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# Tamworth Conservatism And The Repeal Of The Corn Laws: The Foundation Of Modern Conservative Political Discourse

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TAMWORTH CONSERVATISM AND THE REPEAL OF THE CORN LAWS: THE  
FOUNDATION OF MODERN CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL DISCOURSE

By

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Bachelor of Science, University of Wisconsin-River Falls, 2012

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

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for the degree of

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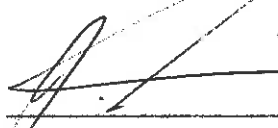
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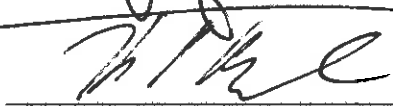
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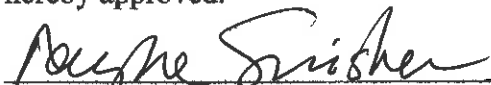
This thesis, submitted by Jonathan James Hedeem in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

  
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## ABSTRACT

In the early morning hours of May 16th, 1846 Parliament gathered for the final reading to repeal the Corn Laws. While the Corn Laws had been a highly contested topic within Britain for over two decades, it was at this juncture that the Conservative party of Sir Robert Peel fractured. As this study shall demonstrate, the Corn Law crisis of 1846 did not destroy Peel's version of Conservatism as has often been argued, but rather put it into a state of suspended animation. The division of the party only twelve years after its formation has long been a topic of interest to historians. As previous histories have suggested, Peel had attempted to revive the old idea of Toryism but also to transform it into his new Conservative idea. This thesis goes beyond this to suggest that Peel's own unique form of Conservatism not only shaped the party in 1834 but also helped it to recover after the split of 1846. As the blueprint for Conservative political discourse, the ideas set forth in Peel's Tamworth Manifesto (1834) outlined the fundamental structures and tenets for a national Conservative party. His central argument was that Conservatives should work to actively reform state institutions as a way of preserving them. This was a revolutionary idea and the central pillar of Tamworth Conservatism. Illustrating his own form of Conservatism the manifesto identified what this new political ideology was to entail for his first ministry (1835) and beyond. Peel's visions for the party after 1835 started a new type of political discourse in British politics. This new discourse was centered on the ideals of preservation of state institutions via careful reforms. To establish a new political organization his Tamworth Conservatism had to become the party's standard. Peel's Manifesto, guided the growth and formation of a party ideology from 1834 to 1846. Peel's decision to repeal the Corn

Laws in 1846 was met with fierce Conservative opposition, leading to an internal party rebellion. Conservative division in 1846 was fueled by discontent with Conservative leadership and the perceived opaqueness of Peel's Conservative principles. However, the Conservative split of 1846 did not result in the abandonment of Conservatism but a period of Conservative dormancy. The Conservative party, unlike Peel's political career, survived and was rebuilt to become a serious contender in British politics. More than a bit ironically, the restoration of Conservatism in 1852 was based upon a return to its origins in Peel's manifesto; a Conservatism that was built upon the ideas of careful, active, and thought-out reforms designed to preserve and protect state institutions. This suggests that the legacy of Peel's Tamworth Conservatism and the Corn Laws crisis of 1846 were more intertwined with each other than previously recognized in the historiography.

## CHAPTER I THE COLLAPSE OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY IN THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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In the early morning hours of May 16th 1846 Parliament gathered for the final reading of the Act that would repeal the Corn Laws and in so doing would bring the demise of Peel's ministry and fracture the party he had created. However, as this thesis shall demonstrate, the Conservative split of 1846 did not result in the collapse of Conservative party but rather a period of Conservative dormancy. True, the fight to repeal the Corn Laws destroyed Peel's political career and nearly destroyed his Conservatism, but the crisis of 1846 did not damage Peel's Conservative party beyond repair. After a long season of dormancy Peel's Conservatism reemerged with a seemingly new direction but with a familiar strategy. This thesis shall argue that the formation of Peel's Tamworth Conservatism, as the foundational ideology for the Conservative party, and the Conservative split over the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 remain more closely intertwined than previously stated in the historiography. This connection between the formation of Peel's Conservatism and the party schism caused by the Corn Laws suggests that Peel's Tamworth Conservatism did not end when Peel stepped down in 1846.

The Corn Laws were part of a long tradition of government regulations over imports and exports of grains that predated the nineteenth century. The Importation Acts of 1815 (Geo. 3 c.26), most infamously known as the Corn Laws, were a set of tariff laws that dated back to the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> The 1815 modification had created a paradigm shift in the tariff by

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<sup>1</sup> ed. Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey, *Free Trade: The Repeal of the Corn Laws* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press 1996), xiii.

establishing a total exclusion of Corn until the domestic price of Corn reached 80 Shillings per quarter (480lbs).<sup>2</sup> These laws, even in their own time, were largely unpopular in a country that was already moving towards a system of free trade. The Corn Laws' design was to protect British grain from being undercut by cheaper foreign alternatives. At base, the Corn Laws suffered the flaw of being too rigid of a system that generated little to no revenue for the state while pushing up the price of flour and bread for consumers. Demands to change the Corn Laws arose in the late 1820s and resulted in the adoption of a new sliding scale that was designed to lower the import duty on foreign grain as the price of domestic grain rose. The problem of the Corn Laws was their indisputable linkage to the interests of the landed aristocracy. The tie between economic protectionism and the aristocracy became more overt as time progressed. Aristocratic members of Parliament were well aware of the shrinking of their own power, particularly after the passage of the Reform Bill in 1832 which had removed their monopoly over the electorate. Maintenance of the Corn Laws came to be seen as the landed interests' last great attempt to retain control over the economy for their own benefit. Thus, popular disgust with the Corn Laws also became disgust with the economic and political position of the aristocracy.

The growing discontent with the aristocracy's maintenance of the Corn Laws created one of the most powerful political interest groups to emerge in Britain. The formation of the Anti-Corn Law League (ACLL) created a public movement against the Corn Laws and the aristocratic landlords that supported them.<sup>3</sup> The League's purpose was to pressure the government to repeal the Corn Laws in their entirety. The propaganda from the League created an atmosphere of national political unrest that was increased by the humanitarian crisis associated with the potato

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., xiv.

<sup>3</sup> E.L. Woodward, *The Age of Reform, 1815-1870* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1962), 61.

famine in Ireland. Historians have recognized the connection between the famine and the repeal of the Corn Laws as significant, noting that while the ACLL pressured the government to repeal the Laws for many years it was the crisis in Ireland which finally forced the change. Peel's decision in late autumn of 1845 to repeal the Corn Laws was because of growing food shortages in Ireland, and growing political unrest in England. The Corn Law crisis split the Conservative party over the continuation of the Corn Laws and the doctrine of protectionism. The division of the Conservative party in 1846 typically appears to be a division between traditionalists and reformers. However, this division, when investigated closely, appears to be a division over Conservatism itself, more specifically the Conservatism of the party's founder Sir Robert Peel.

The Conservative party prior to the Corn Law crisis had struggled with the ideas of reform and how to maintain institutions of the state (the church, the aristocracy, the economy, and the Monarchy) in this new industrial age. The Conservatives and, to a greater extent, the Tories,<sup>4</sup> were often criticized for their support of an unpopular series of laws. The histories of both the ACLL and the repeal of the Corn Laws have shown little sympathy to the Protectionist Conservatives who dominated the party after repeal. Portrayed often as economic dunces and aloof landed aristocrats, the Protectionists have been cast aside as the losers in a battle for Britain's economic future. However, they would play an important role in salvaging the Conservative party of Robert Peel and transforming it into a powerful political force in British politics. Ironically, their revival of the Conservative party would require a return to the message that Peel had used to reorganize the Tories into the Conservative party in the first place.

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<sup>4</sup> The name for the members of the British political party that supported the established Anglican religious and political order until its collapse in 1832. Replaced by Robert Peel's Conservative party in 1834.

The split in Peel's Conservative party during the Corn Law crisis has created a problem for historians analyzing Peel's own Conservatism. The division of the Conservative party only twelve years after its formation is a major point of interest. Why had Peel's seemingly pragmatic and necessary actions in 1846 so bitterly divided the party and why had that division become so heated? This question has been the subject of numerous works analyzing the Conservative party and the Conservative political and economic discourses between 1830 and 1852. Of particular interest to historians have been the politics of Sir Robert Peel. Those who have investigated this puzzle have searched for an explanation as to why Peel decided to repeal the Corn Laws and why his party became so bitterly divided that it prevented the Conservative party from holding a majority government for a generation. Previous historical studies have investigated this problem and have focused upon the politics of Sir Robert Peel. These works argue that the making of Peel's Conservative party and the Corn Law crisis of 1846 were the dual climax points of his political career. As these historians have suggested, the politics of Peel and his Conservative party were dramatically altered in the wake of the fundamental reshaping of the British political system occasioned by the passage of the Great Reform Bill of 1832. Politicians had to create a wholly new approach towards the electorate.

Philip Salmon's work *Electoral Reform at Work: Local Politics and National Parties 1832-1841* suggested that the period before the second Peel Ministry (1841) saw the emergence of a new type of party politics. Salmon argued that Peel's revival of the Tory party, through his Tamworth Manifesto, rallied the party to reorganize itself into a new type of political

organization designed to work in the post-Reform Bill era.<sup>5</sup> Peel's Manifesto set a foundation for a new form of partisan politics and helped to create more rigid political parties built around clearly delineated ideological frameworks. The most crucial part of Salmon's thesis was that this system of new political parties and the systems in which they operated were part of an ongoing and active process. Peel's Conservative party in this early period (1834-5) was undergoing a continuous process of adaptations and modifications to the new political environment. While Peel had successfully imagined a new political party for the post-Reform Bill era, he had to actively work to mold the old Tories into new Conservatives. Salmon argues that when Peel accepted the changes of 1832 he initiated a new age of British politics. Peel's new political organization illustrated that the new type of politics being developed was largely influenced by the changes initiated by the Reform Bill.

Norman Gash, the foremost biographer of Sir Robert Peel, has analyzed the life and legacy of both Peel and his administrations. His most notable works were his two-volume biography of Robert Peel, respectively titled *Mr. Secretary Peel* (1961), and *Sir Robert Peel* (1972) and his successful political study *Politics in the Age of Peel* (1953). Although his interpretations of Peel's politics have been challenged in recent analyses', his biographies remain the most definitive and complete historical works in the field. In each of these works, Gash investigated the reshaping of parliamentary politics in what he terms the 'Age of Peel'.

In *Politics in the Age of Peel* Gash argued that after the passage of the Great Reform Bill (1832) both the Whigs and the Tories had to redesign themselves to fit into a new system

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<sup>5</sup> Philip Salmon, *Electoral Reform at Work: Local Politics and National Parties 1832-1841* (Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2002), 84.



of electoral politics.<sup>6</sup> Leading this new age of political change was Robert Peel. Gash claimed that Peel's political views were pragmatic and took a centrist approach to reform Toryism in the post-Reform Bill era. Gash's detailed analysis of electoral workings post-1832 suggests that the Reform Bill initiated some political changes but did not constitute an extreme change, and can be best explained by understanding those who drafted it. The men that drafted the Reform Bill were not, as Gash argued, battling over abstract principles, but rather working to prevent a disaster. Gash stated that, "Both parties believed in property not numbers: both were anxious to avert bloodshed and disorder."<sup>7</sup> He argued that Peel's Tamworth Manifesto was the key document in the formation of post-Reform Bill politics. With its emphasis on the necessity and acceptance of reform and gradual change, Gash argued, Peel was attempting to create a party and an ideology to occupy the political center and appeal to the new electorate.<sup>8</sup>

Gash's interpretation of Peel's decision to repeal the Corn Laws has been one of the most hotly contested pieces of Gash's analysis of Peel's political legacy. Gash's central argument concerning Peel's decision to repeal the Corn Laws was that Peel made the choice after a 'conversion' to free trade in 1845.<sup>9</sup> This, Gash argued, was part of Peel's pragmatic politics and his belief that his party must accept gradual change if it hoped to continue as a governing party. Gash argued that Peel's failure to contain Protectionist elements within his party ultimately fueled the split of 1846. Gash's argument for Peel's pragmatic reasons to repeal the Corn Laws

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<sup>6</sup> Norman Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel: A Study in the Technique of Parliamentary Representation 1830-1850* (New York: W.W. Norton & company Inc. 1953), 85.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 287.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 316.

was part of his general thesis that the politics of Peel were successful, and they were the way of the future.

Gash's highly detailed analysis of Peel's politics and legacy has remained a dominant force in the historiography. His argument was that the 'Age of Peel' was one of both moderation and pragmatism. These interpretations of Peel as a political pragmatist have been severely criticized by other historians, particularly those that have also investigated the entire political career of Peel and arrived at very different conclusions.

Boyd Hilton's article, 'Peel: A Reappraisal,' suggested that rather than being the originator of a Conservative idea, as Gash had indicated, Peel was actually the originator of a certain brand of Liberalism. Hilton argues that Peel was not a pragmatic centrist but rather a rigid doctrinaire leader bound by his own ideology.<sup>10</sup> He claimed that Peel's efforts during the 'liberal' Tory era to pursue reforms, both civil and economic, suggest that his later 'conversion' to free trade was never a conversion at all.<sup>11</sup> In Hilton's interpretation, Peel's Tamworth Manifesto continued these trends of 'liberal' thinking and Peel's continued 'liberal' Tory outlook extended well into his second ministry. Hilton's revision to the historiography of Robert Peel has not been without challenges. Recent works have suggested that Gash's view of Peel as a pragmatic centrist have not been completely overturned by Hilton's portrayal of Peel as a rigid doctrinaire.<sup>12</sup> Rather it seems that Peel's earliest influences had made him a bit of both. Recent works have turned to an evaluation of both camps when examining Peel from Tamworth up to the time of the Corn Law crisis. An investigation into Peel's early political career indicates that

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<sup>10</sup> Boyd Hilton, "Peel: A Reappraisal," *Historical Journal*, Vol. 22, (1979): 589.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 602.

<sup>12</sup> Richard A. Gaunt, *Sir Robert Peel: The Life and Legacy* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd. 2010), 2.

he may not have been the flexible centrist as portrayed by many in the historiography, but rather was an idealist whose exposure to the ‘liberal’ Tory ideas of his youth shaped his own particular form of conservatism.

Paul Adelman’s work *Peel and the Conservative Party* defines this new era of politics using Gash’s term the ‘Age of Peel’ (1834-1846). Marking them as a crucial start to the new era of mass political change, Adelman argues that Peel’s ideas redefined British politics. Peel’s acceptance of the new type and system of politics that emerged after the Great Reform Bill of 1832 started with his creation of a new political party, the Conservatives. Peel’s ideas for Conservative party politics were organized and presented to the nation through his Tamworth Manifesto of 1834. This act of national publication was portrayed by Adelman as a deliberate appeal to the newly enfranchised middle classes. In effect this was the first salvo in the battle for national party and voter mobilization.<sup>13</sup> As Peel reiterated many times “we [the Conservative party] are not separated by any line of interest or any other line of demarcation from the middle classes”.<sup>14</sup> Adelman uses this language from Peel to show that a new form of electoral political mobilization had begun.

Politics during the Age of Peel, as Adelman suggests, climaxed with Peel’s decision to repeal the Corn Laws. Peel’s repeal of the Corn Laws (1846), Adelman argued, was the result of political rather than economic reasoning.<sup>15</sup> He noted that Peel’s decision, although unpopular with many Conservatives, was actually made in order to preserve the traditional powers of the aristocracy. Citing Peel’s earlier modifications to the Corn Laws (1842-3), Adelman stated that

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<sup>13</sup> Paul Adelman, *Peel and the Conservative Party* (London: Longman 1989), 11.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

Peel had been attempting a careful balancing act between his party and those opposed to the Corn Laws for quite some time. Peel's modifications were careful reforms that were again, more political than economic in design. He had hoped to yield a little ground to moderate opponents of the Corn Laws without sacrificing so much as to upset the Protectionists within his party.<sup>16</sup> These ideas of careful reform had been the backbone of his Conservatism, which Adelman argued was somewhat pragmatic. Debates between Peel and his Conservative backbenchers over the Corn Laws illustrated a schism in Conservatism that had existed ever since the organization of the Conservative party in 1834. Despite the profound division that had emerged after 1846, the ideas of Peel lived on in the Peelite party. Adelman concluded his argument in a similar fashion to Gash, suggesting that the "Age of Peel" had been one of moderation and pragmatism.

