of compromise rather than of true Liberal policy.'[328]

The National Education League was established by nonconformists to fight for non-denominational teaching in primary schools. Chamberlain quickly became the driving force as chairman of the Executive Committee but he was looking for more. In 1869 he asserted that 'the vast numerical majority of the people of this country are in favour of national, compulsory, free and unsectarian education.'[329] The provision in the Bill which allowed denominational interests a period of grace to establish schools in regions not already provided for was seen by the League and nonconformists generally as entrenching the position of the Church of England in the educational system. Opposition to the Bill provided the impetus for Chamberlain's entry onto the national scene. His first, and admiring, biographer, J.L. Garvin, asserts: 'Nothing in the history of politics and agitation in this country is quite like the struggle now undertaken by the new protagonist, not yet thirty-four.'[330] Chamberlain had become involved in education issues a couple of years before the foundation of the League when invited by the Mayor of Birmingham,

[328] ibid, March 14, 1870.
[329] Garvin, *Chamberlain,* 100.
[330] ibid, 108.

George Dixon, to be part of a group to discuss elementary education in the city.[331] It was a cause which he pursued with vehemence for some years.[332] He probably had a genuine desire to see that working class children had a decent education, after all he had supported the Working Men's Institute, giving readings and teaching French there and founded a Benefit's Club for his workers. It is however suggested by Jay that it was a convenient issue that Chamberlain could take up to achieve national prominence quickly.[333] Less likely perhaps, but Marsh suggests that Chamberlain saw the Education Act as a religious issue.[334] Whatever Chamberlain's motivation for opposing Forster's Education Act it led to a bitter enmity between the two men. Chamberlain persistently criticized Forster, feeling that he 'was now antagonistic to the spirit where from which he sprang' in that he had lost his radical and nonconformist principles upon obtaining ministerial office. [335] This antipathy was to continue during Forster's tenure as Chief Secretary for Ireland.

When Forster introduced the Education Bill he acknowledged the assistance he had received from Mundella, and also interestingly from Dixon, President of the National Educational League, 'for stimulating educational zeal in the country.'[336] Nevertheless Mundella was among members of the League, headed by Chamberlain, who met with Gladstone to present their position on the bill. Mundella later wrote to a friend, and then editor of the *Sheffield Independent,* that 'the secularists in the League are pushing the nonconformists into antagonism about the religious question' hoping they would vote against the second reading.[337] After this Mundella was a committed supporter of Forster and the Bill, although he did push, successfully, for some amendments. He continued

[331] Dixon later became President of the National Education League.
[332] See p. 56 above for details of Chamberlain's maiden speech which addressed an education issue.
[333] Jay, *Chamberlain,* 12.
[334] Marsh, *Chamberlain,* 43.
[335] Garvin, *Chamberlain,* 128.
[336] Hansard, Vol. 199, 465 (February 17, 1870).
[337] Armytage, *Mundella,* 78 (letter to Robert Leader, 10 March, 1870).

his support through the leadership crisis following Gladstone's resignation in 1875, writing to Robert Leader:

> Now who is to be leader? One thing is agreed – Harcourt is impossible. It really lies between Forster and Hartington. I suspect the Whigs will make a tremendous attempt to retain it in the hands of the latter. I dislike the man. I distrust his character. Forster is to my mind the only man, but I hear the Non-cons. are bitter and his opposition to the Disestablishment movement will not tend to reconcile them.[338]

Mundella was appointed Vice-President of the Council, with responsibility for education in 1880, a position once occupied by Forster. The Queen was much annoyed at this, writing in her journal 'Another letter from Mr Gladstone, submitting more unexpected names. Mr Mundella (one of the most violent Radicals) for President of the Board of Agriculture (not in the Cabinet).'[339] One of his early initiatives was to complete the process of compelling children to attend school until the age of thirteen and imposing penalties for non-compliance. During his business career Mundella had been an enlightened supporter of innovative technology and when Vice-President saw the need for improved technical education in Britain. To achieve this he oversaw the relocation of several metropolitan institutions to South Kensington, combined as the Normal School of Science with T.H. Huxley as dean.[340] This organisation survives today as one of the world's foremost technical universities, Imperial College.

With universal education a matter of so much attention and concern throughout the period it would have been surprising if the advanced Liberals, Cobden and Bright, and the moderate Conservative, Smith, did not take a strong position on the subject. Cobden's first pamphlet,

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[338] ibid, 154 (15 January, 1875)

[339] *The Letters of Queen Victoria,* (edited by George Earle Buckle), London: John Murray, 1928, Second Series Vol. III, 87. The earlier letter referred to sought the appointment of 'such very advanced Radicals as Mr Chamberlain and Sir Charles Dilke.'

[340] Armytage, *Mundella,* 207.

England, Ireland and America, published in 1835, under the *nom de plume* 'A Manchester Manufacturer', compares the education system of England unfavourably with that of America:

> There is another peculiarity in the present attitude of the American people, as compared with our own, that is probably more calculated than all others to accelerate their progress towards a superior rank of civilization and power. We allude to the universality of education in that country. If knowledge be power, and if education gives knowledge, then must the Americans inevitably become the most powerful people in the world.[341]

Alongside his campaigns for the repeal of the Corn Laws, non-intervention in European affairs, and government retrenchment, Cobden maintained his enthusiasm for better education. He was much involved in the national surge in interest in providing universal primary education but he too became caught up in the 'religious difficulty'. Speaking to the 1851 annual general meeting of The National Public School Association he was concerned that 'the schooling of all those Roman Catholic children should be paid out of the public notes.'[342] He did however support their right to an education. A few months later when speaking against a motion in the Commons to establish free secular schools he returned to his argument against any state funding which would include religious instruction: 'I see the enormous difficulty of taking any combined step, owing to the religious element, which stands always in the way. No-one can deny that never before was there so much strife and disunion amongst different religious bodies.'[343] Perhaps it was fortunate that Cobden did not live to see the religious controversy of the 1870 Education Act.

One of John Bright's earliest public forays was to speak in favour of 'universal education of the people' at a meeting of the Rochdale Literary

[341] Cobden's *Political Writings*, 53.
[342] Cobden, *Speeches*, 591 (Manchester, January 22, 1851).
[343] Hansard, Vol. 116, 1285 (May 22, 1851).

and Philosophical Society in 1833.[344] Like Cobden, Bright became active in other issues but always retained the desire to see improved education throughout the country. Trevelyan records that one of Bright's speeches during the 1868 election was entirely devoted 'to an earnest appeal for a system of national education.'[345] Also, like Cobden, he was opposed to public funds supporting religious teaching but unlike Cobden he was alive and indeed a minister at the time of Forster's Education Act. Trevelyan points out that the 'representative of Birmingham and the champion of the Nonconformist world' would have been expected to challenge some of the bill's clauses but he seems to have raised no protest during discussion of the first draft.[346] He had become seriously ill during the time the bill was being discussed in Cabinet and for a while did not attend cabinet meetings; he was vociferous in his criticism later but that was in accord with the general nonconformist displeasure. There is no evidence of Smith especially espousing the cause of universal education but by 1870 he was in the parliament; he favoured voluntary religious instruction in school and therefore supported Forster's bill. An enduring friendship developed between the two men despite their political differences. That friendship continued through Forster's troubled period as Chief Secretary for Ireland when Smith sympathised with the difficulties he faced.[347]

The aristocratic member of parliament, in general, was less concerned with improving the educational standards of the lower classes. Lord John Russell was an exception, showing an interest throughout his political life, but then 'all Russells did.'[348] He was however mostly concerned with parliamentary reform, the problems of Ireland, his various ministerial responsibilities, and his rivalry with Palmerston. But he did tell the Commons in 1847 during a debate on increasing the monetary grants to schools that he was 'connected, as I always have been, with the British

[344] Trevelyan, *Bright,* 24.
[345] ibid, 394.
[346] ibid, 405-6.
[347] Maxwell, *Smith,* Vol. II, 59.
[348] Prest, *Lord John Russell,* 136.

and Foreign School Society.'[349] This was the organisation which ran non-conformist as well as Anglican Schools. Twenty years later, and now in the Lords, Russell moved a resolution that 'the Education of the Working Classes in England and Wales ought to be extended and improved; Every Child has a moral right to the Blessings of Education, and it is the Duty of the State to guard and maintain that Right.'[350] This was a powerful endorsement from a man who had recently been prime minister and shows the commitment of the party which subsequently produced the 1870 Education Act.