Robert Stewart's works *The Politics of Protection: Lord Derby and the Protectionist Party 1841-1852* and *The Foundation of the Conservative Party 1830-1867* tackle the central issue of Conservative division during the fight to repeal the Corn Laws. He argues that the Conservative party started by Peel in 1834 had a series of internal divisions that would eventually shatter the party in 1846. These divisions among 'conservative' thinkers highlighted the fact that the party started by Peel had not yet established a firm political identity or ideology beyond its initial opposition to Whig radicalism. His work *The Foundation of the Conservative Party* argues that the Conservative division, occasioned by the Corn Law crisis, forced the remaining conservatives to create a new direction for themselves following Peel's 'betrayal' in 1846. He argues that while the Protectionists and Peelites were remarkably similar in their origins, they approached the idea of free trade very differently. Stewart argues that although external pressure from the public and the ACLL was important, it was internal changes in the

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 36.

Conservative party that drove it to split in 1846. He argued that the Protectionists did not see the Corn Laws so much as a long-term economic plan but as a link between the landed interest and the unwritten British constitution.<sup>17</sup>

The Protectionists have often been portrayed in the history of Corn Law politics as economic illiterates who rejected the new ideas of free trade in favor of the old system of mercantilism. Stewart argues the Protectionists were all too cautious concerning the idea of free trade and looked to the past for what suited the country best. They did not claim that corn would be cheaper in Britain than other places. As many of the skeptics of free trade argued, they were not willing to let Manchester prosper at the expense of Coventry.<sup>18</sup> Stewart's argument concerning the Protectionists suggests that histories built around a League based telling of events have cemented Conservative Protectionists into the role of villains. While many Protectionists did question the economic value of repeal of the Corn Laws the majority were far more concerned with the position of the aristocracy in the state. For them, repeal was more about politics than economics.

Anna Gambles' article "Rethinking the Politics of Protection: Conservatism and the Corn Laws, 1830-1852" and her book *Protection and Politics: Conservative Economic Discourse, 1815-1852* investigate the Conservative approach to economic issues during the Age of Peel and the Conservative split. She argues that during the Corn Law crisis the Conservatives had legitimate concerns about the rapid conversion to free trade. Conservative support for reforms to the financial system such as the Bank Charter Act of 1833 and 1844, illustrated the party's willingness to adapt and modernize. These acts developed a more 'liberal' financial system with

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Stewart, *The Foundation of the Conservative Party* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 216.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Stewart, *The Politics of Protection: Lord Derby and the Protectionist Party 1841-1852* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 46.

the printing and expansion of Bank of England paper currency. Gambles argued that the ‘liberal’ financial reforms were undertaken by the Conservative Peel ministry to not only stabilize the currency but also to reinforce the role of state.<sup>19</sup> She also drew the link to the ‘liberal’ Tory ideology of the 1820s when it came to reforming aspects of financial institutions. To that effect she argued that Peel’s Conservative government was willing to support banking reforms, not only because it reinforced protectionism, but also because the Conservatives genuinely believed the reforms would make the banking system work better.

Gambles suggested that previous histories, as well as League propaganda, were wrong to label the Protectionists as economic ignoramuses.<sup>20</sup> Her argument stems from a critique of the histories written by the Anti-Corn Law League that often questioned the intellectual ability of the Protectionists to grasp contemporary economics.<sup>21</sup> She instead argued that the debate between the two Conservative factions was an argument about the role of the state and the aristocracy well beyond the simple application of the Corn Laws. The Protectionists argued that the state (especially the landed classes) had a legitimate position in the economy through rights guaranteed in the constitution.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, Gambles argues that the defenders of the Corn Laws were well aware that total repeal would not drastically lower the price of bread as the League’s propaganda suggested.<sup>23</sup> They were also well aware of the importance of manufacturing to the British economy and had embraced it. She states these facts to support her

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<sup>19</sup> Anna Gambles, *Protection and Politics: Conservative Economic Discourse, 1815-1852* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1999), 117.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>21</sup> Anna Gambles. “Rethinking the politics of Protection: Conservatism and the Corn Laws, 1830- 1852” *The English Historical Review*. 113:453 (1998): 931.

<sup>22</sup> Gambles, *Protection and Politics*, 56.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

argument that the Corn Law debate was about more than simple economics. Yet, as Stewart suggested, the Protectionists were not willing to destroy certain elements of the British economy (namely agriculture) just to allow another to flourish. Gambles' argument as to why the Protectionists supported the Corn Laws suggests that it was for political rather than economic reasons. An effort, the Protectionists were against repeal primarily because they thought repeal was not a reform but rather a fundamental change to a vital state institution. Therefore, Peel's repeal of the Corn Law ran counter to accepted Conservative principles, thus fueling the political split.<sup>24</sup>

Bruce Coleman's work *Conservatism: and the Conservative Party in the Nineteenth Century* discusses the origins of Conservatism after 1832 and the challenges that arose from the Corn Law crisis. Although Coleman's work was concerned with the long run of the Conservative party in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, his emphasis on its formative years stress the importance behind the reorganization of Tory forces after the Reform Bill. Coleman states that Peel's vision for a union of 'conservatives' was equal parts revival and reinvention. He argues that when Peel used the term 'Conservative,' he was making a clear declaration to conserve the Constitution and the institutions of the state that were attached to it.<sup>25</sup>

Coleman's analysis of the Conservative party under the leadership of Robert Peel argued that Peel had been working on creating a political party that would act on behalf of the nation rather than just select members of society.<sup>26</sup> This notion of Conservatism would be later expanded under future Conservative Prime Ministers after the resignation of Peel. Coleman, like

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<sup>24</sup> Gambles. "Rethinking the Politics of Protection," 944.

<sup>25</sup> Bruce Coleman, *Conservatism and the Conservative Party in Nineteenth Century Britain*. (London: Edward Arnold a Division of Hodder & Stoughton 1988), 76.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

other historians of the Conservative party, claims that Disraeli more than Peel created the modern Conservative party. However, Coleman was not willing to diminish the legacy of Robert Peel, arguing that Peel's initiative in adapting to the Reform Bill helped to save and modernize Toryism and start to transform it into Conservatism.<sup>27</sup> Coleman, much like Gash, sees the Conservative party's adaptability, inclusiveness, and attempted modernization, after 1834, as the essential foundation on which the Conservative idea would develop.

Travis Crosby's *Sir Robert Peel's Administration 1841-1846* takes an investigative approach to the successes and failures of Peel's Conservative party during his second administration. Dealing with an increasingly sophisticated electorate Peel's party dealt with issues of both political and economic reform that at times tested his Conservative idea.<sup>28</sup> Crosby notes that Peel's government pursued modifications to the Corn Laws, the financial system and the Church with relatively little Tory obstruction. While each of these reforms was undertaken in a progressive way many within Peel's government were by no means active social reformers.<sup>29</sup> Crosby, like Gash, argues that Peel and his Conservative party were pragmatic centrists that used reform to weigh the balance of issues against one another. The division caused by the decision to repeal the Corn Laws, Crosby argues, was an act that Peel saw as a necessity to maintain order and social stability between the industrial middle classes and the landed elite.<sup>30</sup>

Although Peel left the office of Prime Minister with a divided party, his legacy would outlive his defeat. Peel's refusal to accept any form of leadership of the Peelites signaled his

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>28</sup> Travis L. Crosby, *Sir Robert Peel's Administration 1841-1846* (London: David & Charles 1976), 78.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 156.



refusal to accept a total and final division of the Conservative Party he had created.<sup>31</sup> Crosby argues that Peel's political failure was due to the fact he had underestimated the strength of the Protectionist cause within his party and that this failure to recognize such a strong dissonance cost him greatly. Peel and the Peelites became supportive of the Whig party and Whig notions of free trade but refused an all-out merger with the Whig party. The legacy of the second Peel ministry, with its attention to careful reforms, both political and economic, would serve as a model for future governments' reforms and economic responsibilities.<sup>32</sup>

The most recent analysis of Peel's forty-year career was Richard A. Gaunt's 2010 work, *Sir Robert Peel: The Life and Legacy*. Gaunt draws from a huge collection of Peel's writings to help unwrap the troubling historiographical legacy of the man. The question that has troubled historians since Gash's mid-20<sup>th</sup> century analysis is this: was Peel a pragmatic centrist and Conservative modernizer of the Tory party or a rigid doctrinaire of a certain brand of liberalism?<sup>33</sup> Gaunt's argument suggests that the persistent suspicions that surround Peel's politics have evolved with the analysis of Peel's forty-year political career. His start as a Tory defender of the established Church and opponent of Catholic emancipation (so much so he earned the nickname "Orange Peel") critiques Gash's argument that Peel was a pragmatic centrist. In relation to his change of heart over Catholic emancipation, Gaunt, like Hilton, argues that Peel's vision of Conservatism was focused on embracing timely, practical, and necessary reforms without compromising on larger principles.<sup>34</sup> However, unlike Hilton, Gaunt argued that Peel's politics in the 1820s did not lead to his 'conversion' to free trade ideas, but it was rather a

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>33</sup> Gaunt. *Sir Robert Peel: The Life and Legacy*, 2

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 4.

period in which he formed his political ideology. Gaunt's work illustrates the ongoing historiographical problem with Peel, the Conservative party and the repeal of the Corn Laws; the problem that has plagued the histories of this subject since Gash's 1953 interpretation. This study suggests that it is essential to conduct both a reevaluation of Peel's politics and an investigation into his conservative consistencies in the pursuit of reform. It will challenge the previously observed interpretations that Peel's politics were neither that of a political pragmatist nor that of a rigid doctrinaire.

As most of the historians discussed above have suggested, Peel's Conservatism was a flexible pragmatic ideology with the goal of bringing the old Tory party to the political center. Arguing that Peel was an outstanding politician and statesman, driven by practical necessity over the course of his political life, has forced the historiography to focus on Peel's political changes rather than his consistencies. However, as Hilton argued in his re-evaluation of Peel, his political experiences in the 1820s were extremely influential on his later decisions and in his construction of the Conservative party. Hilton argued that Peel's politics constituted a firm continuation of 'liberal' Toryism and that Peel's consistencies were clear evidence of that 'liberal' Tory ideology. However, as this thesis shall demonstrate, Peel's politics were driven by his own unique ideological development, and were not entirely limited to the old 'liberal' Tory idea. Tamworth Conservatism, as imagined by Peel in 1834, was a product of his own time, political upbringing and of his own unique and evolving perspective on what constituted the 'national interest.' These were the factors that would influence his political decisions for the remainder of his life. His creation of the Conservative party and his Conservatism were to follow these lifelong principles. As many of these authors have suggested, Peel's creation of a Conservative idea was not an immediate or easy action. The division of the party in 1846 was fueled by

internal discontent with Peel's leadership and the perceived variability of Peel's principles. Unlike what these historians have argued this thesis shall show that Peel's Conservatism outlived both Peel and the Corn Law crisis of 1846. Ironically, the group of Conservatives that emerged from the Corn Law crisis made it their objective to reinvent the party based on the foundational principles of Robert Peel's Tamworth Conservatism.

### Sir Robert Peel in Historical Perspective

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The historiographical debate over the formation of Peel's Conservative party illustrates that from 1834 or 1846 Peel and his Conservatives were making their own party for their own age. Peel's visions for the party after 1835 launched a new type of political discourse in British politics. This new discourse centered on the preservation of state institutions (the church, crown, and economy) via careful reforms. Additionally, it remains evident that the making of Peel's Conservative party and Conservatism must be understood in the context of the repeal of the Corn Laws. This important event fundamentally separated Peel's Conservative party from the old Tory party and created a new political discourse. As this work will argue, this new political discourse can only be fully understood by examining the ideas of Robert Peel with particular reference to his 'Tamworth' Conservatism.<sup>35</sup>

Peel's Tamworth Conservatism was different from 'Conservative' ideas of the past. That is to say Peel's Conservative approach was a product of both his time and of his personal character. In his numerous biographies (both recent and older works which remain historiographically significant) Peel and his Conservative idea are typically traced to his family

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<sup>35</sup> I will refer to Peel's own unique form of Conservatism as Tamworth Conservatism as to separate it from other forms of Conservative thought that develop in this same time period.

origins. Peel was born in 1788 to the textile industrialist and parliamentarian Robert Peel (1<sup>st</sup> Baronet). Peel, as his biographer Norman Gash memorably writes, was born “to the world of Gibbon and Joshua Reynolds, of stage-coaches, highwaymen and the judicial burning of women, [but]died in 1850 in the age of Faraday and Darwin, of *Punch*, railway excursions, trade unions and income tax.”<sup>36</sup> Peel’s politics were a direct product of this transformative era. His Tamworth Conservatism would be designed to take the world of his youth and transition it, and the institutions that accompanied it, into the modern age. Peel followed his father into politics in 1809 as an MP for the rotten Irish borough of Cashel. Sponsored by his father and the Duke of Wellington, the man who would become arguably the greatest reformer of the nineteenth century ironically began his political career through the operation of a corrupted electoral system.<sup>37</sup>

A youthful face in parliament, Peel, like his father, joined the Tory party as a follower of the ideas of William Pitt the younger.<sup>38</sup> Pitt had identified often as an independent Whig, and it is of some significance that the branch of the Tory party to which both the younger and elder Peel gave their allegiance, evolved from this particular branch of Whiggism. As Richard Gaunt argues, Peel’s apprenticeship in the Tory party was in many ways an unfortunate circumstance. His assumption that Peel would have excelled in the Whig party suggests a strong element of ‘liberalism’ within the young Tory. Historians have long argued and debated whether or not Peel was a ‘liberal’ wolf in Tory sheep’s clothing.<sup>39</sup> However, it is difficult to accept that before 1832 Peel can be seen as a great reformer. Some historians have maintained that Peel’s sponsors, both his father and the Duke of Wellington, had guided him into the Tory party and he had to repay

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<sup>36</sup> Norman Gash, *Mr. Secretary Peel: the Life of Sir Robert Peel to 1830* (London: Faber & Faber 1961), 1.

<sup>37</sup> Douglas Hurd, *Robert Peel: A Biography* (London: Phoenix 2007), 14.

<sup>38</sup> William Pitt the Younger (1759-1806) Prime minister and leading political figure during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>39</sup> Gaunt. *Sir Robert Peel: The Life and Legacy*, 3.

the favor with loyalty. This argument is heavily debated. Peel's patrons may have expected a return on their investment, however, Peel's change of heart, in 1829, with his support of Catholic emancipation contradicts this suspicion. His 'betrayal' over Catholic emancipation illustrated Peel's loyalty was not to his patrons but rather to his conscience. The long debated origins of Peel's own form of Conservatism began at this point when he made the decision that to press for the political rights of Catholics as a reform, was necessary for the security of the state in Britain and Ireland.<sup>40</sup>

Peel's first speech in parliament (an 1810 reply to the King's speech) met with great applause and caught the attention of leading Tory members as it was noted as "the best first speech since that of William Pitt".<sup>41</sup> Peel's early entrance into high politics was regarded as successful and he was labeled as a person of interest. Noting his strong speaking ability MP's recognized why Wellington had chosen to support the young Robert Peel. Although his contemporaries did not see the younger Peel as a traditional Tory, he was welcomed into the party as the face of the next generation of Tories. Peel's entrance into politics through the Tory party has been a point of debate amongst historians. Some have argued that both Peel and his father were following the ideas of Pitt rather than mainstream Toryism. This has led to the theory that both Peels had a certain 'liberal' leaning despite their outward allegiance to the Tory party. The true nature of Peel's early political beliefs may never really be understood but the type of politics that he would develop in his youth would shape his designs for a new political organization.

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>41</sup> Gash. *Mr. Secretary Peel*, 59-61.

The historiography concerning the origins of Peel's Conservatism often highlights the era of Lord Liverpool's 'liberal' Tory administration (1822-1827) as a precursor to the Conservative party. Referred to as the 'liberal' Tory era the Liverpool administration presided over a period of reform and progress, shaping Peel's early perceptions that Toryism, especially 'liberal' Toryism, was the true legacy of Pitt and Burke.<sup>42</sup> Historians have argued that this era, and the figures that would emerge from it, became rising stars in British politics and the leading political thinkers of the early Victorian era. Peel's involvement in Liverpool's government earned him the position of Home Secretary in 1822. As Home Secretary, Peel clearly saw the necessity of certain types of reform. Working on liberalizing criminal law and organizing an early police force, Peel arguably was, as Gaunt suggests, an active 'liberal' Tory.<sup>43</sup> Many of these ideas in the more recent works suggest that Peel was not so much the pragmatic centrist that Gash had originally cast him. Hilton's interpretation of Peel's politics argued that Peel was more connected to a certain set of ideas than a pragmatic reaction to the changes of the nineteenth century. Following Hilton's argument, it appears that Peel maintained a certain series of principles throughout his life that were extremely important to the formation of the Conservative party and his Conservatism.

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Historians of Peel have almost universally acknowledged the origins of the Conservative party in Peel's 1834 Tamworth Manifesto. While his manifesto remained central to his politics the ideas that sparked Peel's own Conservatism can be traced back to the era of 'liberal' Toryism (1822-1827). The two major schools of historiographical thought concerning Peel's complex,

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<sup>42</sup> Along with Pitt the Younger Edmund Burke (1729-1797) is argued to be one of the progenitors of British Conservatism.

<sup>43</sup> Gaunt. *Sir Robert Peel*, 4.

reserved personality contests whether Peel was a pragmatist or a rigid doctrinaire. These schools have investigated Peel's entire political career from his first speech in Parliament to his last and have come to very different conclusions about his political ideology. As this study will demonstrate, Peel's early political career within the 'liberal' wing of the Tory party was essential in forming his early political beliefs. His early politics and challenges, especially his decision on Catholic emancipation, would play a fundamental role in shaping his Conservatism. Unlike the works of previous historians this investigation shall argue that Peel's politics and attitudes could be traced to the 'liberal' Tory era and evolved with Peel to become his Tamworth Conservatism. This Conservatism, derived from Peel's own politics, would come to reshape the Tory party and create a new direction for politics for the remainder of the century. The Conservative party, grounded in the ideas of Peel's Conservatism, would outlast a number of crises during Peel's leadership. When the party was divided in 1846 its new leaders would return to the ideas of Peel's Conservatism to reinvigorate Toryism for a second time.

## CHAPTER II

### REFORMED TOYRISM AND THE EARLY FORMATION OF CONSERVATIVISM

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Since the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Toryism had been defined by its defense of the establishment, most specifically the crown, the church, and the aristocracy. During the 1820s, under the leadership of Lord Liverpool, Toryism evolved into what historians have labeled as ‘liberal’ Toryism. In political terms the ‘liberal’ Tory era was defined by a series of reforms to state institutions and by the success of Toryism electorally. However, the success of ‘liberal’ Toryism was short lived. After the death of Lord Liverpool in 1827 the succeeding Tory governments failed to continue the policies that made Liverpool’s government successful. The electoral collapse of the Tories after the passage of the Great Reform Bill of 1832 had opened parliament to a new era of Whig government. Facing political crisis, the Tory remnants had to reevaluate their own politics, most notably how to approach the idea of reform after the passage of the Reform Bill. Therefore, to enter into the post-Reform Bill era the Tories had to reinvent themselves and Toryism in order to survive as a political organization. A new generation would emerge after the death of Lord Liverpool to take the leadership of his ‘liberal’ Tory legacy and the larger legacy of Pitt and Burke.

Robert Peel orchestrated the reorganization of Toryism after the passage of the Reform Bill thereby creating the political organization that would succeed Toryism. This idea would be called Conservatism. However, reorganizing Toryism and transforming it along Peel’s own principles into Conservatism was a difficult task for Peel to manage. To initiate these changes



Peel would have to convince his party that the reforms they had opposed in the recent past (Catholic emancipation, the Great Reform Bill) had to be accepted. Peel would call upon his experience in the Liverpool government and the reforms he had spearheaded as examples of the types of reforms the new Conservative party should undertake. It was Robert Peel's own political ideology, based in 'liberal' Toryism that would be used to transition Toryism into a political ideology for post-Reform Bill Britain.

### Toryism into Conservatism and the Tamworth Manifesto

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The formation of modern conservatism actually predated the origins of Robert Peel's party in 1834. As the historiography suggests, the origins of Peel's Tamworth Conservatism stretched back to the so-called 'liberal' Tory period. The government of Lord Liverpool (1822-1827) dominated this era of Tory success. The Tory governments before the Reform Bill, especially Liverpool's, had seen much success in both electoral and popular terms. However, the 'liberal' Toryism that had developed during Liverpool's administration was itself an attempt to bring the party back to its roots in the ideas of the much-respected William Pitt the Younger, the Whig turned Tory.

Liverpool's 'liberal' Toryism had been marked by a belief in strong government dedicated to economic prosperity through reform.<sup>44</sup> Liverpool's government had taken a proactive approach to reform and had advocated for political and economic reforms as a way to combat the growing calls from the working and middle classes. As Liverpool worked to return the party to the ideas of Pitt, two factions emerged within the administration: the 'liberal' Tories and reactionary Tories (or Ultras). The Ultra Tories were an extreme right wing faction of the

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<sup>44</sup> Henry John Temple to William Temple 17, July 1826. *Life of Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston: With Selections from his Diaries and Correspondence. Vol. I.* ed. H.L. Bulwer Bentley. (Philadelphia: J.B. Libbincott & Co. 1871), 171-172.

Tory party, and staunch defenders of the Anglican Church. The Ultra faction came into existence in the 1820s as Tory opponents to the ‘liberal’ policies of the Liverpool government. Their role in the decline of Toryism climaxed in 1829 with the passage of Catholic emancipation. The Ultra-Tories rejected the label of extreme or reactionary and saw themselves as the true upholders of the Whig tradition of 1689.<sup>45</sup> Conversely, the ‘liberal’ Tories thought of themselves in the same fashion except with closer ties to Pitt the Younger who had supported Catholic emancipation at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These two factions were often at odds with each other despite being part of the same government. Henry John Temple (Lord Palmerston) described the tension between the two groups of Tories as problematic for the continuation of Toryism. As he saw it, in 1826, the Ultras were reactionary forces that were determined to prevent the party from returning to its roots:

in truth the real opposition of the present day sit behind the Treasury Bench; and it is by the stupid old Tory party, who bawl out the memory and praises of Pitt while they are opposing all the measures and principles which he held most important<sup>46</sup>

John Henry Temple’s critique of the Ultras illustrated that while the party believed itself to be the successors of the politics of Pitt the Ultras were undermining his legacy.

The passage of ‘liberal’ Pitt-like reforms sponsored by the Liverpool administration was an effort to remove a negative stigma from Toryism; a stigma that was associated with the repression of the lower orders by the aristocracy. Reforms to criminal law with the Gaols Act of 1823, introduced by Home Secretary Robert Peel, reformed the prison system by introducing payment of jailers and the prohibition of irons. Additionally, Peel’s reforms to criminal law

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<sup>45</sup> J. J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative. Reaction and orthodoxy in Britain, 1760–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 69.

<sup>46</sup> Henry John Temple to William Temple 17, July 1826. *Life of Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston.* ed. H.L. Bulwer Bentley. 171-172.

extended to the reduction of the number of capital offences and a significant reduction in executions.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, key economic reforms were undertaken by the Liverpool government. The relaxation of the Navigation Acts in 1823 reduced colonial trade restrictions and a gradual reduction of duties in 1825 helped to stimulate economic growth and employment.<sup>48</sup> Reforms undertaken by the Liverpool government and Robert Peel have been argued to be liberal in their nature, however they were actually more ‘conservative’, that is to say, they worked within the existing system to make it work more efficiently rather than to change it fundamentally. Peel’s reforms to the criminal justice system and Liverpool’s relaxation of the Navigation Acts were indeed reforms that had lasting consequences but did not tackle the larger constitutional issues.

Despite the successes of the ‘liberal’ Tory government, Liverpool’s administration was often at war with itself. Ultra Toryism became highly problematic. This section of the party was unwilling to compromise on reforms to the Church, Crown, the aristocracy, and the constitution.<sup>49</sup> Regardless, ‘liberal’ sections of the party pressed for careful reforms. In a letter to the young Robert Peel, Irish statesman John Wilson Croker argued that while the public clamored for reform it should be undertaken carefully.<sup>50</sup> While the ‘liberal’ Toryism of Lord Liverpool appears to be a precursor to Peel’s Conservative party, with its belief in careful reform, the reluctance on behalf of the party leadership to pursue larger parliamentary reforms prevented ‘liberal’ Toryism from evolving. Its failures to make any efforts at larger constitutional

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<sup>47</sup> Boyd Hilton, *A Mad Bad & Dangerous People? England 1782-1846* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 2006), 318.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>49</sup> Henry John Temple to William Temple 17, July 1826. *Life of Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston.* ed. H.L. Bulwer Bentley. 171-172.

<sup>50</sup> John Wilson Croker to Robert Peel February 1, 1822. *The Croker Papers: The Correspondence and Diaries of the Late John Wilson Croker. Letters, Diaries, and Memoirs of the RT. Hon. John W. Croker LL.D, F.R.S, Vol. II.* ed. Louis, J. Jennings (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street. 1885), 448-449.

changes such as Pitt had tried in 1801 further damaged the party.<sup>51</sup> In essence, the ‘liberal’ Tory party prolonged the survival of Toryism until 1832 rather than letting it die at the hands of the Ultra reactionaries in the 1820s.

The death of Lord Liverpool, in 1827, began a change in the politics of the ‘liberal’ Tories. He was succeeded by the ‘liberal’ Tory, George Canning. Canning’s administration was plagued by a more heated division between Ultras and ‘liberals’. Canning’s government, unlike Liverpool’s, did not have the support of the Ultra Tories and was forced to draw in more support from the Whig party. This further distanced Canning from political moderates like Robert Peel, who subsequently resigned from the office of Home Secretary. Canning’s tenure as Prime Minister ended after only 119 days with his death on August 8<sup>th</sup> 1827. His replacement was the unlikeable Viscount Goderich (Lord Ripon). Like Canning, Goderich’s term as PM was also destined to be quite short, lasting only 144 days, over the course of which he managed to earn the hatred of both the Ultras and the ‘liberal’ Tories. Goderich was summed up by King George IV as “a damned, sniveling, blubbering blockhead.”<sup>52</sup> While Goderich was the *de jure* leader of the party the real power was in the hands of the Duke of Wellington and Robert Peel, a rising star within the party. The two brief ministries of Canning and Goderich illustrated the crisis within ‘liberal’ Toryism as to who would succeed Liverpool and take the mantle of the liberal Tories. Goderich’s resignation in 1828 was widely welcomed and he was succeeded by the Duke of Wellington.

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<sup>51</sup> Pitt’s failure at Catholic emancipation in 1801 was blocked by King George III and with lack of royal support Pitt could not attempt such a reform.

<sup>52</sup> Phillip Zielger, *Melbourne, a Biography of William Lamb, 2nd Viscount Melbourne* (London: Atheneum 1982), 92.

Wellington's government (1828-1830) undertook serious reforms to both the state and economy that the previous Liverpool government had avoided. Wellington had every opportunity to bring the Ultra Tories back into power, but the first person he chose for his cabinet was Robert Peel. With Peel in the all-important position of Home Secretary Wellington chose the remainder of his ministers carefully; seeking to balance the forces of the Ultras and the 'liberal' Tories. Significantly, the first reforms undertaken by Wellington were modifications to the Corn Laws. The economic reforms of the Liverpool government had avoided the Corn Laws specifically as Liverpool did not wish to revive the type of agitation that had occurred earlier, most notably at Peterloo in 1819.<sup>53</sup> Reforms to the Corn Laws had to be undertaken as they caused the price of Corn to remain artificially high even as the nation sank deeper and deeper in the economic depression that had begun in 1815. The introduction of a 'sliding scale' was designed to lower the price of Corn and to continually adjust the tariff to the market price. With the introduction of the sliding scale in 1828 some foreign grain would be allowed into the British market. The need for modification was clear because the previous exclusionary price of 80s per quarter had artificially driven up the price of corn. The introduction of a sliding scale allowed the duty free importation of grain when the domestic price reached 72s per quarter. These changes were fully supported by many within the government and seen as a necessary reform.<sup>54</sup> Modifications to the Corn Laws represented a 'conservative' approach to reform with evidence of a 'liberal' Tory economic mindset. This modification in 1828 illustrated the developing mind-set of modern

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<sup>53</sup> The Peterloo Massacre occurred in August 1819 and was the result of a cavalry charge against a crowd that demanded repeal of the Corn Laws and reform to parliamentary representation. The immediate effect after Peterloo was a halt to reforms.

<sup>54</sup> Boyd Hilton, *Corn Cash, Commerce: The Economic Policies of the Tory Governments 1815-1830*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1977), 292.

Conservatism as it was undertaken to make an existing “institution” work more efficiently rather than to change it fundamentally.

The next major reform the Wellington administration undertook was Peel’s notable Metropolitan Police Act of 1829 (10 Geo. 4, C.44). This 1829 Act established the Metropolitan Police of London replacing the old system of constables. Similar to his reforms to criminal law in 1823 and 1825 his reforms to policing were the first piece of legislation ushering in a police force that would serve as a model for cities around the country. Peel’s police force, often called ‘bobbies’ or ‘peelers’, was designed to wear uniforms and interact with the public. Peel had argued against the use of ununiformed police or spies and informants. In the debate over criminal law Peel argued, “God forbid that I should mean to countenance a system of espionage; but a vigorous preventive police, consistent with the free principles, of our free constitution, was an object which I did not despair of seeing accomplished.”<sup>55</sup> When Peel set up the Metropolitan Police in 1829 he wanted the public to see the police as a visible presence of the state through which criminal law was being enforced for the good of the nation.

However, the most pressing issue of Wellington’s government was the issue of Catholic emancipation. Although the idea of emancipation had been around since before the Act of Union with Ireland in 1800, the issue had been extremely divisive. Pitt the Younger had fought for Catholic emancipation as part of the Act of Union in 1801. However, upon hearing that the King (George III) would not support this, in part because it would violate his Coronation Oath, Pitt resigned and his government collapsed.<sup>56</sup> Since the collapse of Pitt’s ministry in 1801 the Tories had refrained from pursuing any large parliamentary reforms on this issue. Matters changed

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<sup>55</sup> Robert Peel’s Speech on Criminal Laws, June 4, 1822. *Hansard*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series Vol. VII § 790-805 §804

<sup>56</sup> Hilton, *A Mad Bad & Dangerous People?*, 79.

after the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828 granted political rights to Non-Conformists. Although initially opposed by Peel and the Tories, the support of Anglican Church leaders persuaded the government to pursue repeal.<sup>57</sup> Following repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts the issue of Catholic rights became a major point of debate within the Tory party, with some fervently opposed to granting Catholics political rights. In 1828 the Irishman Daniel O'Connell was elected to Parliament but could not take his seat in the House of Commons as a practicing Catholic. O'Connell then campaigned to gather public support for the emancipation of Catholics. While supporters of emancipation were primarily in the Whig party, many Tories began to turn to support O'Connell's campaign after a significant amount of public support became evident. As Home Secretary, Robert Peel became instrumental in helping Wellington's government pass Catholic emancipation. While initially opposed to Catholic emancipation (Peel had earned the nickname "Orange Peel" for his almost visceral opposition to expanding the political rights of Catholics), after O'Connell's national campaign had gathered significant public support both Peel and the Duke of Wellington came to believe that if the nation was against the exclusion of Catholics they must adhere to the national will and pass the reform. Peel now viewed it as an absolutely necessary reform, for as he explained to Wellington, "though emancipation was a great danger, civil strife was a greater danger."<sup>58</sup> Peel had observed the growing tension in Ireland and believed that only by granting emancipation could a wholesale rebellion be prevented. Peel's close relationship with Wellington had also changed his position concerning emancipation and the passage of the act was finalized in 1829. Although both men

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<sup>57</sup> Gash, *Mr. Secretary Peel*, 460.