Whilst still a Whig parliamentarian, and Chief Secretary for Ireland in Grey's government, Stanley (later Lord Derby and Conservative prime minister) introduced the Irish Education Act of 1832. It was an extremely liberal piece of legislation at a time when violent resistance to British rule was increasing. The Act provided for the financing of government schools admitting children of all denominations, with one aim of engendering 'companionship and kindly feeling between Catholics and Protestants.'[351] This could have simply been a concessionary measure to balance tougher actions in other areas as Stanley does not seem to have taken much interest in educational matters thereafter. Ireland had long presented difficulties for the British parliament. Whilst the issues of parliamentary reform, universal education, free trade and factory legislation were the products of an increasingly urbanised and industrial society, the Irish 'problem' was concerned with age old issues: religion, land ownership and alien government. Nevertheless it was a problem that concerned politicians of all persuasions including the businessmen discussed in this thesis.

Conflict between the native Irish and their English overlords was frequent since the first entry of Norman knights in the eleventh century. The 1800 Act of Union however precipitated a different form of

[349] *Parliamentary Debates, Third* Series, Vol. XCI, 955 (19 April, 1847).
[350] ibid, Vol. CXC, 478 (2 December, 1867).
[351] ibid, Vol. IX, 1250 (Stanley's speech, 9 September, 1831).

subordination which saw political and economic issues take on a new complexion.[352] Anglo-Irish Tory landlords were usually elected to represent Irish constituencies at Westminster until the 1832 Reform Act, although Daniel O'Connell, a Roman Catholic and first elected in 1828, finally took his seat in 1830 after the passage of the Catholic Emancipation Bill the previous year. O'Connell promoted repeal of the Act of Union and his 'party' won thirty-nine seats at the first election after the passing of the Reform Act. He had started the united Irish block which often held the balance of power in the Commons throughout the period discussed here. This disciplined voting group was one of the problems facing British politicians but they also had to contend with the obvious religious issue of supporting an established protestant church in a predominantly Roman Catholic country, the increasing violent actions of Irishmen opposed to the union, the inequality of land rights in a largely agricultural country and finally the catastrophic issue of the potato famines of 1845-49.

Richard Cobden first visited Ireland in 1825 and wrote of it in his 1835 pamphlet. He accuses most British of being ignorant of affairs in Ireland and by implication uncaring. He suggests that increased emigration and 'throwing open the semi-barbarous southern portion of the island to the curiosity and enterprise of England' might be remedies to improve the 'miserable state of the Irish people.'[353] He ruled out repeal of the Union as a Dublin parliament had proved unsuccessful, and as he continued to do, attacked the Roman church as 'retarding the *secular* prosperity of nations.'[354] In 1845 he did however vote for an increase in the government grant to Maynooth College which educated Irish Roman Catholic priests, saying 'it will tend to heal the festering wounds of Irish

[352] Oliver MacDonagh, *Ireland,* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1968, vii; Donal McCartney, *The Dawning of Democracy : Ireland 1800-1870,* Dublin: Helicon Limited, 1987, 3.
[353] Cobden's, *Political Writings,* 26-37.
[354] ibid, 25.

society.'[355] Cobden laboured long and hard to effect the repeal of the Corn Laws and perhaps led Peel to accept the concept of free trade; nevertheless it was the devastation of Ireland's potato crop in 1845 that finally led to the repeal. John Bright visited Ireland several times. He recorded in his diary that: 'Landlords have grossly neglected their duties and their political position as protestants and a favoured minority has been adverse to a good understanding with the tenantry and peasantry.'[356] He continued this attack on the landed gentry later in his visit: 'It is a common thing to say Popery is the cause of no progress in Ireland – query – "Which class has most neglected its duty in Ireland?" Have not the landed proprietors, and are they not mostly *protestant*? If Protestantism has not saved the proprietors, why say that Popery has ruined the peasants?'[357] It was during this 1849 visit that Bright developed his ideas for a Tenants Rights Bill to provide security over improvements made to the land.[358] It was a cause he continued to advocate through the years but it was not until 1870 that the first Irish Land Act passed the parliament.

Bright was an opponent of Irish home rule, writing to Gladstone:

> I think the plan of your Bill is full of complexity and gives no hope of successful working in Ireland or of harmony between Westminster and Dublin. I cannot consent to a measure which is so offensive to the whole Protestant population of Ireland. Up to this time I have not been able to bring myself to the point of giving a vote in favour of your Bill.[359]

He voted with the majority to defeat the second reading of the Bill, send the Commons to the country and split the Liberal Party. Joseph

[355] Hansard, LXXIX, 968 (18 April, 1845)
[356] JBP, F/BRI/3/1.2 (August 14, 1849).
[357] ibid, (September 4, 1849).
[358] Trevelyan, *Bright,* 167-169.
[359] ibid, 450 (May 13, 1886).

Chamberlain also voted against the Bill, but his was a quite different position to that of Bright who was old, tired and ill and took little active part in the opposition to Home Rule. Chamberlain was not yet fifty and was ambitious for both the Radical cause and his personal position. The conventional explanation for his opposition is that he saw it as the beginning of the disintegration of the British Empire, but Jay advances a darker view, suggesting that Chamberlain saw it as a means of destabilizing the Liberal Party leading to the removal of Gladstone and his own accession to the leadership.[360] Whatever his reasons were he had tried to broker some practical solution to meet Irish demands by negotiating with Charles Stewart Parnell, leader of the home rule MPs in the Commons. The story of these negotiations, often with Captain William Henry O'Shea, erstwhile husband of Parnell's mistress, Katharine, often reads like sensational fiction, but do indicate a real desire by Chamberlain to help the Irish. He had involved himself in Irish affairs a few years earlier during Forster's period as Chief Secretary for Ireland. Chamberlain had just entered the ministry when Forster was given the responsibility for Ireland but he went on the attack immediately, objecting to Forster's coercive policy and criticizing his inconsistency. It was a renewal of their fight over education and even Garvin, who generally portrays Chamberlain in a favourable light, wonders if it was a continuation of that antagonism.[361]

Forster had some early understanding of the problem of poverty in Ireland when as a young man and still a committed Quaker he was involved in the British Association for the Relief of Distress in Ireland during the potato famine.[362] His father had gone to Ireland in 1846 as an agent for this Quaker organisation and Forster spent some months there himself. On returning to England he was involved in raising money to support this cause and according to Reid was 'strong in the determination

[360] Jay, *Chamberlain,* 126-7.
[361] Garvin, *Chamberlain,* 325.
[362] WEFP, TDMs. 4986 (274) – letter to Fowell Buxton, 1847.