<sup>58</sup> Peel to Wellington Robert Peel August 12, 1828. *Memoirs by the Right Honourable Sir Robert Peel Part I the Roman Catholic Question 1828-9*. ed. Edward Cardwell & Lord Mahon (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street. 1857), 181-182.

originally opposed Catholic emancipation they became supporters of the reform because – in their collective view – it had become necessary for the health and security of the nation.

The changing position of both the Duke of Wellington and Robert Peel over Catholic emancipation signaled a return to Pittite ideas. That is to say, reform when necessary. It was during these debates over Catholic emancipation that Peel's own particular form of 'conservatism' started to become independent of his 'liberal' Tory roots. Peel notes within his own memoirs that other than the repeal of the Corn Laws (1846) the fight to grant Catholic political rights was the most defining moment in his political life.<sup>59</sup> With the passage of Catholic emancipation, the balance of power in the House shifted towards the Whigs, which would have profound implications for Britain's political future, most notably in the form of the Whig-sponsored legislation of 1832 and 1833.

The Great Reform Bill of 1832 created a fundamental shift in the political system despite the relatively small expansion of the franchise. To many Tories it destroyed their conception of a political system based around the Church, the aristocracy and the crown. The old system of party organization and elections changed with the passage of the Great Reform Bill; patronage, purchase, and favors were no longer central to any party's political upkeep, as the monopoly over political power was withdrawn from the aristocracy.<sup>60</sup> Intense Tory opposition to the Bill was felt in the next election with a crushing defeat to the party. In 1831 the Tories held 235 seats and the Whigs 370. After the election of 1832, the Tories held 175 seats and the Whigs gained 71 seats bringing their total to 441. With the Tories' defeat the Whigs possessed nearly

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<sup>59</sup> Robert Peel, *Memoirs by the Right Honourable Sir Robert Peel: Part I Roman Catholic Belief*. ed. Edward Cardwell & Lord Mahon 2.

<sup>60</sup> Coleman, *Conservatism and the Conservative Party in Nineteenth Century Britain*, 5.



three quarters of the total number of seats in the House of Commons.<sup>61</sup> This crushing defeat for the Tories was very troubling to the future of the party.<sup>62</sup> Ongoing Tory opposition to the Reform Bill illustrated a fundamental problem that manifested itself in the elections of 1832; more than ever the Tories were associated with backwardness.

Refusal to accept what were widely viewed as much needed changes to the electoral system lead to an overwhelming Whig victory in 1832. The Whig victory signaled a potentially crippling and long-term defeat for Toryism and its supporters. From an Ultra Tory perspective the factors that had contributed to this decline were the reforms passed in the 1820s, most notably changes to the Corn Laws and relaxation of the Navigation Acts, the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, and finally Catholic emancipation. For Ultras each of these reforms, although passed by the Tory party, had contributed to an erosion of key Tory state institutions. This alleged erosion gave the Ultras fuel to strike against the Whig government and further divide the party from within. The final blow to Toryism was the intense opposition to the Great Reform Bill. By opposing the expansion of the franchise and the removal of corrupt boroughs the Tories had aligned themselves with the forces of repression. The political chaos initiated by the Reform Bill sent Toryism further on the path of self-destructive behavior. To combat these self-inflicted injuries, less reactionary Tories sought to return the party to what it resembled before 1832. The 'liberal' Tory faction of the party, lead informally by Peel, would work to undo the recent failures of the party.

To transform Toryism, Peel and others had suggested a new name and label for the party in the post-Reform Bill world. The transformative label that arose was 'conservative'.

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<sup>61</sup> F.W.S. Craig, *British Electoral Facts 1832-1987* (Worcester: Billing & Sons Ltd 1989), 1.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

‘Conservative’ had its first use by John Wilson Croker in an issue of the *Quarterly Review* in 1830 as a description of the Tory party.<sup>63</sup> He and other Tory politicians had argued that in order to create a stronger party they must work to preserve and ‘conserve’ the institutions of the state; such as the rights of the Crown, the rights of the state church, and the rights of the landed class. Croker’s term for the party crept slowly into favor and began to be utilized by other Tories as a way to shift away from the now problematic Tory label. Conservatism would be about the protection and conservation of the institutions of the state through reforms that would work within the existing institution to preserve it rather than change it fundamentally or destroy it.

The formation of local ‘conservative’ associations after the Tory defeat in 1832 began to bring Tories together to discuss the future of the party in a post-Reform Bill era. These associations were founded along the lines of parliamentary constituencies and were funded by local members. As Philip Salmon argued, the formation of these associations was inspired by ‘conservative’ thinking individuals who had evaluated the new electorate and consciously sought newer methods to revive Toryism in the post Reform Bill era.<sup>64</sup> Of these associations, the most influential was the Carlton Club. The Carlton Club quickly became the central think tank of ‘conservative’ minded individuals. Salmon argues that the organization of the Club in 1832 began to help revive the Tory party from the ground up.<sup>65</sup> The Carlton Club and like-minded conservative associations after 1832 played a vital role in selecting Conservative candidates, canvassing and financing the party. These ground level changes initiated by the Carlton Club and other conservative associations played an important role in the transformation of Toryism

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<sup>63</sup> *The Croker Papers: The Correspondence and Diaries of the Late John Wilson Croker. Letters, Diaries, and Memoirs of the RT. Hon. John W. Croker Vol. III* .ed. Louis J. Jennings. (London: John Murray, Albermarle Street 1885) 448-449.

<sup>64</sup> Salmon, *Electoral Reform at Work*, 84.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

into Conservatism. Their bottom-up redevelopment of Toryism after the Reform Bill meant that the Tories themselves knew they had to change. While Peel remained the grand architect of later Conservatism, the reorganization of the Tories from the ground level began with the local political clubs.<sup>66</sup>

What was clear for the Tories after the passage of the Reform Bill was that the party had to change and adapt if it were to survive in the new world of British politics. Croker's suggestion for a 'conservative' label and the formation of conservative clubs and associations began a return to Pittite Toryism that started with Liverpool's 'liberal' Tory era.<sup>67</sup> However, to change the electorate's (as well as the public's) perception of the Tory party from one of repression to one that worked primarily to preserve state institutions, a new generation would have to lead the charge. The figurehead for this transformation would be Robert Peel.

Peel's leadership of the remaining Tories began with a recommendation from the Duke of Wellington. With the dismissal of Lord Melbourne's Whig government by King William IV in late 1834, the Duke of Wellington was asked by the King to form a government. He declined the offer; instead he suggested that the young star of the Tory party, Robert Peel, take the office of Prime Minister.<sup>68</sup> Wellington's reluctance to take the office of PM and his endorsement of Peel suggests that in his mind Peel would be a better candidate to revive Toryism. Whereas Wellington represented the old Tory party, Peel was to be representative of something new. Before Peel, the Tory party had been associated with the landed aristocrats, minor gentry and the established Anglican Church. Peel, however, was an industrialist rather than a landlord and it

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<sup>66</sup> Hurd, *Robert Peel*, 178.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 448-449.

<sup>68</sup> Wellington to William IV December 12, 1834. *Sir Robert Peel From His Private Papers Vol. II* ed. Charles Stuart Parker. (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street 1899), 263-264.

was believed that his background outside of the traditional Tory realm would help lead to the transformation and modernization that would turn the Tories into Conservatives.<sup>69</sup>

Peel's first order of business was to explain what his policies would be as the first Tory to take office since the passage of the Reform Bill. Upon accepting the call to take the office of Prime Minister in early December of 1834 Peel drafted his platform, aptly named after his constituency in Tamworth, the Tamworth Manifesto.<sup>70</sup> Peel began to fundamentally change the political discourse of British politics through this manifesto. Tamworth Conservatism, as defined by Robert Peel, outlined the economic, political, and social arguments for the party as a revitalization of Toryism. Peel's Manifesto remains by far one of the most significant ideological statements of early nineteenth century British politics. Delivered as a supposedly nonpartisan speech on December 18, 1834, before his electors at the Borough of Tamworth, this manifesto outlined the fundamental structures for his new Conservative party and ministry.<sup>71</sup> Although delivered to the electors at Tamworth, the main points were addressed to the electorate at large. Peel realized that since the passage of the Reform Bill national politics had fundamentally changed.<sup>72</sup> With a national audience in mind Peel's Manifesto outlined a new direction for the Tories based on the reformed electorate.<sup>73</sup> Peel's idea of a national Conservative party was one that could act on behalf of the nation regardless of levels of enfranchisement. The principles he

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<sup>69</sup> Hurd, *Robert Peel*, 1.

<sup>70</sup> Robert Peel, "Tamworth Manifesto" *The Times*, December 19, 1834, 2.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Salmon, *Electoral Reform at Work*, 84.

enunciated in the new party canon centered on the maintenance and careful reform of the traditional institutions of church, state, and economy.<sup>74</sup>

To simply change the name of the party from Tory to Conservative was not the goal. Peel believed that a reformation of the Tory party into a ‘conservative’ one would be the best way to combat radicalism and block radical Whig reforms.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, Peel believed that certain reforms were necessary and that his new party should carry out reforms that were in the national interest. Peel believed that Toryism, especially the principles and policies that began with ‘liberal’ Toryism, with its strong commitment to the state, church, crown and pursuit of necessary reform, would be a firm base for his new party.<sup>76</sup> His objective in designing the Conservative party was to help maintain these important state organizations. It was, in Peel’s opinion, the position of the ministers of government to lead, not to follow.<sup>77</sup> Peel argued that a Conservative government would not be led by public opinion or party doctrine but rather by what it considered to be in the best interests of the nation. Additionally he stated that the Tories’ refusal to pursue and accept reforms had essentially led them to extinction by sticking to a pure party doctrine rather than working towards the larger national interest.<sup>78</sup> Peel had argued that Whig radicals had been strongly influenced by the press and public agitation; therefore, they were following and adhering to the ‘vilest species of despotisms- the despotism of

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<sup>74</sup> Peel, “Tamworth Manifesto,” 2.

<sup>75</sup> Peel to Goulburn January 3, 1833. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol II.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 212.

<sup>76</sup> Peel to Aberdeen May 10, 1834. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol II.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 237.

<sup>77</sup> Peel to Goulburn 3, January 1833. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol II.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 212.

<sup>78</sup> Peel, *Memoirs by the Right Honourable Sir Robert Peel*, 74.

demagogues.<sup>79</sup> Clearly in his mind, a strong government or party should not unthinkingly bend to the demands of the public or press. Conservative MP's were to be representatives of the electorate, responsible for making decision for the good of the whole, not party delegates told how to vote.<sup>80</sup> Since the passage of the Reform Bill Peel had criticized the Whigs for enacting a host of unnecessary reforms, which did not truly help the nation.<sup>81</sup> He argued that by following the public's demands for immediate action the Whigs were undermining the constitution. His objective was to create a Conservative party that would help *preserve* and *conserve* crucial state institutions and work for the national interest.

Peel's argument for a Conservative government suggested that it had to be accepting of reforms already enacted and in some cases actively pursue further needed reforms. As Croker had suggested to Peel more than a decade earlier, reforms should be undertaken, but carefully.<sup>82</sup> This careful approach meant that state institutions could undergo careful review that could inform well-constructed measures of reform. Peel argued that reforms were also to be opposed if they were against national interests. Still, such opposition, Peel argued, had to be carefully managed. The Conservative party should pick and choose its fights and selectively oppose unnecessary measures.<sup>83</sup> He argued that unnecessary reforms to state institutions were not only dangerous but also irresponsible. This notion of selective opposition illustrated that Peel's

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<sup>79</sup> Robert Peel. Prorogation of Parliament April 22, 1831. *Speeches of the Late Right Honourable Robert Peel, Bart Peel Speeches, Vol. II.* (London: George Routledge and Co., Farringdon Street 1853), 309.

<sup>80</sup> Matthew Cragoe. "Sir Robert Peel and the 'Moral Authority' of the House of Commons, 1832-1841" *English Historical Review* Vol. CXXVIII No. 530 (Feb. 2013): 57.

<sup>81</sup> Robert Peel. Parliamentary Reform March 14, 1832. *Speeches of the Late Right Honourable Robert Peel, Bart Peel Speeches, Vol. II.* 499.

<sup>82</sup> ed. Louis J. Jennings. *The Croker Papers Vol. III.* 448-449.

<sup>83</sup> Michael Lusztig. "Solving Peel's Puzzle: Repeal of the Corn Laws and Institutional Preservation." *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Jul., 1995): 397.

Conservative party was constructing a hierarchy of principles. Some things were of greater importance than others and required strong defense. Therefore, Peel's idea of a careful and selective approach to reform established a basis on which the party could oppose or support reforms to institutions of the state and serve as a basis for the ideology of Conservatism.

Changing the party name from Tory to Conservative was part of Peel's attempt to create not only a new image but an entirely new political discourse for the party. Peel's objective was not only to distance his new party from the narrow ideas of the old Tory party but also to revitalize what he viewed as the positive elements of Toryism; most notably its commitment to national institutions of church and state. Peel had no time for the Ultras and his dislike of them ran deep. He argued that their narrow-mindedness and failure to look at the interests of the nation were not only damaging but also distressing.<sup>84</sup> His party's design, outlined in the Manifesto, was to *conserve* the institutions of the state and *guide* them into the future.<sup>85</sup>

The Manifesto directly outlined the general goals and directions of Peel's first government.<sup>86</sup> However, his manifesto would have consequences that went far beyond outlining the objectives of a single ministry. The manifesto dictated four critical aims that were designed to appeal to the new electorate in the post-Reform Bill era. These four principles were: acceptance of the Reform Bill as irrevocable; a willingness to pursue further needed reforms, both civil and ecclesiastical; the preservation of the church; and a refusal to accept reforms that were unnecessary or so radical they undermined the very nature of British society.

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<sup>84</sup> Hurd. *Robert Peel*, 146.

<sup>85</sup> Peel, "Tamworth Manifesto," 2.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

The first and most crucial section of the Manifesto was Peel's explicit support for the Reform Bill, stating that it was an irrevocable piece of legislation.<sup>87</sup> Peel's stance on the Reform Bill in the manifesto clearly defined his political position from then on. Declaring that with the passage of the Reform Bill British politics had entered a new era, Peel argued that it was the responsibility of the Prime Minister to both maintain the Bill and act in the spirit of it. This first section of Peel's manifesto clearly articulates his 'liberal' Tory attitudes and dislike of Ultra Toryism:

Now I say at once that I will not accept power on the condition of declaring myself an apostate from the principles on which I have heretofore acted. At the same time, I never will admit that I have been, either before or after the Reform Bill, the defender of abuses, or the enemy of judicious reforms.<sup>88</sup>

Peel's alignment with the Reform Bill illustrated his commitment to modernizing the Tories in line with the new age of politics. Peel argued that the Bill had settled the issue of corruption in politics in a positive fashion and that any attempts by either Conservatives or Whigs to undo its work would be against the national interest.<sup>89</sup> Aligning himself with the Reform Bill Peel made it clear that the new and enlarged national electorate was his party's target audience.

Second, Peel argued for his Conservatives to review state institutions in the "spirit" of the Reform Bill. He argued that:

[I]f the spirit of the Reform Bill implies merely a careful review of institutions, civil and ecclesiastical, undertaken in a friendly temper combining, with the firm maintenance of established rights, the correction of proved abuses and the redress of real grievances, - in that case, I can for myself and colleagues undertake to act in such a spirit and with such intentions.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.



Peel's Manifesto addressed the notion of reform both civil and ecclesiastical but also clearly stated that it would be limited in its extent. He stated that the Reform Bill did not require a massive overhaul of the state but a series of careful reviews.<sup>91</sup> Review and then reform to state institutions both civil and ecclesiastical broke with the old idea of Toryism and its unyielding opposition to changing state institutions in any way, shape or form. As a reflection of his own Conservatism Peel had argued that his government would have to be proactive and enact change where there was both a perceived need and a strong case for change.<sup>92</sup> Similar to his involvement in the debate over Catholic emancipation in 1829, Peel believed that the best way to maintain both the authority of the Church and state was through reform that addressed the grievances of the nation.<sup>93</sup>

Third, he wanted his reformed Tory party to stand for the active preservation and improvement of current institutions. Thus, his position on the Anglican Church in Ireland was to reform the institution of the church so it could be better promoted.<sup>94</sup> His offer to investigate the possibility of church reform to preserve the interests of the established church satisfied his Tory base but also acted within the spirit of the post-Reform Bill era. Peel imagined his party could, through careful and well thought out measures of reform, guide state institutions into the present and promote their interests.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Peel to Wellington August 11, 1828. Robert Peel. *Memoirs by the Right Honourable Sir Robert Peel Part I the Roman Catholic Question 1828-9*. ed. Edward Cardwell & Lord Mahon (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street. 1857) 181-182.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 2.

Finally, Peel argued that while his administration was in support of necessary reforms it would not undertake sweeping reforms that were fueled by unthinking, popular mass agitation. Peel had stated that if the positive spirit of the Reform Bill was to degenerate into an atmosphere of continual agitation and demands for massive and sweeping reforms he could not support it.<sup>95</sup> Peel's final point in the Manifesto conceived his intent to establish a modern government that could act for the good of the entire nation, regardless of the level of enfranchisement. Although seemingly democratic, Tamworth Conservatism wasn't. His Conservatism was about the maintenance and preservation of state institutions and pursuit of reforms that worked within the existing system to address problems and correct them for the good of the nation.

The overall message in Peel's Manifesto was to accept reforms for the good of the nation. Peel's Tamworth Conservatism had to take into account the changes instituted by the Reform Bill and had to embrace them as irrevocable and necessary for the party's transition from Toryism into Conservatism.<sup>96</sup> The ideas addressed in the Manifesto, inspired by the Reform Bill, represented Peel's notion of a Conservative government. "Conservative government" as Peel had called it, reflected his intentions to govern in the spirit of reformed 'liberal' Toryism. Aligning himself with the spirit of the Reform Bill Peel made it clear that the newly reconstituted and enhanced national electorate was his party's target audience. Obstructive opposition by the Ultra Tories after the passage of the Reform Bill had brought the party to the brink of extinction. Peel had observed these problems and offered cautious reforms as a compromise to revitalize the party, while still maintaining support of state institutions. Peel's Tamworth Conservatism took

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>96</sup> Richard W. Davis, "Toryism to Tamworth: The Triumph of Reform, 1827-1835." *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, Vol. 12 No. 2 (1980): 145.

into account the changes instituted by the Reform Bill and actually embraced them as a means of evolution.<sup>97</sup>

The ideas set forth in the Manifesto presented Peel's vision of a Conservative government. By accepting the ideals behind the Reform Bill, Peel's Tamworth Conservatism launched a new political discourse. The new Conservative party was one that embraced the Reform Bill as irrevocable and believed that attempts to undo it were threats to the peace and security of the nation.<sup>98</sup> Peel clearly saw himself and his new Conservative Party as the ideological successors of 'liberal' Toryism, because it too had accepted cautious reform in the 1820s. Drawing from the fundamental basis of 'liberal' Toryism the Manifesto sought to draw in all but the most reactionary of Tories, who after 1834, had to either join Peel's party or fade into political oblivion.<sup>99</sup>

The government that started with the Tamworth Manifesto was to operate in a new Conservative fashion. Peel's first ministry was a minority government and had to rely on Whig support. However, the Whigs who supported Peel were often skeptical of his Tory background and because of this Peel could never be certain of their support; indeed, the Whig supporters of Peel's government eventually broke off and joined with the Irish radicals to defeat Peel's government.<sup>100</sup> By early April 1835, Peel could no longer continue his minority government and reluctantly resigned, allowing Lord Melbourne and the Whigs to return to office.

Although the first Peel ministry lasted only one hundred days, it had created the foundation for a new political organization. The collapse after one hundred days in office

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>98</sup> Peel, "Tamworth Manifesto," 2.

<sup>99</sup> Eric J. Evans, *Sir Robert Peel: Statesmanship, Power and Party* (London: Routledge 1991), 41.

<sup>100</sup> Hurd. *Robert Peel*, 186.

illustrated the fragility of the newly organized party but in the long term helped to forge stronger party discipline.<sup>101</sup> The withdrawal into opposition gave Peel's Tamworth Conservatism a chance to evolve into a more detailed and well-defined party canon which in turn allowed for a more fully articulated Conservative party ideology. Peel's first ministry, although short, was a relatively successful first test of Conservatism as a national party idea. In this sense, the collapse of Peel's first ministry was not really a failure but rather a case of a premature ascent to power. The resignation of Conservative government ministers on April 8, 1835 was met with cheers of support for Peel.<sup>102</sup> Although defeated Peel had successfully rallied support for his new Conservative idea. The first Conservative ministry ended in perhaps the best way possible for Peel and his supporters. Peel's Conservatives as well as his non-partisan supporters within the House of Commons marched triumphantly to the opposition benches. As the session ended Peel was met with cheers from both opponents and supporters all around the House.<sup>103</sup> While Peel had not had the numbers in 1835 to form a strong ministry, he had rallied the support necessary for the formation of a strong opposition. It was evident that despite the party's inability to hold on to the reins of government it clearly had strong influence within parliament which was a vast improvement over the years from 1832 to 1834 when the party had almost disappeared into political irrelevancy.<sup>104</sup> Peel's move to the opposition benches allowed him and his follower's time to rally support, build internal ideology, identity, and to attract new members to the party. In opposition, Tamworth Conservatism proved to be a successful basis for rallying more support and strengthening the party ideology.

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<sup>101</sup> Norman Gash, *Peel* (London: Longman 1976), 175.

<sup>102</sup> Robert Peel. Resignation of Ministers April 8, 1835. *Speeches of the Late Right Honourable Robert Peel, Bart Peel Speeches, Vol. III.* (London: George Routledge and Co., Farringdon Street 1853), 116-119.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-119.

Seen in that light, the first Peel ministry was a victory for the idea of Tamworth Conservatism despite its short run. The immediate effects of the Manifesto were minimal. However, the long-term ramifications of the manifesto were huge. The results of the elections of 1835 and 1837 showed a strong Conservative rise, which would continue into the elections of 1841 allowing Peel to form a majority government. The tenets of the Manifesto and his first ministry helped to convince the electors around the country, and fellow Tories, that Peel could and should be trusted as the leader of this new Conservative party. Peel had managed to revive the still beating heart of Toryism and transform it into a new national idea— Conservatism. Peel had not only revived the ideology from the brink but he had also successfully removed, or restrained, many of the rotten branches associated with the most reactionary strains of Ultra Toryism. Peel's Tamworth Conservatism had passed the first test in establishing itself as a viable political ideology and successor to 'liberal' Toryism. However, to expand the party, Peel had to purge or at the very least further restrain the most reactionary forces in the party. His ultimate solution was to dilute the influence of the Ultras by recruiting large numbers of moderate Conservative converts and ex-Whigs to the Conservative party standard.

#### Converts to Peel's Conservative Party: Edward Smith-Stanley and the Derby Dilly

Peel's 1834 reformation of the Tories launched the new Conservative movement, but if he was going to create a truly new type of political party he needed more than traditional Tory support. It was imperative that he bring in ex-Whig members to his cause, largely to dilute the continued threat of Ultra Toryism. High on the list of potential candidates for his new party was Edward George Geoffrey Smith-Stanley. Lord Stanley's role in the formation of the Conservative party has often been underrated despite his later service as the leader of the party

and Prime Minister. His alliance with Peel would help further Peel's Tamworth Conservatism as the official brand of Conservatism for the party.

Lord Stanley's political career began in the Whig party and he was an active member of Lord Grey's government (1831) as Chief Secretary for Ireland (an office occupied twenty years earlier by Robert Peel). As a more 'conservative' member of the Whig party Stanley had been a cautious supporter of the Reform Bill to expand the franchise. However, the measure that broke his confidence with the Whigs was the reform of the Church of Ireland. After 1832, he saw the Whig's as having fragmented into thousands of distinct factions with no real organization.<sup>105</sup> His exit from the Whigs was accompanied by that of fellow members of the Grey government Sir James Graham, Lord George Bentinck, Lord Ripon<sup>106</sup> and the Duke of Richmond.<sup>107</sup> Together these men rallied around Stanley and were called the Stanleyites, Dillyites or the Derby Dilly.<sup>108</sup> The Dillyites or the Derby Dilly was a reference to both Stanley as the future 14<sup>th</sup> Earl of Derby and Dilly as slang for Diligence. These Conservative Whigs under Lord Stanley broke with the Whig leader in the Commons, John Russell, over a perceived radicalization within the party. Each of these ex-Whigs were logical targets for inclusion in Peel's Conservative party because of their (especially Lord Stanley's) "adherence to the Conservative but yet liberal principles."<sup>109</sup> Stanley's transformation into a Conservative was not a simple conversion but rather was part of the larger reorganization of British politics after the passage of the Reform

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<sup>105</sup> Lord Stanley to Spring Rice, 4 February 1835. As cited in (Angus Hawkins. *The Forgotten Prime Minister: The 14<sup>th</sup> Earl of Derby Vol. 1 Ascent, 1799-1851* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007), 144.)

<sup>106</sup> Lord Ripon (Viscount Goderich) was a former Canningite Tory and briefly Prime Minister. His resignation as Lord Privy Seal signaled his exit from the Whig party.

<sup>107</sup> The Duke of Richmond had served in Lord Grey Cabinet as Postmaster General but was labeled an Ultra-Tory.

<sup>108</sup> Richard Grant, *Sir Robert Peel: The Life and Legacy*. (New York: I.B. Tauris 2010), 89.

<sup>109</sup> Robert Peel to Herbert Taylor January 12, 1835. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. II*. ed. Charles Stuart Parker 280.

Bill. As a crucial part of the creation of Conservatism, Peel needed Stanley and other ex-Whigs to broaden Conservatism beyond reformed Toryism.

The formation of Stanley's Derby Dilly arose from his installation as Lord Rector of Glasgow University on December 21<sup>st</sup> 1834. The political ideas that he articulated in his installation speech became known as the Knowsley Creed.<sup>110</sup> The creed advocated for moderation, careful reform, and strong government. The publication of Peel's Tamworth Manifesto three days earlier on December 18<sup>th</sup> stole the thunder that Stanley was hoping to capture by creating a center party. With Peel beating him to the punch, Stanley's Knowsley Creed had seemed more like an imitation of Peel's support of moderate politics rather than the creation of an original platform by Stanley.<sup>111</sup> Peel's Conservatism and Stanley's Knowsley Creed, were at their core, very similar. Both reflected the popular idea of necessary reform for the good of the nation.

Both Peel and Stanley nationally published their speeches to express the message of a moderate approach to reform. To the assembled crowd, Stanley stated that the spirit of moderation prevailed around the country.<sup>112</sup> Moderation, selective reform, and the preservation of state institutions were all key elements of Stanley's beliefs, and like Peel, he articulated the idea of a careful approach to reform. In the context of the post-Reform Bill era Stanley was cautious of reforms and was well aware of Whig measures that targeted crucial state institutions. It was his belief that these were not reforms but acts of willful destruction which had to be blocked. As he put it, "I will oppose with all the might and energy of which I am capable those

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<sup>110</sup> Knowsley being homage to Stanley's family estate of Knowsley Hall in Liverpool.

<sup>111</sup> Grant, *Sir Robert Peel*, 89.

<sup>112</sup> Smith-Stanley, Edward. "Inauguration of Lord Stanley." *The Times*, December 22, 1834, 3.

whose measure, whose objects, and whose intentions are not intended to reform, but to destroy.”<sup>113</sup> His argument was that, under the pretext of reform, members of the Whig party had created ‘reforms’ that undermined the national interests and institutions. Stanley argued that these should be opposed, as they were not actually reforms. However, Stanley was not opposed to reform in the slightest. He remained committed to addressing grievances and correcting systems of government to work more effectively.

While a strong supporter of the idea of reform Stanley, like Peel, suggested that if reform was not undertaken with due consideration to the maintenance of crucial state institutions it would be problematic. Additionally, Stanley argued that it would be impossible to engage in reactionary reverses. Changes like the Great Reform Act were permanent: “On these principles it was that I acted with the government of Earl Grey in favour of a reform.”<sup>114</sup> Unlike Peel, who had originally opposed the Reform Bill, Stanley had always embraced its design of expanding the franchise beyond the aristocracy. However, Stanley opposed the later reforms passed by the Whigs as being excessive and counter to the protection of the core institutions of the state. The reform that precipitated his and others exit from the Whig party dealt with the relationship of the state church in Ireland. Stanley believed that the state and church was under attack across the nation under the guise of reform. In his creed, he called for the preservation of these institutions through continued maintenance.<sup>115</sup> Stanley argued for a defense of the state church in the following terms,

Are those the institutions which ought to be treated by Government with indifference or non-interference? It ought to be the first duty of a Government to

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.



extend religious knowledge and see that the people by means of establishments had the power of obtaining instruction and religious comfort.<sup>116</sup>

Stanley's defense of the state church argued that it should be respected and maintained as a central part of the country.