that he at least would do his best to the utmost extent of his ability to wash himself of all the guilt which the conditions of that country had cast upon England.'[363] By the time he became Chief Secretary in 1880 his attitude had changed. Home rule, with its accompanying violence, rather than humanitarian aid were the issues he faced, but not only was it what was happening in Ireland that he had to contend with but also Chamberlain and Dilke's sniping in Cabinet, Gladstone's ambivalence and Parnell's group of obstructionists in the Commons. Forster played no part in the home rule debate, being extremely sick, in fact terminally ill, dying in April 1886 the month in which Gladstone's Home Rule Bill was introduced. At the time it was generally thought that the Irish issue had killed him. The Burley-in-Wharfedale parish priest speaking the day after Forster's funeral claimed:

> It was some six years ago that he threw himself into the 'imminent deadly breach' then widening between Ireland and Great Britain. There was one at least who thought and said at the time that the task he had undertaken would be death to him. He was held up to the pelting of the pitiless storm of national contempt and abhorrence. And it is the grandeur of the grief involved and the splendour of this defeat that complete his life.[364]

The difficulties of ruling Ireland were a constant problem for British governments during the period covered by this thesis so it was not an issue that the political aristocrat could avoid. After visiting Ireland and seeing the poverty and land tenure issues, Lord John Russell spoke of 'the great and holy cause of Ireland.'[365] As Home Secretary in Melbourne's government Russell had an overall responsibility for Irish affairs and did make attempts to bring some reforms. Like many others he was unsuccessful, perhaps because he wasn't whole hearted in his attempts.

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[363] Reid, *Forster,* 198-9.
[364] WEFP, TD Ms 4986 (234) – 11 April, 1886.
[365] Prest, *Lord John Russell,* 61 (21 April, 1836).

Certainly Daniel O'Connell thought so; writing to the Liberal MP Charles Buller in 1844 he said:

> The British people will think of doing justice to Ireland, as they did to America, when too late. The Whigs won't do it: the principal part of them will necessarily be under the control of Lord John Russell; and he will never permit anything like justice to be done to the Catholic people of this country. He has a thorough, contemptuous, Whig hatred of the Irish. He has a strong and I believe, conscientious abhorrence of Popery everywhere, but particularly of Irish Popery. You cannot succeed, it is impossible.[366]

Whilst Chief Secretary for Ireland Stanley enforced the coercion laws asserting his 'unshakable faith that law and property were the prerequisites to civilized progress.'[367] Nevertheless he also introduced the Irish Education Act of 1831 and the Irish Reform Act of 1832. This provided for a fairer representation of Irish members elected to the British parliament.[368] The Irish issue was to remain an unresolved problem for Britain until the twentieth or perhaps the twenty-first century and was an issue quite different from those others discussed in this chapter.

The Anti-Corn Law League and the repeal of the Corn Laws have been mentioned several times in this thesis due to the importance of the main leaders of the League, Cobden and Bright.[369] These two young men were cotton manufacturers but on a relatively small scale, they did not come from influential families yet their strength of purpose and oratorical skills helped turn the League into the most powerful extra-parliamentary group yet seen. Despite the League's arguments the Parliament routinely voted down bills to repeal the Corn Laws and it was not until the horror of the

366 Spencer Walpole, *The Life of Lord John Russell,* London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1889, 396.

367 Hawkins, *Lord Derby,* in Davis (editor), *Lords of Parliament,* 145.

368 Parliamentary Debates, Third Series, Vol. IX, 595 (19 January, 1832).

369 The Anti-Corn Law League's activities are well documented. A contemporary account, written by a participant and published in 1853, is Prentice, *History of the Anti-Corn Law League;* more recent histories are McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League,* (1968), and Pickering and Tyrrell, *The Peoples' Bread,* (2000).

Irish potato famine that this occurred.[370] What was of more significance was the League's development of the free trade philosophy which became accepted policy of both Whigs and Tories. The League's leaders were faithful disciples of Adam Smith and eagerly subscribed to his argument that when left free of regulation people would be capable of raising overall standards of living.[371] They saw the Corn Laws as a symbol of the landed interest's protectionism which, when ended, would lead to benefits in most business and trade areas. Even if it took a starving Ireland and a Conservative prime minister to remove the import duty on corn, the free trade principle ruled in Britain for the next fifty years.

Cobden saw free trade not only in terms of increasing British exports to Europe and America but as a means of achieving peace between nations and reducing the costs of keeping a standing army and navy. With these aims he successfully negotiated a free trade treaty with France, contrary to the instincts of the Prime Minister, Palmerston, and Foreign Secretary, Russell. Before leaving for Paris in late 1859 Cobden wrote to Bright of a meeting he had had with the two leaders:

> It is not easy to interest men whose foreign policy has been running in such different grooves, in questions of political economy and tariffs. But I spoke frankly to both of them as to the state of our relations with France, and disparaged any other pretended *entente cordiale,* whilst we were keeping up twenty-six millions of armaments, principally as a defence against France.[372]

Following the French Emperor's agreement to the Treaty, Morley records that there was 'intensive satisfaction' in both countries 'due less to a desire for extended trade, than to the confidence that the Emperor intended peace, and had taken the most effectual means to make it

[370] This view is shared by Prentice, II, 412, McCord, 197 and Pickering and Tyrell, 165.
[371] Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations,* London: Penguin Books, 1999, 8 (Andrew S. Skinner, *Analytical Introduction).*
[372] Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden,* 241-2.

permanent.'[373] This was the only legislation that can actually be attributed directly to Cobden.

Extreme free trade principles, especially as argued by Richard Cobden, included opposition to legislating for the hours of work in factories. Even before his involvement with the Anti-Corn Law League Cobden was an advocate of the freedom for the working man to determine his hours of labour. Writing to W.C. Hunt in 1836 he says of advocates of the Ten Hours Bill:

> Have they considered that it would be the first example of a legislature of a free country interfering with the freedom of adult labour? Have they reflected that if we surrender into the hands of Government the power to make laws to fix the hours of labour at all, it has a good a right, upon the same principle, to make twenty hours the standard as ten?[374]

In the same letter he asserts his 'goodwill towards the great body of the working classes' but:

> My sympathy is not of that morbid kind which would lead me to despond over their future prospects. Nor do I partake of that spurious humanity, which would indulge in an unreasoning kind of philanthropy at the expense of the independence of the great bulk of the community. Mine is that species of charity which would lead me to inculcate in the minds of the labouring classes, the love of independence, the privilege of self-respect, the disdain of being patronized.