Still, the Knowsley Creed, unlike Peel's Tamworth Manifesto, was not a founding party document but a suggestion for new type of politics in a post Reform Bill era. His creed, like Peel's Manifesto expressed the new political atmosphere that was surrounding politics in the wake of the Reform Bill. Stanley argued that the preservation of state institutions should be a high priority. However as he argued in his creed,

These institutions are respected, and ought to be maintained and upheld in the love and attention of the country; but while I say this, I am not blind to the defects which at present exist, and which I am anxious to see removed- for by such means do I wish to disarm our enemies, conciliate our opponents and increase our friends. But it is not our sacred institutions alone I wish to see reformed; it is the whole range of civic institution which I desire to see amended but not altered for the purpose of destruction.<sup>117</sup>

Stanley concluded his Knowsley Creed with a suggestion that a national leader and a defender of the constitution should be willing to pursue necessary and careful reform.<sup>118</sup> His goal in the Knowsley Creed wasn't directly to establish a centrist party between the radical Whigs and the Tories, but rather to suggest that there was room for one. However, with much of his thunder stolen by Peel's similar message Stanley's attempt to organize many of his followers into their own party became a difficult task.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

When William IV called upon Peel to form a government in December 1834, Peel immediately approached Stanley and inquired if he would be willing to serve as a member of his new Conservative ministry. In his reply Stanley stated: “I acknowledge that recent events have narrowed the ground of difference which heretofore divided us”<sup>119</sup> However, despite becoming closer politically Stanley refused to enter into an alliance with Peel. Stanley’s hesitancy seemed to center around his concerns that Peel’s Conservative party was just a new form of Toryism.<sup>120</sup> In correspondence with one another over Peel’s hundred-day ministry, both Peel and Stanley agreed how close ideologically they were to one another. Still, Peel’s early attempts to draw in the Dillyite forces were met with outright rejection. In correspondence with Stanley’s right hand man, Sir James Graham, Peel had requested a union between the factions. Graham, in deference to Stanley, had politely declined and returned Peels’ offer stating, “in our peculiar position we think it right to return your packet unopened.”<sup>121</sup> Peel’s response to Graham’s decline was that he hoped the group would eventually reconsider.<sup>122</sup> Peel’s first attempt to draw in these potential ‘conservative’ forces was premature. His Tamworth Conservatism was still too new while his support from the Tories aroused suspicions that Peel’s Conservative Party was simply a renamed Tory party. However, as Peel’s first government neared its end Stanley and his supporters

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<sup>119</sup> Lord Stanley to Robert Peel December 11, 1834. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. II* ed. Charles Stuart Parker. 257.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Sir James Graham to Robert Peel February 22 1835. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. II.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 289.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

became more open towards Peel's Conservatism and saw it less as a version of Toryism and certainly preferable to the radicalism of the Whigs.<sup>123</sup>

Peel's later attempts to bring the Derby Dilly into the Conservative fold would often suggest that an alliance between the two, rather than a simple union, might prove beneficial in the future.<sup>124</sup> Stanley's response to these advances was typically silence. Peel's later careful attempts gave the illusion that the Dillities would maintain independence in an alliance rather than be suborned in a union. However, both Stanley and Peel realized that the continuation of a third party was not a long-term option and a union, with either the Whigs or the Conservatives, was seemingly inevitable. The results of the 1835 election drove this home, as they were particularly bad news for Stanley's Derby Dilly party. The success of the Conservative party in early 1835 meant that Stanley's long-term plan to form an independent party was going to be difficult to realize.

By the spring of 1835, Stanley's supporters began to shift towards an alliance with Peel after John Russell's Whigs formalized their union with O'Connell and the Irish radicals.<sup>125</sup> This union pushed Stanley and his supporters further away from a return to the Whigs and closer towards Peel and his Conservatives. In correspondence with the Duke of Wellington Sir Henry Hardinge indicated that he believed that Graham and, most importantly, Stanley were beginning to shift towards an alliance with Peel's Party. When referring to his conversation with Graham, Hardinge stated, "His conversation was very Conservative, with a conviction that the difficulties

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<sup>123</sup> Lord Stanley to Robert Peel March 29, 1835. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. II.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 298.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

of the Melbourne Government were so great that it can hardly outlive the session.”<sup>126</sup>

Wellington’s response suggested that the coming alliance (not quite a union) with Stanley’s Derby Dilly could prove beneficial for Peel’s party, particularly in upcoming elections.

Wellington believed that the relative similarities between the two groups was growing stronger and that “ my own conviction is that we are looking to the same objects, and feel much more interested in protecting the monarch, and the public interests involved in its security.”<sup>127</sup>

Continued independence of the Dillyites gradually declined after Peel’s hundred days in office. The cheers that echoed around the House for Peel as he left office signaled the coming end to Stanley as an independent figure outside of the two parties. Lord Melbourne’s new government could hardly count on the Dillyites for support after Russell’s strategic union with O’Connell. To the Dillyites a return to Whig party became a less realistic option with every passing day. Stanley acknowledged that his hopes of an independent third party were coming to an end. In his own words, Stanley noted, “The formation of ‘the Dilly’ depended upon the balance of parties being such that a section comparatively triflingly in numbers, could exercise a powerful influence over a weak government... But no calculations can lead us to flatter ourselves that one can exercise any such influence *now*.”<sup>128</sup>

The end of the Derby Dilly was not a simple merger with the Conservative party and the resistance from some of Stanley’s supporters lasted well after Stanley himself had suggested a union with Peel’s Conservative party. The Duke of Richmond in numerous letters to Stanley

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<sup>126</sup> Wellington to Henry Hardinge April 24, 1835. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. II*. ed. Charles Stuart Parker 312-313.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

<sup>128</sup> Lord Stanley to Vernon, January 2 1836 Derby Manuscripts Vol. II 172 As cited in (Angus Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister: The 14<sup>th</sup> Earl of Derby Vol. 1 Ascent, 1799-1851* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007), 186.)

suggested that it would be highly unlikely he would seek office again even if Peel were to defeat Melbourne's government.<sup>129</sup> The most peculiar support of Lord Stanley came in the form of a letter submitted to *The Times* on February 6<sup>th</sup> 1836. In the letter, Stanley was labeled a viable candidate for a future Prime Ministership, as well as a brilliant current political leader. The author praised many of Stanley's actions since 1834 (especially his refusal to join Peel) as "honourable, and in defence of the prosperity of the nation rather than to gratify his own ambition."<sup>130</sup> Signed simply 'Runnymede' the author was in reality the debt-ridden novelist and future Conservative MP Benjamin Disraeli.

Stanley's move to the Conservative benches was met with resistance from his own members and a final division of the Dillyites between the Whigs and Conservatives. The division of the Dillyites by the end of December 1837 was finalized and despite Stanley's union with Peel many of his Dillyites returned to the Whig party. The leading members of the Dillyite party who joined Peel were Lord George Bentinck, James Graham, the Duke of Richmond and Lord Ripon. Others returned to Whig party under John Russell, but with clear-cut reservations about the alliance with Irish radicals.<sup>131</sup> With Stanley's party dissolved Peel acted quickly to welcome the Derby faction into his Conservative party. This was exactly what Peel had hoped for in his Tamworth Manifesto, the inclusion of moderates into the fold. Stanley's conversion to Conservatism was gradual and his similarities with Peel, concerning his ideas of selective reform, and the necessity to reform for the national good were welcomed. However, many of the Dillyites still did not trust Peel and Graham in particular often called out Peel's shortcomings.

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<sup>129</sup> Angus Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister: The 14<sup>th</sup> Earl of Derby Vol. 1 Ascent, 1799-1851* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007), 187.

<sup>130</sup> Benjamin Disraeli, *Letters of Runnymede*. (London: John Macrone, St. James's Square 1836), 79.

<sup>131</sup> Sir James Graham to Robert Peel. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. II*. ed. Charles Stuart Parker 348-349.

Knowing that Graham was Stanley's right hand man Peel knew that Graham's concerns were also Stanley's. Therefore when Peel listened to Graham and acted accordingly he was thereby attempting to win over Stanley.<sup>132</sup> An example of this was when Peel drafted a bill to reform Irish municipal corporations to localize control. Both Stanley and Graham had supported the localization of Irish municipalities. Their support of improving government in Ireland through an Irish Municipal Reform Act (municipal reform had passed in England and Wales in 1835) illustrated their commitment to a particular form of Conservatism. Although this Bill was defeated Peel gained the formal support of Stanley and the Dillyites for a union by the end of the year.<sup>133</sup> Peel's adjustment of Conservative policy to secure Stanley's long-term support illustrated his commitment to necessary reform (even to his own ideas) to maintain stability and success within his party.

Peel's acquisition of the Dillyites to the Conservative cause set the precedent for his national objective of a future Conservative government. In the years immediately after the party was formed it achieved massive gains in the elections of 1835 and 1837. Earning close to one hundred new seats in 1835 the Conservatives greatly reduced the gap between them and the Whigs. Table 1 illustrates the Conservative seats gained in the elections since 1832. It is to be noted that while the Party was officially labeled Conservative in 1834 the 1832 results apply to the Tories.

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<sup>132</sup> Robert Peel to Wellington February 10, 1836. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. II.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 322-323.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 322-323.

### Conservative Election results 1832-1841

	1832	1835	1837	1841
<b>England 471</b>	129	209	244	283
<b>Scotland 53</b>	10	15	20	22
<b>Wales 29</b>	13	17	18	19
<b>Ireland 105</b>	33	38	32	43
<b>Total 658</b>	175	273	314	367

Table 1 Conservatives returned in elections between Peel governments<sup>134</sup>

Peel's success in 1837 came partially from the acquisition of ex-Whigs but was also the result of the national respect he began to receive as a leader.

Offering a dramatic turnaround from the Tories' disastrous defeat in 1832 Peel's Tamworth Conservatism had indeed worked. However, Peel noted that the party still remained fragile. The Ultra Tories only tolerated Peel's leadership and the Dillyites did not fully trust Peel, but certainly approved of him over Russell and O'Connell. Peel's challenge during the remainder of the 1830s was to bring together the various types of 'conservatives' and unify them under the mantle of his Tamworth Conservatism. As he stated 1837,

Few people can judge the difficulty there has frequently been of maintaining harmony between the various branches of the Conservative Party — the great majority in the House of Lords and the minority in the House of Commons consisting of very different elements that had been in open conflict within a recent period.<sup>135</sup>

Peel's new Conservative party in the 1830s was the union of Ultra Tories, 'liberal' Tories and ex-Whigs. These three different groups together under one Conservative umbrella was a very difficult group for Peel to manage. To unify these three Peel had to make his brand of Conservatism the most appealing option. His attempts to do this consisted of appeasing the

<sup>134</sup> Craig, *British Electoral Facts 1832-1987*, 1-4.

<sup>135</sup> Robert Peel to Wellington July 4, 1837. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. II*. ed. Charles Stuart Parker 336.

Ultra Tories through the appointment of the Ultra Sir Edward Knatchball to his 1834 ministry and cementing his alliance with Stanley by taking the side of the Derby Dilly and pursuing Irish municipal reform. Peel's calculated moves during his leadership of the new Conservative party earned him allies from the right and the left. However, a definition of Conservatism was still a huge question. What was it that made Conservatism different from Toryism, 'liberal' Toryism, or even Whiggism? These questions plagued both Stanley's Dillyites and the Ultra Tories.

For Peel's Ultra Tory critics his Conservatism and its' so called development were dubious. The Duke of Newcastle stated that 'the only difference between Sir Robert Peel and Lord John Russell is that one would only give a handful where the other would give bushels'.<sup>136</sup> Newcastle's Ultra Tory perspective argued that the 'liberal' Tory Peel and the Whig John Russell were very similar with only minor differences. In his 1844 political novel, *Coningsby or the New Generation* Benjamin Disraeli critiqued Peel's actions during the 1830s and particularly the way he had formed his Conservative party. While Disraeli wrote *Coningsby* a decade after the events of 1834, given his role in later internal party struggles, his criticism of Peel's Conservative party nonetheless remains important for historical analysis. Disraeli had argued that Peel's Conservatism had been a vain attempt to reform Toryism with 'liberal' Whig values.<sup>137</sup> In his novel, the discussion between the characters Tadpole and Taper illustrated a particular criticism of Peel's Conservative party. Disraeli's characters suggested that Peel's party was abandoning Tory values in favor of popular Whig measures:

'True, terribly true,' said Mr. Taper. 'That we should ever live to see a Tory government again! We have reason to be very thankful.'

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<sup>136</sup> National Register of Archives Scotland, 901, Hamilton Papers, Newcastle to the Duke of Hamilton, June 29, 1835. As cited in (Richard A. Gaunt. *Sir Robert Peel: The Life and Legacy* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd. 2010), 94.)

<sup>137</sup> Benjamin Disraeli, *Coningsby or The New Generation* (London: Colburn and Co., Publishers[1844] 2009), 41.



'Hush!' said Mr. Tadpole. 'The time has gone by for Tory governments; what the country requires is a sound Conservative government.'

'A sound Conservative government,' said Taper, musingly. 'I understand: Tory men and Whig measures.'<sup>138</sup>

Critiques like those found in *Coningsby* were not far from the truth. Between 1834 and 1841 many Tories suggested that Peel's Tamworth Conservatism was abandoning Tory principles simply to curry favor with the new electorate. While many of Peel's followers had attached themselves to this smart political strategy, others felt the abandonment of principles was damaging to the future of a Conservative party. Disraeli like other Conservatives, (Stanley included) had asked the natural question 'if Conservative principles are about preservation and conservation how will that be achieved through the act of reform?'<sup>139</sup>

Peel tackled this criticism frequently and suggested that reform was an active way to preserve state institutions. Often his Conservative party was suggested to be 'a party without principles' or a group of 'Tory men with Whig values'. Peel responded to his critics that his Conservatism had its own principles that separated it from the old Tory party. In defense of his Conservative idea, Peel argued that his party had a firm set of principles that were grounded in Toryism but were Conservative in their own way:

By conservative principles I mean, a maintenance of the settled institutions of church and state, and I mean also the maintenance, defence, and continuation of those laws, those institutions, that society, and those habits and manners which have contributed to mould and form the character of Englishmen<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>140</sup> James Graham, Robert Peel. *The Peel Banquet. Speeches of Sir Robert Peel, Lord Stanley, and Sir James Graham. At Merchant Tailor's Hall 12 May 1838. With details of Proceedings at the banquet held that day in honour of Sir Robert Peel.* (London: Robert Tyas) 1838. 3.

Peel's argument with party critics suggested that what he saw as Conservatism was different from Toryism. 'Maintenance of settled institutions of church and state' meant that reform was necessary to preserve them and guide them into the future.<sup>141</sup> Peel's Tamworth Conservatism was not about the continuation of the *Status Quo ante*; instead it called for a transformation and modernization of Tory social values. Despite Peel's argument for Conservatism and his electoral success many members of his party still harbored serious suspicions of the man and his 'principles'.

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According to Gash's interpretation, the formation of Peel's Conservative party in the mid-1830s suggested that Peel had reformed Toryism through the Tamworth Manifesto into a pragmatic centrist party. The inclusion of Lord Stanley into the fold was the primary evidence of this pragmatism by Peel. Conversely, Hilton had argued that Peel's inclusion of ex-Whigs was designed to help support his 'liberal' Tory doctrine and alienate the Ultras, furthering his 'Conservatism' as the defining ideology of his new party. Hilton argues that Peel's inclusion of Stanley and the Dillyites was necessary to further these 'liberal' ideological doctrines. However, while these authors argue that Peel acted either as a liberal wolf in sheep's clothing or was simply a political pragmatist, this study maintains that the Conservatism Peel professed emerged more as a synthesis of old Whig policies (after being passed through the filter of Peel's 'liberal' Toryism) and Tory the social values that Peel believed his party was to defend.

The significance of Peel's Tamworth Manifesto and its transformation of the Tory party cannot be underestimated. Between his first and second Ministries, Peel had successfully reversed the Tories electoral defeat of 1832, and revived and transformed Toryism into a successful post-Reform Bill political party. Attaining high office for Peel during the 1830s was

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<sup>141</sup>Ibid.

about maintaining and securing a sense of stability after the Tory collapse in 1832. Peel's Tamworth Manifesto outlined not only the objectives of his first ministry but of his new, more broadly-based Conservative movement. The addition of ex-Whigs into the Conservative party brought about what Peel had aimed for in designing a post-Reform Bill party. Peel politics starting in 1830 have been observed as both pragmatic and partial to the 'liberal' Tory political doctrine. His consistencies with the 'liberal' Tory movement a decade earlier illustrate that his Tamworth Conservatism was the logical evolution of these ideas. Conservatism's dual principles – the necessity of reform for the national interest (as defined by Peel) and the maintenance of state institutions through careful reform– were the basis of his Tamworth Conservatism.

### CHAPTER III

## TAMWORTH CONSERVATIVISM FROM TRIUMPH TO TRAGEDY: THE SECOND PEEL MINISTRY AND THE CORN LAW CRISIS

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The 1841 election resulted in a Conservative government and a personal victory for Peel. Securing a Conservative majority in the Commons vindicated his Conservative idea and, in his mind, illustrated that the Tories were being transformed into a new party.<sup>142</sup> After the results of the general election were finalized Peel stated: “If I exercise power, it shall be upon my conception - perhaps imperfect, perhaps mistaken, but my sincere conception - of public duty.”<sup>143</sup> Peel’s commitment as Prime Minister from the start of his second ministry was based upon his sense of public duty. He felt that as the Prime Minister his duty was to the Monarch, his conscience, and the nation rather than only to the Conservative party.<sup>144</sup> Peel’s pursuits of reforms over the course of his second ministry would receive both praise and criticism. His Tamworth Conservatism stood for firmness, moderation, and sound judgment to help guide the institutions of the state (the Church, the aristocracy, and the Monarchy) into the present age.

The fundamental problem at the start of Peel’s second ministry was the party’s lack of a single unifying ‘conservative’ principle, beyond the maintenance of state institutions through cautious, well thought-out reform. Peel had suggested in his Tamworth Manifesto (1834) that

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<sup>142</sup> Sir Robert Peel, *Tamworth Election: Speech of Sir Robert Peel, June 28 1841* (London: John Ollivier 59 Pall Mall 1841), 4.

<sup>143</sup> Robert Peel. Address in Answer to the Speech August 24, 1841. *The Speeches of the Late Right Honourable Sir Robert Peel 2<sup>nd</sup> Bart. Vol. III.* 802.

<sup>144</sup> Sir Robert Peel to John W. Croker September 20, 1841. *The Croker Papers: The Correspondence and Diaries of the Late John Wilson Croker. Letters, Diaries, and Memoirs of the RT. Hon. John W. Croker Vol. II.* .ed. Louis J. Jennings London: John Murray, Albermarle Street 1885), 200.

every institution of the state was up for careful review. This led to a problem concerning certain state “institutions,” perhaps most notably those associated with the Corn Laws. Critics had inquired where reform would stop and to what extent the party was going to pursue reform. If the Tories refused to accept reform to state institutions, then they were not becoming Conservatives, rather they were still the obstructionist Tories with a Conservative veneer. Additionally, some Conservatives worried that reform was simply a type of Whig appeasement. Peel’s commitments to Tory principles were often doubted. His actions on Catholic Emancipation in 1829 and his suggestion in 1834 that no institution of the state was safe from reform stood as examples. Some Conservative party members had intimated that Peel’s ‘conservative’ principles were not very concrete and that maintenance through reform was not a long-term plan to ‘conserve’ state institutions like the church and the aristocracy. As a result, the next five years would be challenging ones for Peel, as he worked to keep his conservative forces unified in the face of several crises.

### The Second Peel Ministry Reform and the Corn Laws

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The general election of 1841 saw Peel’s party gain 53 seats, pushing its seat total from 314 to 367, thereby providing the Conservatives with a majority government.<sup>145</sup> Peel’s return to the office of Prime Minister was in his mind a confirmation of the success of his Conservative idea. His electoral triumph brought the first majority for the Conservatives/Tories since the passage of the Reform Bill nine years earlier. However, the Conservative triumph of 1841 was slowly undercut by the growing problems associated with the Corn Laws. Pressure from the newly formed Anti-Corn Law League (1838) had forced Peel and his Conservative party to deal

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<sup>145</sup>Craig, *British Electoral Facts 1832-1987*, 4.

with the Corn Law issue in the general election. The problem of the Corn Laws and protectionism for Peel in 1841 has been a long debated and heavily politicized topic. Some historians have argued that Peel had converted to free trade well before 1841.<sup>146</sup> Other scholars have suggested that by 1841 Peel experienced his first serious doubts concerning the protectionist doctrine.<sup>147</sup> Whatever Peel's true position on protection in 1841, it remains important to note that his earlier mentions of protectionism indicated that reform must be pursued to maintain the security of the state. Although protectionism was not explicitly mentioned, the concluding remarks of the Tamworth Manifesto stated his position on the economy arguing for, "the impartial consideration of what is due to all interests' agricultural, manufacturing, and commercial."<sup>148</sup> Peel's argument for a careful and impartial consideration of all interests when approaching reform defined his Conservatism not as pragmatic but as cautious. The principles concerning protectionism which Peel argued for in 1834, had not dramatically changed by 1841. His party's commitment to the maintenance of protectionism would result in a Conservative triumph. While historians often overlook the election of 1841 (in favor of larger events such as Corn Law repeal in 1846), it remains critical in a study of Peel's rise and fall over the course of his second ministry.

The Conservative candidates that stood for election in 1841, as many historians have noted, did so on the platform of protection. Lord Ashburton wrote to Peel after the general election stating, "I am aware to what extent our Conservative party is a party pledged to the

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<sup>146</sup> Hilton, 'Peel: A Reappraisal,' 2

<sup>147</sup> Norman Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel: A Study in the Technique of Parliamentary Representation 1830-1850* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc. 1953), 287.

<sup>148</sup> Peel, "Tamworth Manifesto," 2.

support of the land, and that that principle abandoned the party is dissolved”<sup>149</sup> In effect, he argued that maintenance of the Corn Laws in 1841 was an essential component of the Conservative platform and ideology. However, maintenance of the Corn Laws, to many Conservatives, was not just a matter of continuing them in their current state. Conservatives in 1841 would argue for reforms to improve the efficacy of the laws. Modifications to the sliding scale were the type of reforms that Conservatives believed would alleviate the problems with the Corn Laws.<sup>150</sup> The sliding scale had been designed in 1828 to adjust to the rise and fall of the price of grain. The Wellington government (in which Peel acted as Home Secretary) had introduced the concept of the sliding scale to allow foreign grain duty free importation when the domestic price had reached 72s per quarter. The scale was supposed to provide relief to the poor by potentially lowering the price of bread but, by 1841, it was having the opposite effect – keeping grain and therefore bread artificially high.<sup>151</sup> Calls to modify the sliding scale yet again actually came first from Conservative agriculturalists. They argued a modification was necessary to provide relief to the farmers who found it difficult to sell grain at artificially high prices. However, the call from the agriculturalists to modify the Corn Laws was not singular.

Pressure from the working classes to lower the price of bread was most clearly articulated by the Chartists.<sup>152</sup> To the Conservatives the Chartist movement, a working class political group, had been a thorn in their side since its inception. While pressures from the Chartists most certainly influenced the election, the overall electoral importance of the working classes was

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<sup>149</sup> Lord Asburton to Sir Robert Peel October 22, 1841 *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. III*. ed. Charles Stuart Parker (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street 1899), 501.

<sup>150</sup> Edwin Jaggard, “The 1841 British General Election: A Reconsideration,” *Australian Journal of Politics & History* Vol. 30 No. 1 99-114 (1984): 99.

<sup>151</sup> Anthony Howe, *Free trade and Liberal England 1846-1946* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1997), 25.

<sup>152</sup> Chartism was a Working class political reform movement based around the people’s Charter of 1838.

minimal because of restrictions to the franchise. The group that did have a large presence in the election was the Anti-Corn Law League. The ACLL's attacks on what it coined the "Bread Tax" became a powerful weapon against the Corn Laws and their continued maintenance.<sup>153</sup> An earlier attempt by the Whig government, in 1839, to open an inquiry into the Corn Laws had failed to gather sufficient support from the Whig backbenches. While the attempt in 1839 failed to gather parliamentary support, it provided considerable impetus for the idea of national extra-parliamentary agitation against the continuation of the Laws by the ACLL.<sup>154</sup> One of the League's most prominent spokesmen within the House was the Whig MP Charles Pelham Villiers. He would, from 1838 until 1845, continually attempt to introduce a Bill to repeal the Corn Laws in their entirety. His yearly attempts would fail to gather support from his own party, despite the praise he received from free trade groups like the ACLL. Still, Villiers and other ACLL members of Parliament became problematic for Peel and the Conservative party. Cries of "cheap bread" and "Free trade" became contentious slogans that Peel and his Conservative government had to face. Demands to address the Corn Laws from both the Laws' supporters and opponents became a crucial item Peel had to address in the early days of his second ministry. Peel himself had carefully avoided the issue of the Corn Laws in the election of 1841. As *The Illustrated London News* would later put it, "He left himself many loopholes of escape from the charge of intentional tergiversation."<sup>155</sup> Peel's delay over taking a personal position on the Corn

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<sup>153</sup> John Russell to Queen Victoria August 26, 1841. *The Letters of Queen Victoria: A selection From Her Majesty's Correspondence Between the Years 1837 and 1861 Vol. I* ed. Arthur Christopher Benson and Viscount Esher, G.C.V.O., K.C.B.(London: John Murray, Albemarle Street 1907), 300.

<sup>154</sup> The issue of protection within the Whig party has been observed to have been equally as divisive as it was in the Conservative party See William. O. Aydelotte, "The Country Gentlemen and the Repeal of the Corn Laws." *The English Historical Review*. 82:322 (1967): 51.

<sup>155</sup> *The Illustrated London News*, July 13, 1850, 46.



Law issue until after the election secured the much-needed support of the whole of the Conservative party.

Thus as one of the most important subjects of the election of 1841, the Corn Laws became an immediate issue for Peel and his new ministry to address. Peel's post-election discussion of the Corn Laws suggests that his intentions to reform the Corn Laws (not repeal them) had been part of his Conservative character since carefully dodging the issue in the election of 1841. In a discussion before the new parliament, Peel stated that a reform of the sliding scale was necessary and a continuation of the Laws in their present form problematic. As he put it in the House,

I will not bind myself to the details of the existing law, but will reserve to myself the unfettered discretion of considering and amending that law. I hold the same language now; but if you ask me whether I bind myself to the maintenance of the existing law in its details, or if you say that that is the condition on which the agricultural interest give me their support, I say that on that condition I will not accept their support.<sup>156</sup>

Peel's Tamworth Conservatism is evident in this early discussion of the Corn Laws. To Peel the Corn Laws were not a *sine qua non* of Conservatism; they could be modified or repealed entirely if that was in the best interest of the nation. His 1841 speech over the possibility of reforming the sliding scale took nothing off the table. Peel advised his party and the nation that if the Corn Laws were not functioning as they were intended, reform or even repeal might be necessary. As he explained it in the summer of 1841,

I would earnestly advise a relaxation, an alteration, nay, if necessary, a repeal of the Corn-laws. But it is because I cannot convince my mind that the Corn-laws are at the bottom of this distress, or that the repeal of them, or the alteration of

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<sup>156</sup> Robert Peel's Address in answer to the Speech from the Throne-Adjourned debate- (forth night), August 27, 1841. *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. LIX § § 342-450 § 413-29.

their principle, would be its cure, that I am induced to continue my maintenance of them<sup>157</sup>

The suggestion that Peel made in this early Corn Law debate illustrated that he clearly saw himself as Prime Minister to a nation rather than Prime Minister to a Conservative government. The suggestion of total repeal in 1841, while overly alarming to the Tories, addressed his form of Conservatism as one that sought for the good of the nation through necessary reform. He had to satisfy those that helped him into power but also those whom he believed would see his party into the future. Any suggestion of a total repeal, in 1841, was risky and yet Peel left all options open.

Suggestions from members of the Whig opposition to change or modify the Corn Laws had sparked outrage within Peel's Conservative party. The MP William Mure retroactively saw Peel's 1841 suggestion of a possible modification of the Corn Laws or even repeal as a sign that Peel had always intended to repeal them in their entirety.<sup>158</sup> His suggestion that if repeal should become necessary he would pursue it, became a point of tension with his own party. Peel therefore had to use caution when it came to proposing alterations to the Corn Laws.<sup>159</sup> To the Tories that had helped him win the election only modification to the Corn Laws was acceptable, as it was what they had campaigned on, as opposed to the option of repeal. The election of 1841 had been, after all, about modification, not repeal. However, some in Parliament argued that slight modifications to the existing Corn Laws were not a permanent solution to the problems they were causing in 1841. As Viscount Palmerston argued in a debate in late autumn of 1841,

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<sup>157</sup>Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> William Mure, *The Commercial Policy of Pitt and Peel 1783-1846* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1847), 288.

<sup>159</sup> Robert Peel's Speech on Finance, October 6, 1841. *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. LIX § 1146-51 § 1150.

[It's] the obligation on the part of the Government to prove and to declare to Parliament their determination on that great question— the Corn-laws, and on our whole commercial policy. He [Peel] would entreat them to consider this, persuaded as he was that the public would never be contented with the proposition to Parliament of some petty change in the "pivot," or some slight alteration of the "sliding scale;" and that even supposing the existing distress to subside, the country would not be satisfied with any measure short of one which would substantially, bonâ fide, permit the introduction of foreign corn at a moderate fixed duty.<sup>160</sup>

Peel's response to Palmerston was that his objective and that of his colleagues, was to maintain the institution of the Corn Laws and reform them to work.<sup>161</sup> Many of the members of his government, who had helped him win office, were from rural constituencies, and wholeheartedly believed in the continuation of the Corn Law.<sup>162</sup> Therefore Peel had to maintain a careful approach when it came to modifying the Corn Laws, since a large portion of his party had declared them a crucial institution of the state. His response upon being prodded a second time within a few months of taking office was to abstain from any further comments. Peel had understood that if the Corn Laws were to be modified both reform and the approach to reform had to be careful.<sup>163</sup> If he was to maintain his position as Prime Minister as well as the stability of the nation he and his party would have to act carefully when it came to review of the Corn Laws.

Peel's eventual response was to propose a slight modification to the sliding scale. The changes to the Corn Laws in 1842 lowered the duty threshold for the free importation of grain

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<sup>160</sup> Viscount Palmerston's Speech on Finance, October 6, 1841. *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. LIX § §1146-51 §1151.

<sup>161</sup> Robert Peel's Speech on Finance, October 6, 1841. *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. LIX § §1146-51 §1151.

<sup>162</sup> Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey, "Ideology, Party and Interests in The British Parliament of 1841-47," *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 33 No. 4 (Oct. 2003): 587.

<sup>163</sup> Robert Peel's Speech on Finance, October 6, 1841. *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. LIX § §1146-51 §1150.

from the previous level of 72s per quarter to 51s per quarter. These adjustments were designed to help lower the overall price of grain. The new duty-free threshold of 51s per quarter had the desired effect as there was an almost immediate drop in the price of domestic grain. By the same token, in modifying the Corn Laws, Peel was actively maintaining the institution of protectionism. As his Tamworth Conservatism suggested, Peel was working within an existing system to make it work more efficiently rather than changing it fundamentally. This modification was, in his mind, preferable and more palatable to Parliament and his Conservatives than general repeal.<sup>164</sup> Some historians have argued that by 1841 Peel's modifications to the Corn Laws were actually steps towards free trade. However, Peel's modifications to the Corn Laws were strongly supported by the Protectionists who had campaigned on reform to the Corn Laws in the previous election.<sup>165</sup> If it was true that Peel was slowly dismantling the Corn Laws in 1842, then it was also the case that he had the support of the Protectionists in this endeavor. This theory that Peel was slowly dismantling the Corn Laws starting in 1842 doesn't seem to have much validity. Peel's motivation in 1842, like that of the Protectionists, was to reform the system to make it work more efficiently rather than to change it fundamentally.

Additional modifications by Peel in 1843 opened Britain to the importation of Canadian corn at preferential rates. The expansion of the Canadian Corn Act was designed in part to provide relief to farmers in Upper Canada by granting a guaranteed market for Canadian grain growers.<sup>166</sup> The passage of this Act in 1843 allowed Canadian grain to enter the British market at

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<sup>164</sup> Robert Peel to Queen Victoria February 17, 1842. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. II.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 526.

<sup>165</sup> Edwin Jaggard, "The 1841 British General Election: A Reconsideration," *Australian Journal of Politics & History* Vol. 30 No. 1 99-114 (1984): 99.