This letter seems to target the philanthropic approach of Lord Ashley (later the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury) who had, unsuccessfully, introduced a Ten Hours Bill to the Commons in 1833. Cobden returned to his attack on 'Tory Philanthropists' in 1839 telling them that their

[373] ibid, 265.
[374] Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden,* Appendix, 464-468 (21 October, 1836).

arguments were pointless 'unless they showed their consistency by untaxing the poor man's loaf.'[375]

Ashley was a Tory but never a minister nor an influence on his Party's policies. He was indeed looked upon with some suspicion by the leaders; there was a major dispute as early as 1842 when Peel refused Ashley's request for Government support for his factory bill.[376] He was also an Evangelical Anglican who clearly stated his position in his first important speech in the House of Commons. After seconding an amendment to the Lunacy Act he wrote 'and by God's blessing, my first effort has been made for the advancement of human happiness.'[377] Neither the industrialists nor the land owners were supporters of changes to working conditions but this aristocrat who opposed the First Reform Act and the repeal of the Corn Laws 'did more than any single man, or any single Government in English history to check the raw power of the new industrial system.'[378] Shaftesbury spent his political life in battles to improve the working and living conditions of the working class, but even one of his most supportive biographers commented on the 'moral earnestness and spiritual ecstasy' that he brought to the task.[379] As committed free traders, both Cobden and Bright were extremely critical of what Shaftesbury was trying to achieve and accused him of double standards in ignoring the low wages and poor housing of his own Dorsetshire farm workers. Forster and Mundella however took a different view to the majority of industrialists. As early as 1846 Forster, at a meeting in Bradford, moved a resolution supporting Ashley's proposed Ten Hours Bill.[380] Forster was also one of the principal speakers at a dinner in 1881 celebrating Shaftesbury's eightieth birthday. In response Shaftesbury remembered Forster as a mill owner 'who know the evils which existed in the factory districts and who

375 Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury,* Vol. I, 424.
376 N. Gash, "Ashley and the Conservative Party in 1842", *The English Historical Review,* Vol. 53, No. 212 (October, 1938), 679.
377 J. Wesley Bready, *Lord Shaftesbury and Social – Industrial Progress,* London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1933 (first published 1926), 25 (20 February 1828).
378 John Lawrence & Barbara Hammond, *Lord Shaftesbury,* London: Constable, 1925, 15.
379 Bready, *Lord Shaftesbury,* 388.
380 Jackson, *Education Act Forster, 54.*

had been one of the first to speak a kind word to him.'[381] Mundella too was a supporter of improved working conditions and he succeeded Shaftesbury, but without his religious fervour, as the champion of factory reform.[382]

The number of businessmen elected to parliament increased considerably after 1832 but only a few can be counted as influential. Forster, Smith, Mundella and Chamberlain all achieved senior cabinet status; two of them nearly became prime minister. They were intelligent, hard working men who had a genuine desire to promote legislation they believed beneficial both for the nation and for individuals. They brought a different perspective to this task from the landed aristocrat. But many aristocratic politicians also enacted improving legislation. Grey, Lambton, Russell and Derby were proponents of parliamentary reform, Russell and Derby tried to help the Irish, Lambton set the scene for self-government of the colonies, and Shaftesbury improved factory conditions. That both the new businessmen politicians and the old aristocrats and gentry sought change in some way showed recognition of an evolving society with new problems. The Radical Liberal businessman was just that; he advocated change, in parliamentary systems, in economic and trade matters and in education. These men entered parliament with an expectation that they would achieve their objectives; the country was going through widespread social and economic change and parliamentary reform had started, it was the time to address the issues that concerned them. Few were able to meet the challenges presented due to their late entry into politics and the continued dominance of the aristocracy. Even the six men discussed in detail in this thesis had a patchy record with only education reform being of wide benefit. The aristocratic politician performed better in responding to the new conditions but the most successful had a lengthy parliamentary experience and considerable support from family and friends.

381 Hodder, *The Life and Work of ... Shaftesbury,* Vol. III, 423.

382 Armytage, *A.J. Mundella,* 123 – although Shaftesbury chaired the inaugural meeting of the Factory Acts Reform Association in January, 1872 he was then seventy-one; Mundella was chosen to present the proposed bills to the Commons.

4
Legacies

Each of the six men discussed in this thesis stayed in parliament until their deaths. This was despite major health problems and political disappointment experienced by most of them. The desire to be at the centre of decision making was evidently very strong. When the Irish Home Rule Bill was defeated on 8 June, 1886 Cobden had been long dead, Forster only in April of that year. Bright was a spent force and hardly appeared in public after the events of 1886, dying in 1891. Smith and Mundella were still prominent and loyal members of their parties and served as cabinet ministers in the short lived governments of the time. Smith was to die in 1891 and Mundella in 1897. Chamberlain however was only fifty in 1886 and a powerful force in national affairs. He confidently expected to be prime minister and to oversee the radical policies he espoused. Although none of these men reached the pinnacle of political power they all influenced the politics of their day and two, Cobden and Chamberlain, beyond their lifetimes.

Writing in the Preface to his biography of Cobden in 1881, some sixteen years after his subject's death, John Morley commented that 'my memoir of Mr Cobden appears at a moment when there is a certain disposition in men's minds to subject his work and his principles to a more hostile criticism than they have hitherto encountered.'[383] Morley does not explain his reason for this assertion but later, in the concluding chapter of his book, he levels the criticism that Cobden 'was expecting the arrival of a great social reform from the mere increase and more equal distribution of material wealth.'[384] He should have known 'that what our society needs is the diffusion of intellectual light and the fire of a higher morality.'[385] A

383 Morley, *Cobden,* Vol. I, vii.
384 ibid, Vol. II, 481.
385 ibid, Vol. II, 481.

later biographer, Nicholas Edsall, on the contrary, asserts that when Morley's study was published 'Cobden's influence was at its height. The Gladstonian Liberal party had just won an electoral victory on a platform of economy in government and opposition to imperialism.'[386] Edsall is a Cobden devotee believing that 'the senseless slaughter of World War I also served to enhance Cobden's reputation as critic and prophet' and that 'as late as 1923 free trade was still a sufficiently potent battle cry around which to reunite the Liberal party'.[387] Whilst these sentiments may not have been shared by many there was a continuing devotion to Cobden's ideas for many years after his death as illustrated by the long lived Cobden Club. Established in 1866 by Thomas Bayley Potter, Cobden's successor as MP for Rochdale, its purpose was to continue to present the principles espoused by Cobden – 'Peace, free trade and goodwill among nations' – to future generations.[388] By the early 1880's membership of the Club had reached over a thousand and 'its activities undoubtedly assisted in rooting Cobdenite ideas at the centre of the British Liberal Party.'[389] The belief in the longevity of Cobden's ideas was shared by his critics. In an otherwise negative article titled 'The Church of Cobden' the *Pall Mall Gazette* declared that 'Cobden alone of recent public men seems destined to prove the founder of a sect.'[390] The writer of this article argues that Cobden's only constructive feat was the negotiation of the French Commercial Treaty, dismissing his call for the limitation of the powers of the State as irreconcilable with the extension of the suffrage. Irrespective of the criticism of Cobden's philosophy the Cobden Club, through many ups and downs, survived until 1982 when it was associated with anti-European pressure groups, surely the antithesis of Cobden's arguments.[391]

386 Edsall, *Cobden,* vii.
387 ibid, viii.
388 A.C. Howe, *Cobden Club,* ODNB (accessed 19/08/2011).
389 ibid.
390 *Pall Mall Gazette*, Wednesday, January 10, 1872, Issue 2155, 121.
391 Howe, *Cobden Club*, ODNB.

Cobden's legacy has been regularly celebrated. The centenary of his birth in 1904 was used, in Anthony Howe's view, to 'galvanise a new communitarian spirit which identified Cobden as a modern liberal.'[392] Herbert Samuel wrote an interesting article in 1904. The author was then a new, young, Liberal MP but his political career was to extend until 1963, still as a Liberal, through to the virtual demise of the Party. Samuel argued that 'some of Cobden's ideas are now so generally accepted that they no longer figure in the world of controversy.'[393] He then mentions that the Liberal Party of his day was 'out of sympathy' with Cobden's belief that 'colonies were nothing else than possible causes of quarrel and actual sources of expense.'[394] He was of course writing during a period of increasing colonial self-government and financial responsibility, not the increasing cost of maintaining the colonies that Cobden resisted. Equally he damns with faint praise Cobden's 'antipathy [to] almost every form of state action.'[395] He however concludes that 'there remains in our contemporary Liberalism a great body of doctrine of which Cobden was the originator or zealous advocate.'[396] Fifty years later the *Manchester Guardian* was more philosophical, commenting 'that Cobdenism and the Liberalism with which it ran in harness are no longer quite the political force they were', but goes on to say that 'the astonishing thing is that they have survived so long when so many other Victorian causes have passed out of memory.'[397] Cobden's bicentenary in 2004 was recognised with a conference held at Cobden's birthplace, Dunford House in West Sussex. The papers presented at this conference explored the relationship between Cobden and nineteenth-century liberalism.[398] Most papers were written by historians from English speaking countries and cover free trade, democracy, peace and retrenchment; there are however papers by

[392] Howe and Morgan, *Rethinking Nineteenth Century Liberalism,* 18.
[393] Herbert Samuel, "The Cobden Centenary and Modern Liberalism", *The Nineteenth Century and After,* Vol. LV, No. CCCXXVIII, June, 1904, 902.
[394] ibid, 900.
[395] Ibid, 901.
[396] ibid, 909.
[397] *Manchester Guardian,* "Richard Cobden", June 3, 1954.
[398] Howe and Morgan, *Rethinking Nineteenth Century Liberalism.*

German, Italian and Greek academics showing the influence of Cobden's ideas on liberal politics and economic thinking in their countries. The breadth of Cobden's influence and the continued reference to it over a long period of time is probably unique amongst British politicians.

Joseph Chamberlain was the only industrialist 'to set the pace of British politics' in the view of Peter Marsh.[399] But it was an undisciplined ride that Chamberlain took; he was the only man to divide both major parties since the establishment of the modern party system – the Liberal party over Home Rule for Ireland and the Conservatives over tariff reform. Chamberlain saw Home Rule as the beginning of the break-up of the British Empire and later became convinced that some degree of protectionism together with imperial preferences were necessary fiscal policy reforms. He resigned from Arthur Balfour's Conservative Unionist Cabinet in September 1903 so that he could take his argument directly to the people.[400] The divisions that this created within the cabinet and the party as a whole eventually led to Balfour's resignation in December 1905, and 'so ended the great Unionist administration which had governed Britain almost without interruption since 1886.'[401] The Conservative Unionist Party was annihilated in the election of 1906 with even Balfour losing his seat. They did not return to government for seventeen years. Such was the furore created by Chamberlain's ideas that seven years later the free traders of the Cobden Club thought it necessary to publish a book to demonstrate 'the delusions of Protection'.[402] The author, J.M. Robertson was severe in his view of Chamberlain – 'never was false teacher more completely confused by argument, or false prophet more promptly confronted and confounded.'[403]

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399 Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain,* xi.

400 Julian Amery, *Joseph Chamberlain and the Tariff Reform Campaign,* (Vol. Six of *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain,* commenced by J.L. Garvin in 1935), London: Macmillan, 1969, 451.

401 ibid, 763.

402 J.M Robertson, *The Collapse of "Tariff Reform": Mr Chamberlain's Case Exposed,* Westminster: The Cobden Club, 1911, vi.

403 ibid, v.

In the Epilogue to his book Julian Amery stoutly defends Chamberlain's record, asserting that he was a committed interventionist all his life, 'holding that political power should be used to shape the pattern of society' and so opposing the prevailing *laisser-faire* philosophy.[404] Amery's defence of Chamberlain is not unbiased. His father, a Conservative MP for over thirty years, was something of a Chamberlain protégé and Julian Amery himself was an ardent imperialist and right wing Conservative member. It should be added that the Lloyd George government accepted the need for tariff reform and imperial preference by the end of the First World War.[405] This was not the end of the dispute between free traders and tariff reformers; it continued until the passing of the Import Duties Act and the Ottawa Agreement of 1932 when 'Chamberlain's faith was soon confirmed by works.'[406] The United States' requirement that Britain reduce tariffs and eliminate trade preferences as conditions for their loan at the end of the Second World War saw 'the curtain falling on the work of Chamberlain and his successors.'[407] Amery bravely defends Chamberlain in his final page:

> This does not mean that Chamberlain failed, or that his work was in vain. For a man's vision to dominate the thinking of two generations is rare enough; and the history of the British Empire since his death is a sufficient monument to his achievement. Nor is that, of necessity, the end. The British Empire, as Chamberlain knew it, will not return, [but] her ties of interest and affection with rising nations are abiding, and will long continue to influence the march of events.[408]

A more recent biographer, Richard Jay, highlights the widely opposing evaluations of Chamberlain's career and ongoing influence in 'A

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404 Amery, *Joseph Chamberlain,* 994.
405 ibid, 1008-9.
406 ibid, 1031.
407 ibid, 1050.
408 ibid, 1055.

Concluding Essay'.[409] He points out that 'the images of Chamberlain as a great statesman and a dramatic careerist confront each other as partisan stereotypes.'[410] Jay concludes that 'he was more than a mere historical curiosity, and offered genuine alternatives to the eventual course of British politics.'[411] His influence on political policy continued through his eldest son, Austen, and the Chamberlain dynasty lasted through until the death of his second son, Neville, in 1940; thus the Chamberlain name was present at Westminster for seventy continuous years. No other business related family could match that.

When W.E. Forster died in 1886 *The Times* said 'when we consider what the Education Act has done for England, and what it still has to do, we must acknowledge that there is no single measure passed since the Reform Act of 1867 with which a statesman would be more willing that his name should be associated.'[412] The article concluded by supporting a memorial service in Westminster Abbey for 'the distinguished statesman to whom the country owes its system of elementary education.' Patrick Jackson also saw the Education Act as 'Forster's finest achievement' which effectively combined his idealism with his pragmatic approach as an effective politician.[413] Forster, although both a nonconformist and radical, was a practical man who was prepared to find compromises to get things done. He said of his Education Act 'It would have been done without me, but I believe it would not have been done quite so soon without me.'[414] He didn't leave a group of followers to continue his name and ideas as Cobden and Chamberlain did but he did leave something more tangible. 'His best monument is still to be seen in the schools, scattered far and wide over the land, from which he banished bigotry without excluding religion. Millions of children grown to men and women may look back with gratitude to the labours of this dead statesman, who set them free from

[409] Jay, *Joseph Chamberlain,* 320-351.
[410] ibid, 322.
[411] ibid, 351.
[412] *The Times,* 6 August, 1886, 9.
[413] Jackson, *Education Act Forster,* 319.
[414] ibid, 316.

the slavery of ignorance.'[415] Whilst the 1870 Education Act was the major legislative triumph of any of the businessmen-politicians discussed in this thesis the role of Joseph Chamberlain in framing the Australian Constitution is significant for this country. Chamberlain served as Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1895 to 1903 and thus was intimately involved in the negotiations with the Australian colonies as they moved towards federation. Chamberlain has been accused of 'stubborn arrogance' in his attempts to change the clause of the Commonwealth Constitution referring to appeals to the Privy Council.[416] Howell argues that Chamberlain 'should be regarded not as an opponent, but as a facilitator of the process which eventually gave complete political independence to the Empire's self-governing dominions.'[417] Chamberlain saw the Bill through the British Parliament and thus he has had some influence on the governance of Australia to this day.

Anthony Mundella left some legacy with his support for better technical education and his advocacy of labour issue arbitration. It might be argued that his work to improve and extend scientific and engineering teaching achieved little with a generation which thought that vocational training 'carried the stigma of utility.'[418] Armytage credits Mundella with establishing the Normal School of Science, the predecessor of the Imperial College of Science and Technology, in 1881.[419] However the process of improving technical education had started ten years earlier with the setting up of a Royal Commission to recommend improvements.[420] Mundella's work to provide for the legal recognition of

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415 *Daily Telegraph,* 6 April, 1886.

416 Peter A. Howell, "Joseph Chamberlain and the amendment of the Australian Constitution Bill", The Flinders University of South Australia, u/d, 2. (An earlier version of this paper was presented at a conference held in Australia House, London, in July 2000 which commemorated the centenary of the passing of the Constitution Bill.)

417 ibid, 3.

418 Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980,* Cambridge University Press, 1981, 19.

419 Armytage, *A.J. Mundella,* 207.

420 "Royal Commission on Scientific Instruction and the Advancement of Science", London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1872, University of Toronto Internet Archive (accessed 1 September, 2011), 13-14.

trade unions and for the protection of their funds was an initial step in enhancing the status of the working man but it also marked Mundella as someone of consequence during his first years in parliament.[421] These were but part of the changing social and political make-up of the country and whilst Mundella was involved he could hardly be seen as an innovator or as a precursor of an ongoing identifiable movement.

During his lifetime John Bright was one of the most well known men in the country and 'the greatest orator of his time.'[422] Throughout his political career Bright had championed causes which were not always universally popular at the time; with some – the repeal of the Corn Laws, parliamentary reform – he was successful, in others – his anti-war campaigns – he was not. His life's work was recognised in the number of glowing testimonials he received in 1883 to recognise the fortieth anniversary of his first election to parliament.[423] When he died 'Intelligence from all parts of the country proves that the death of Mr Bright caused profound and universal grief.'[424] His death was reported in other countries; a report from Philadelphia said that it 'has made a profound impression throughout the United States, his friendly attitude to the country during the rebellion being recalled.'[425] As his oratorical powers are frequently extolled so are his shortcomings as an administrator.[426] Bright's first ministerial appointment was as President of the Board of Trade, a role appropriate to his business background. He did not perform well. Shaw Lefevre, Secretary to the Board, recalled that:

> He [Bright] had no experience of official work, and I gathered that he had not taken part in the business of the manufacturing firm of which he was a partner. He had a

[421] Armytage, *A.J. Mundella*, 67-72, 95.
[422] T.W. Reid, *Cabinet Portraits: Sketches of Statesmen,* London: Henry S. King & Co., 1872, 58.
[423] Ausubel, *John Bright,* 219.
[424] *The Times,* March 27, 1889.
[425] *The Times,* March 28, 1889.
[426] Reid, *Cabinet Portraits,* 69; Keith Robbins, "John Bright and the Middle Class in Politics", in Garrard, *The Middle Class in Politics,* 31.

> great distaste and almost an incapacity, for wading through a bundle of official papers.[427]

Lefevre did however go on to acknowledge Bright's 'practical common sense' and thought him 'a very good judge of men.'[428]

Bright served in several Gladstone cabinets without achieving any major legislation. Although he contributed to the debate on some of the important reforms of the day he failed to convince many of the need to pursue peace and refrain from military adventures, matters on which he placed the highest importance. He finally quit the cabinet over Britain's involvement in Egyptian affairs when it led to the bombardment of Alexandria. Bright may have been a giant during his life but he left neither an ongoing political philosophy nor any far reaching legislation. His legacy was being questioned less than ten years after his death. An unnamed reviewer of an early biography on Bright thought that:

> Mr Bright was a great orator and a distinctive personality. He played a great part in the politics of his day, but whether he will bulk so largely in the coming years as it was at one time thought he would do, is among the questions about which it is proper to keep an open mind. A fame that rests on oratory is proverbially evanescent, and political oratory is probably the most elusive of all.[429]

William Henry Smith was the only businessman to achieve political success on the Conservative side of politics during the period studied here. Despite having a 'trade' background he succeeded in the party of the landed gentry, being a minister in every Conservative administration during his time in parliament, and leader of his party in the Commons at the time of his death. He was admired and respected by men on both sides of politics and developed an enduring friendship with W.E. Forster despite their political differences.[430] When appointed as Lord Warden

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427 Trevelyan, *The Life of John Bright*, 404-5.
428 ibid, 405.
429 *The Outlook,* April 2, 1898, 275 (Review of "John Bright", by C.A. Vince).
430 Maxwell, *Life and Times of William Henry Smith,* Vol. I, 177-8.

of the Cinque Ports in 1891 Smith had to recontest his seat and the Radical candidate, who had stood against Smith in the previous general election, announced 'that he would not think of committing himself to an act so ungracious as that of putting Mr Smith to any inconvenience on such an occasion.'[431] Such was the high regard that Smith was held by his political opponents. There was genuine sorrow at his early death; Queen Victoria recorded in her journal, 'Good, excellent Mr Smith has expired. Such a terrible, really irreparable loss! Such an excellent, honest, wise, reliable, conciliatory man, and so modest and simple.'[432] Writing the day after Smith's death a correspondent for *The Times* wrote of 'his intelligence, his industry, his business capacity, and what above all distinguished him, his high sense of public duty.'[433] These views, and the numerous others quoted by his biographers, show that Smith was held in high regard by his contemporaries. He was a good party man who 'yielded unwavering loyalty to those who directed the party with whom he found himself most in harmony.'[434] He was a more than competent politician judging by his ministerial appointments culminating in the leadership of his party in the Commons. He is not however associated with any groundbreaking legislation; nor did he develop any political philosophy that attracted followers. He thus left only a record of dedication to duty and hard work. In contrast to his political legacy his business record is impressive. From a modest enterprise started in 1792 by his grandparents, initially his father, then Smith himself built an incredibly successful wholesale newspaper and book business. It made Smith one of the wealthiest men in England and allowed him to concentrate his attention on politics. The business continued to be wholly owned by the Smith family until 1948 and there was always a family

431 *The Times,* October 7, 1891.
432 Buckle (editor), *The Letters of Queen Victoria,* Vol. II, 73 (Journal entry for October 6, 1891).
433 *The Times,* October 7, 1891.
434 Maxwell, *Life and Times of William Henry Smith,* Vol. I, 179.

member on the board until 1996.[435] The company continues to prosper and that it is still named *WH Smith (plc)* is something of a memorial to Smith, although few shopping in their high street or railway station shops today would have any idea of the career of the man himself.

Anyone who entered parliament between 1832 and 1886 needed to be wealthy enough not to be concerned with the non-payment of members. Even Richard Cobden, who neglected his business during the Anti-Corn Law League Campaign and needed financial help from his admirers, lived what most of the population would have thought a privileged life. The working man was in a very different position both in regard to income and to influence. The Radical Liberals who might be thought to espouse the promotion of working-class men in the political sphere generally adopted a condescending attitude towards the lower classes, expecting them to be supporters of their radical policies but not share in any of the decision making. Even Anthony Mundella who was of working- class origins and who worked to legalise trade unions, to introduce industrial arbitration, and to improve working conditions seems to have adopted a command rather than co-operative approach.[436] The antipathy of Cobden and Bright towards trades unionism and factory reform has been discussed above. This stemmed from their deep commitment to a *laisser-faire* philosophy. Cobden was lauded by his middle class peers but some of the working class saw him as 'just a middle class advocate.'[437] He was thought of as someone who, 'in affairs of trade or peace, had good discernment [but] in social aims, with which he had little sympathy, he was undiscerning.'[438] Bright, however, was more often looked upon as 'the friend of the common people.'[439] Some years after Bright's death a reviewer of Trevelyan's biography asserted

[435] Wilson, *First with the News* tells the history of the Company from 1792-1972.
[436] Armytage, *A.J. Mundella,* 318, 'a practitioner of the subtle art of fostering and shaping the ideology of the English proletariat.'
[437] W.E. Adams, *Memoirs of a Social Atom,* London: Hutchinson, 1903, Vol. I, 163.
[438] George Jacob Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitators Life,* London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1906, Vol. I, 196.
[439] Reid, *Cabinet Portraits,* 68.

that 'Bright escaped the deep gulf between capital and labour which yawned at Manchester, and understood the working classes as Cobden never understood them.'[440] This was not the universal opinion. Bright was criticised not only for his espousal of parliamentary reform and his anti-war stance, but also for his hostility to factory legislation. He delivered a lengthy speech attacking the proposed new Factory Act, castigating it as 'a conspiracy of the landed gentry to clip the wings of the masters of industry, whom they feared as social and political competitors.'[441] The Earl of Shaftesbury's first biographer called this address by Bright 'perhaps the most vindictive towards the working classes ever used in the British Parliament.'[442] Bright continued to oppose the reduction of working hours when seconding a proposal to legalise the system of 'shifts and relays', which to a certain extent circumvented the terms of the Ten Hour Act.[443] His antipathy to changing working conditions was consistent and prolonged. Although Bright opposed legislation providing some governmental control of factory working hours he was a consistent supporter of a universal franchise. But even when discussing this matter with Joseph Arch of the Agricultural Laborer's Union he was condescending towards Arch, saying he found him 'a sensible, and I think, an honest man.'[444]

Within the time frame used for this thesis Joseph Chamberlain's political position was always on the left or advanced wing of the Liberal Party. Before his election to parliament he declared 'I am not ashamed to be called an advanced Liberal. I am a Radical Reformer because I would reform and remove ignorance, poverty, intemperance and crime from their very roots.'[445] In 1883, and a member of Gladstone's cabinet, Chamberlain felt some frustration at the rate of progress with his policies. He took an unusual step of publishing a series of articles on 'The Radical

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440 *The Athenaeum,* June 7, 1913, 609.
441 *Hansard,* Third Series, Vol. LXXIII, 1032-1151 (March 15, 1844).
442 Hodder, *Shaftesbury,* Vol. II, 27.
443 *Hansard,* Third Series, Vol. CX, 842-849 (June 6, 1850).
444 JBP, F/BRI/3.1.8, Diary entry July 6, 1875.
445 Boyd, *Chamberlain's Speeches,* 43, Speech in Birmingham on October 12, 1874.

Programme' in *The Fortnightly Review*.[446] These cover not only such political matters as parliamentary reform but social issues such as the need for better housing for the working class and land acquisition for agricultural labourers. Although written in a belligerent way it still appears patronising, imposing solutions on the lower classes. Marsh sums up this attitude well when he says that Chamberlain advocated social reform to protect the working class not to share anything, 'to benefit but not partner.'[447] Jay also thinks that Chamberlain used his support for social and democratic issues to increase his power base and largely dropped them when in a position of power.[448] This is a harsh view; Chamberlain was an enlightened employer, an outstanding Mayor of Birmingham, and a supporter of parliamentary reform and improved education amongst other measures that improved the lives of many people. Considering the way he lived and seeing the way he looked it is hard to see him as mixing readily with the working class, and Marsh's view that Chamberlain wanted to improve the lot of the working man but not consult him on anything appears accurate.

The first working men, Thomas Burt and Alexander MacDonald, elected to parliament in 1874 were both mining trades' union leaders. Their candidature was supported by the Labour Representation League, a body mainly of working men but also including a handful of middle-class radicals, whose aims were to promote the vote amongst working men and to have working men elected to parliament. Although initially very active and fielding eleven working class candidates in 1874, it became overwhelmed by the growth of the Liberal Associations, endorsing only six candidates in 1880.[449] Up until the formation of the Independent Labour Party in 1893 the Liberal Party was the natural home of working-class

446 *The Fortnightly Review,* Volumes CXCIX to CCV, July 1883 to January 1884.
447 Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain,* XIII.
448 Jay, *Joseph Chamberlain,* 339.
449 Hanham*, Elections and Party Management,* 324.

candidates and they were ready to join 'if a door was opened to them.'[450] There seems to have been little encouragement from the bulk of the businessmen-parliamentarians towards working class representation, in fact it looks like a perpetuation of the master-servant relationship of the factory system. Neither is there any evidence of working men being inspired by the example of the middle class making their way in the previous gentry dominated parliament. The effect of the wider franchise, better education and the experience of leadership in a union were more important factors in the move to candidature.

Each of the six businessmen-politicians discussed in this thesis was an eminent figure during his lifetime. The aim of this chapter is to analyse any ongoing influence they may have had. If what has been written about them is any measure of a legacy Cobden, Bright and Chamberlain outweigh Forster, Smith and Mundella probably because they were more controversial and espoused new, and sometimes unpopular causes. But the latter three were much more successful cabinet ministers and arguably Forster's 1870 Education Act was the best piece of legislation any of them was associated with; an Act which profoundly changed British society. The repeal of the Corn Laws was also an important milestone which led to the general acceptance of a free trade philosophy. Although the drive of Cobden and Bright through the Anti-Corn Law League campaign raised the problems and proselytized the nation, it was a Conservative administration faced with the Irish famine that enacted the law. Cobden, although never a cabinet minister and therefore never having responsibility for legislation, became a symbol of Liberal party political philosophy at least up until Chamberlain's move on tariff reform. Some kept his memory alive beyond that through the Cobden Club.

Alongside Cobden at the height of his fame, Joseph Chamberlain was probably the most widely known of the group. He aroused extreme attitudes with his arrogant and superior approach and this resulted in

[450] Angus Hawkins, *British Party Politics, 1852-1886,* Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998, 136.

him being probably the only politician to have been at the centre of the split of both major parties. This could hardly be called a legacy as both parties survived, and still do, but with two important political sons his name survived for some years. It would be tempting to think that these middle-class politicians opened the way for the working man to enter parliament but the evidence is that they gave little help and no encouragement to that group.

Conclusion

The Industrial Revolution had changed the social face of Britain and parliamentary reform in 1832 changed the political scene. The enfranchisement of the middle-class encouraged a different kind of man to seek a seat in parliament. Previously men who owed their wealth to other than the long term ownership of land had entered parliament but their objectives in seeking this status were usually to confirm their higher social position or to obtain some preferment for themselves, their relatives or business associates.[451]

The First Reform Act increased the number and character of voters; it eliminated most of the rotten boroughs and gave a vote to some of the large industrial towns. It was at a time when the wealthy businessman was feeling more comfortable with public responsibility as he became involved with local government activities after the passing of the Municipal Corporation Act in 1835. The information flow was multiplying dramatically as the number of newspapers increased and they were more readily available as stamp duty was gradually reduced.[452] The period also saw the rise of what Kitson Clark called the 'semi-moral, semi-political' agitations – the Anti-Corn Law League, the Political Unions, the Peace Society, the Temperance Movement and more.[453] Such developments provided the impetus for a different type of businessman to enter politics; one who sought change, sometimes for the public benefit, sometimes for economic improvement.

Several hundred businessmen were elected to parliament during the period covered by this thesis but only a small minority can be regarded as important. Most of these new men called themselves Radicals and both

[451] Namier, *The Structure of Politics,* describes the business dealings with government of some of these men in the eighteenth century.

[452] Escott, *Social Transformations*, 381 'on Queen Victoria's accession 479 newspapers were regularly published in the UK, at her sixtieth commemoration there were 2,396'.

[453] Kitson Clark, *The Making of Victorian England,* 198-200.

they and their electors expected that they would take up the challenges resulting from the changed social and industrial conditions. Few of them however achieved high political status and often left parliament after a short tenure, disillusioned with the political process or needing to return to their business. The continued parliamentary dominance of the aristocracy, especially in the ministry, and the businessman's older age, often over fifty when first elected, meant that most were ineffective politicians. They also had to contend with a lack of support in parliament – they seldom acted in concert – and they often had to continue to run a business well away from Westminster.[454] Many were non-conformists who received little sympathy from the predominantly Anglican members of the Commons. They always came from a wealthy background and were divorced from the realities of the life faced by the poor working class. Although many industrialists wanted to see an improvement in the living conditions and the educational opportunities of the working class few were concerned with the long hours and working conditions of the time. This attitude followed the principles of free trade principles and many businessmen actively opposed any reform in the work place. Six businessmen-politicians have been identified as being different from most of those elected. They reached ministerial level and were involved with the major issues of the day.

The initial motivation for entering parliament of most of these men was similar – it was to advocate change. Both Richard Cobden's and John Bright's first cause was the repeal of the Corn Laws; W.E. Forster, A.J. Mundella and Joseph Chamberlain wanted to see improvements in the living conditions of the working class. W.H. Smith was the only Conservative in the group and his entry into national politics was rather a natural progression from successful businessman through local politics to Westminster. His views on change were always moderate – abolish church rates but oppose disestablishment, extend popular education but don't make it compulsory, reduce military expenditure but maintain

[454] Bagehot, *The English Constitution,* 174.

efficiency.[455] Each of their priorities changed with time; after the repeal of the Corn Laws Cobden turned to broader free trade issues linking them to world peace; Bright, as a Quaker, was also an advocate for the peace movement, and a continual preacher for further parliamentary reform. Forster turned his attention to improving primary education, Mundella to enhancing the position of the trades' unions and Chamberlain to becoming Prime Minister. Smith maintained his middle of the road attitude whilst always being a loyal member of his party and a successful cabinet minister.

It could be expected that the businessman would bring an understanding of trade and finance, and perhaps some appreciation of working class aspirations, to his parliamentary role, but these attributes were not always apparent. Richard Cobden consistently refused office, Bagehot called him 'an *outsider* in politics', thus his business acumen or lack of it, was never tested.[456] John Bright's was; his first ministerial position was as President of the Board of Trade, a role which should have suited his business background, but he failed, showing a surprising lack of application. Forster was not tested in an economic portfolio but he did well in Education, less so as Chief Secretary for Ireland. This was a role that had defeated many equally able men and no amount of business knowledge or administrative ability could have helped. Both Smith and Mundella were competent ministers, not surprisingly, as each of them had built up large and successful enterprises. So had Joseph Chamberlain, who had been an extremely successful mayor of Birmingham. His record as a minister is patchy. Marsh suggests that he had 'a businesslike command of his portfolios' but 'could not translate the prescriptions of Birmingham Radicalism for national consumption.'[457]

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455 Chilston, *W.H. Smith,* 36.

456 Norman St. John-Stevas (editor), *The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot,* London: Economist, 1968, Vol.Three, 237 (First published in *The Economist* for December 26, 1863, Vol. XXI, 1443-4.)

457 Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain*, 143.

Although the composition of the parliament was changing with the election of manufacturers, bankers, professional men − and towards the end of the period working men − the aristocrat continued to dominate the ministries of both parties. It is not therefore surprising that some of the major political triumphs should have been promoted by aristocrats. What is surprising is that the most far reaching measures were reforming matters. Aristocrats were responsible for the first two parliamentary reform acts which would seem to be against their inclinations and interests but Grey looked to forestall revolution and Derby to benefit his Party.

It is difficult to weigh the successes of the aristocrat against those of the businessman. The aristocrat achieved much in the period considered but he had many advantages. Invariably he came from a long established political family and was well educated. He was also generally much younger when first elected than were businessmen and was thus able to develop a better understanding of parliamentary processes before taking ministerial office. These advantages were considerable; it saw men like Durham, Russell and Derby arriving in the parliament with the knowledge to be able to govern, and with the expectation that they would. The businessman lacked friendly support in the House, particularly during the early years when party organisation was undeveloped. The experience of first generation parliamentarians like the Lancastrian Quaker, John Bright, the London 'tradesman', W.H. Smith, and the upstart Birmingham mayor, Joseph Chamberlain, were far removed from a Lambton, a minister in his father-in-law's cabinet, a Russell with the Duke of Bedford's family influence behind him or a Stanley with a father as prime minister. This was a quite unequal standing and it is surprising that these businessmen achieved as much as they did in the social environment of their times.

This thesis argues that the Education Act of 1870 was the most significant piece of legislation that can be directly attributed to a businessman who had turned to politics. W.E. Forster could not but have had an interest in education after marrying Jane, the eldest child of the

famous Dr. Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby, and sister of the poet, but a lifetime inspector of schools, Matthew Arnold. Forster's most recent biographer, Patrick Jackson, asserts that 'it has been regularly suggested that his political attitudes and policies must have been influenced by the Arnold connection; the 1870 Education Act in particular.'[458] He then goes on to demolish this argument showing that Forster's interest in improving access to, and the quality, of primary education pre-dates his marriage. The matter of state involvement in education had been argued both within and outside the parliament since the first payment of small building grants to schools in 1833, but it was only through Forster's tenacity that the comprehensive 1870 Act was passed.

Joseph Chamberlain's career was complex and contrary. He was evidently a first class businessman who achieved sufficient material success to allow retirement at forty so that he could concentrate on politics; he was a great mayor of Birmingham, initiating many significant projects; he became a cabinet minister after only four years in parliament. From the outset he was controversial, repeatedly disagreeing with his cabinet colleagues and emphasising his radical policies. His political efforts in the years from his election in 1876 to the Liberal split of 1886 were marked more by his self-promotion than say his efforts to secure a beneficial Irish settlement or his work to promote the parliamentary reform acts of 1884-5.

The majority of businessmen, particularly from the midlands and the north, started out as Radical Liberals and of the six men discussed here five were of this persuasion. Although Chamberlain saw himself as a future prime minister it was only Forster who really had a chance to achieve this office, and this only after embracing more mainstream Liberal values. He could have become leader of the party after Gladstone's stepped down in 1874 but whether he would have been prime minister is doubtful. Smith, although not from the gentry, progressed through the Conservative Party to become its leader in the Commons.

[458] Jackson, *Education Act Forster,* 33.

Conclusion

Only a small minority of the businessmen who entered parliament reached the level that those discussed here did, but so it was with the gentry; many served but few were influential. In all cases it was due, not surprisingly, to tenacity and intelligence. No businessmen became Prime Minister, or Chancellor of the Exchequer, or Foreign Secretary in the period discussed so it is argued that their achievements in politics did not match those of the gentry. Nevertheless some of them, and six businessmen have been identified as important politicians, did very well considering the problems that they had to overcome. It is not so much what they actually did but that they did anything significant at all and were able to share some measure of political power with the landed gentry.

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