<sup>166</sup> Edward George Geoffery Smith-Stanley. *Lord Stanley's Speech In the House of Commons on Friday May 19<sup>th</sup> 1843* (London: W.E. Painter), 2.

a nominal duty and all flour manufactured in Canada at a proportionate rate. The Colonial secretary, Lord Stanley, who advocated for the Canadian Corn Bill, was met around the House with cheers when he observed that, “It is because the measure is purely a colonial measure, that as the Colonial Minister of the day, I now ask the House to grant Canada a boon... to which they have solicited for at least five and twenty years.”<sup>167</sup> Stanley’s speech suggested that this expansion of the British market to include Canada was not a question of free trade or a critique of the Corn Laws but an expansion of national interests in colonial affairs.<sup>168</sup> Additionally the Protectionists supported the Corn Bill of Canada as a way to secure closer ties within the empire. The expansion of the Corn Laws, to include Canadian grain at preferential rates, was both an attempt to strengthen ties within the empire and to help alleviate the higher price of domestic grain by reducing shipments from the American market.<sup>169</sup> Conservative opposition to the Bill was minimal. The few Conservative opponents argued that American grain could pass into Canada and enter into Britain to avoid the higher importation duty.<sup>170</sup> To these select few Protectionists the Canadian Corn Bill, as they saw it, was a slow transition towards a free trade system, rather than what Stanley called a boon to the famers of Canada. However, most Conservatives accepted it because it was far from an abandonment of protection but rather an expansion of protectionism into the empire.<sup>171</sup>

The Corn Law policy of 1842 and the Canadian Corn Bill of 1843 illustrated Peel’s Tamworth Conservatism in action. In 1841, both he and protectionist Tories acknowledged

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> D.L. Burn, “Canada and Repeal of the Corn Laws.” *Cambridge Historical Journal* Vol.2 No. 3 (1928): 253.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>171</sup> Gambles. “Protection and Politics.”197.

that an adjustment to the sliding scale was necessary.<sup>172</sup> These reforms to an existing state institution followed Peel's simple, but not simplistic, notion of Tamworth Conservatism, that is to say they were to preserve and guide the Corn Laws forward in the interests of Britain and the empire rather than simply repeal them. The Protectionist William Mure would argue in his 1847 book *The Commercial Policy of Pitt and Peel 1785-1846*, that Peel's modifications to the Corn Laws in 1842-43 were what Tory Protectionists had always feared, a move towards free trade.<sup>173</sup> However, these claims over Peel's belief in free trade have been hotly contested. It is impossible to know if the modifications to the Corn Laws in 1842-3 were in fact designed to lead the nation towards free trade or were simply necessary reforms for national and imperial interest. While suspicions of Peel's conversion to free trade have proliferated through the historiography, given the lack of any positive proof in Peel 's own words, it makes more sense to view the pursuit of necessary reforms by Peel as a logical extension of his Tamworth Conservatism.

The rise of ACLL and Chartist agitation created a problem for Peel's administration. For Peel the League, more so than the Chartists, was problematic, as members of the House clearly were being influenced by League propaganda. Led by two great orators Richard Cobden (MP for Stockport since 1841) and John Bright (MP City of Durham) the League argued that the Corn Laws had outlived their usefulness and that free trade should become the national policy. With a foothold in the House and a successful national fundraising campaign the League applied significant pressure on the Peel government to repeal the Corn Laws. Peel and the Conservatives had responded to these pressures with the modifications of the Corn Laws in 1842-3. Peel's 1842 modifications to the Corn Laws had slowed the League's momentum and earned him more

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<sup>172</sup> Robert Peel's Address in answer to the Speech from the Throne-Adjourned debate- (forth night), August 27, 1841. *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. LIX § § 342-450 § 413-29.

<sup>173</sup> Mure. *The Commercial Policy of Pitt and Peel. 1783-1846* 288-289.

middle class support, which the League had needed.<sup>174</sup> Peel's reforms to the Corn Laws arguably worked against League propaganda by illustrating that protectionism could work and that the Corn Laws had not outlived their usefulness.

Additionally the Plug Plots of 1842 became a concern to the Peel government as it reacted to League agitation. The Plug Plot Riots were alleged to be the result of a reduction of wages implemented by Anti-Corn Law manufacturers.<sup>175</sup> As part of the larger General Strike of 1842 the Plug Plot Riots started in the industrial centers of Britain and then became a national crisis. Many workers took direct action by pulling out the plugs in the mill equipment to stop work altogether. Most historians have argued that the Plug Plots and the general strike of 1842 were fueled by Chartist demands and the abysmal economic conditions of the working classes. A reduction of wages by the manufacturers, terrible living conditions, long working hours and little to no representation drove many of the working classes to riot.<sup>176</sup> However, many Conservatives saw something else at work: an ACLL conspiracy to foment popular discontent in order to force the government's hand on Corn Law repeal. Graham, in a letter to Peel, argued that the manufacturers who supported the Anti-Corn Law League had intentionally pushed the working classes to their current level of desperation, through a reduction of wages, in order to force the government to consider repealing the Corn Laws.<sup>177</sup> This theory has been difficult for historians to investigate. Although Graham and other members of the Peel government saw a clear cut

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<sup>174</sup> Paul A Pickering, Alex Tyrrell, *The People's Bread: A History of the Anti-Corn Law League* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 87.

<sup>175</sup> The Plug Plots were part of the general strike of 1842 and were named thus because the strikers removed the boiler plugs in the textile mills depriving the machinery in the mill of power.

<sup>176</sup> Hilton, *A Mad Bad & Dangerous People?*, 612.

<sup>177</sup> Sir James Graham to Robert Peel August 25, 1842. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. II.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 540-541.

connection between the League and the riots, most historians believe more was at work than ACLL manufacturers manipulating the working classes. Indeed, most historians argue that the strikers were not as concerned with the Corn Laws as Graham had believed, but rather sought a restoration of wages and more importantly the acceptance of the People's Charter.<sup>178</sup> Although Peel remained hesitant to send in the army against the strikers (perhaps to avoid another Peterloo) he eventually agreed with Wellington and called in the army to break up the strike.<sup>179</sup> After the general strike was ended, an investigation by the government could not determine beyond reasonable doubt that the League had had a hand in promoting the strikes or was connected to the general reduction of wages across the region. Peel, and to a greater extent, Graham were extremely dissatisfied with the local magistrates, and believed many of them (being ACLL members) were protecting those behind the agitation.<sup>180</sup>

While the government's official report stated that the riots were caused by Chartist agitation, both Peel and Graham believed that was false. Certain as they were that the true cause of the riots was Anti-Corn Law League influence, both Graham and Peel demanded a more thorough investigation into the causes of the riots and the alleged links to the ACLL.<sup>181</sup> Peel argued that the local officials had protected those at fault and that ties to the League proliferated in the area.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Edward Royle, *Chartism*.(London: Routledge 1996), 39.

<sup>179</sup> Robert Peel to the Duke of Wellington August 24, 1842. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. II.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 540.

<sup>180</sup> Robert Peel to Sir James Graham August 30, 1842. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. II.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 542-543.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Robert Peel to Sir James Graham September 1, 1842.. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. II.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 543.



Those who believed Graham's claim that the League was behind the riots, particularly the Protectionist Conservatives, became fearful about just how far the League was willing to go to force the government to repeal the Corn Laws. The Protectionist wing of the party argued that an alliance between the working classes and the landlords against the factory owners would be an effective force to challenge the ACLL. As a result, the growing strength of the League was countered early in 1843 by the emergence of a series of agricultural protection societies, most notably the Central Agricultural Protection Society (CAPS) under the leadership of the Duke of Richmond and the Duke of Buckingham. Lead primarily by Richmond CAPS was a supposedly non-partisan organization dedicated to pressuring MP's for the continuation of protection. Much like the ACLL this Anti-League organization worked as an external pressure group to convince the government – and the nation—that protection should be maintained. While CAPS has been characterized by some historians as an organization of aristocratic landlords and economic ignoramuses who were out of touch with the latest developments in economic thought, the CAPS was far more sophisticated than this. The Protectionist members of the CAPS were actually well versed in the works of Adam Smith. In fact, in the organization's charter, Adam Smith's defense of the necessity of Corn Laws to maintain the price of grain was one of the cornerstones in its defense of protection.<sup>183</sup> Additionally, the CAPS challenged League propaganda that the Corn Laws were only continued because they supported the high rents of the Landlords.<sup>184</sup> The society refuted these accusations by noting that many working class laborers and independent farmers relied on protectionism to maintain their wages. They also argued that the calls for free trade benefited only the manufacturing interests. Protectionists maintained, with some justice,

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<sup>183</sup> Edward Stillingfleet Cayley Esq., MP. *Reasons for the Formation of the Agricultural protection society Addressed to the Industrious Classes of the United Kingdom.* (London: John Ollivier, 59, Pall Mall 1844), 6.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

that while the manufacturing class did not have much in the way of international competition there was scarcely a country of Europe/North America that did not have some type of Corn Laws.<sup>185</sup> CAPS concluded its argument about protectionism stating that a relaxation of protection might make goods cheap but asked did that cheapness have to be at the expense of the working classes?

The Conservative party's protection of working class interests, particularly after the Plug Plot Riots, became another key element of reform for Peel's second government. The 1844 Factory Act was designed to limit the working hours of children to nine hours and of women to no more than twelve.

In a proposed amendment to the Factory Act Sir James Graham introduced a section aimed at further reducing the working hours of adolescents. Afterwards Lord Ashley had suggested replacing the words "twelve" with "Ten".<sup>186</sup> This aim at reducing the working hours for youths was the first serious attempt at instituting a ten hour workday. Lord Ashley had received support from a large number of Conservatives and their rationale for support was split between humanitarian relief and Anti-League feelings. However, the amendment was defeated by seven votes and in a letter to the Queen, a frustrated Peel explained exactly how this issue had divided his party,

A great body of the agricultural members, partly out of hostility to the Anti-Corn Law League, partly from the influence of humane feelings, not foreseeing the certain consequences as to the Corn Laws of new restrictions upon labour, voted against the government. It is difficult to foresee what may be the result of this question. Your Majesty's servants are in a minority, but they consider it would be

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>186</sup> Lord Ashley's Speech on Hours of Labour in Factories, March 19, 1844. *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. LXXIII § 1269-1270 § 1270.

inconsistent with their public duty to sanction or acquiesce in the views of the majority. There may be a different result of the division on Friday next.<sup>187</sup>

Those who voted against Peel in this amendment to the Factory Act were in favor of a shortened workday, both to attack the source of the ACLL and out of human concern. Despite Lord Ashley's attempt to reduce the working hours from twelve to ten hours with his amendment, the Factory Act did indeed pass with full support from the Peel government. This division of the Conservative party over an amendment to a reform remains an interesting example of landed Tories pushing for more reform than Peel had envisioned. Peel and his government may have defeated the amendment to introduce a ten hour day but Peel's reasoning behind his votes appears to be in line with his brand of Conservatism, that is to say Peel did not pursue the additional reform because it was not necessary at the moment. Peel had argued that the previous reform of twelve hours had been the furthest reform that could be accepted by the factory owners and the government. As he put it, "we have arrived at the utmost limit to which we can agree to limit the labour of adults".<sup>188</sup> In addition, Peel had recognized that a number of his fellow Conservatives had voted for Lord Ashley's amendment solely because of their hostility to the ACLL and their friends and allies, the manufacturers. The Russian ambassador, Baron Bunow, was present at the debate when the House rejected Lord Ashley's amendment and his comments on Peel's speech noted that; "It was impossible to speak with more reason, moderation, and strength."<sup>189</sup> Peel's address over the connection between the Corn Laws, and the regulation of factories earned him a round of applause. Even after his failure to support a ten-hour day Lord

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<sup>187</sup> Robert Peel to Queen Victoria March 19, 1844. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. III.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 148.

<sup>188</sup> Robert Peel's Speech on the Hours of Labour in Factories, March 18, 1844. *The Speeches of the Late Right Honourable Sir Robert Peel 2<sup>nd</sup> Bart. Volume IV* 366-367.

<sup>189</sup> Baron Bunow to Count Nesselrode May 14, 1844. (Fr: II est impossible de parler avec plus de raison, de moderation et de force) *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. III.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 149

Ashely thanked Peel for his honesty and moderation when voting against the amendment. The limited regulation of factories appears as a successful application of Tamworth Conservatism in Peel's administration in which some Conservatives sought to achieve reform beyond what Peel himself had determined was necessary.<sup>190</sup>

To Peel the passage of the Factory Act proved that his party would willingly pursue reforms that it believed to be for the good of the nation. However, a number of his Conservative colleagues sought to go further and only voted on Lord Ashley's ten hour amendment as a way to attack the ACLL.<sup>191</sup> These traditional Tory members of the party would become a problem when pursuing other reforms that Peel deemed necessary for the good of the nation, and perhaps not coincidentally, for the good of Conservatism. The issue that would be the most damaging to Peel's party (until his decision to repeal the Corn Laws) was the Maynooth Grant.

Peel's objective with the Maynooth Grant was to improve relations between Protestant England and Catholic Ireland by increasing the annual grant from the government to the Catholic seminary in Maynooth, Ireland. Expanding Catholic influence in Ireland rather than protecting the Protestant church of Ireland infuriated many Tories within the Conservative party. Anti-Irish and anti-Catholic sentiment flared up across the nation in response to Peel's proposal to increase the grant. While it was often observed that the Church of England was the Tory party at prayer, this was no laughing matter for the Tories. The Royal College of St. Patrick at Maynooth was a Catholic seminary and since the Union of 1801 its grant had been controlled by London. Peel's Maynooth Bill proposed to raise the grant from its previous sum of under £10,000 to roughly

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<sup>190</sup> Robert Peel to Queen Victoria March 19, 1844. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. III.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 148.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

£30,000. Moreover, the grant was to become permanent.<sup>192</sup> Many Tories found it doubly insulting that it was Peel, who had helped to pass Catholic emancipation in 1829, who was behind this pro-Catholic reform. What Peel had sought in the Maynooth Grant was an easing of the hostilities between Irish Catholics and the English Protestant church.<sup>193</sup> Peel's notion of necessary reform led him to believe that relaxing tensions in Ireland was essential – for the good of the Union– and that increasing the Maynooth Grant was a relatively low cost reform that could serve the larger interests of the nation. Others argued it was dangerous for a Protestant state to support a Catholic seminary, leading to fierce national debates over the future of Maynooth. Queen Victoria wrote about this political problem that had divided her government and was in shock at the ferocity of the opposition to Peel's proposal: "I am sure poor Peel ought to be blessed by all Catholics for the manly and noble way in which he stands forth to protect and do good to poor Ireland. RELIGIOUS BIGOTRY! But bigotry, wicked and blind passions it brings forth is quite dreadful, and I blush for Protestantism!"<sup>194</sup> The Queen's reaction to the criticism that Peel received during the Maynooth controversy suggested that opposition on the grant was both a national problem in matters related to religion and an internal Conservative Party problem in relation to the extent of reform that could be tolerated by certain members of the party. This controversy among Conservatives was caricatured in the satirical magazine *Punch*. Situated between supporters and opponents, within his own party, Peel was compared to heroes in a Greek Tragedy. The cartoon, titled *The Position of The Premier*, shows Peel in the

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<sup>192</sup> Sir Robert Peel's Speech on Maynooth College, March 19, 1845. *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series Vol. LXXVIII § § 1148-1150 § 1149

<sup>193</sup> Queen Victoria to The King of the Belgians April 15, 1845. *The Letters of Queen Victoria: A selection From Her Majesty's Correspondence Between the Years 1837 and 1861* Vol. II. ed. Arthur Christopher Benson and Viscount Esher, G.C.V.O., K.C.B. (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street 1907), 42-43.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

center, and flanked on either side by members of his own party, in both praise and disgust (Figure 1).<sup>195</sup> Those on the left side of Peel (Wellington) have their hands raised and look up at the Prime Minister. While those on the right (Disraeli) have their heads turned away, revolted by Peel's expansion of the Maynooth Grant and his support of a Catholic institution.

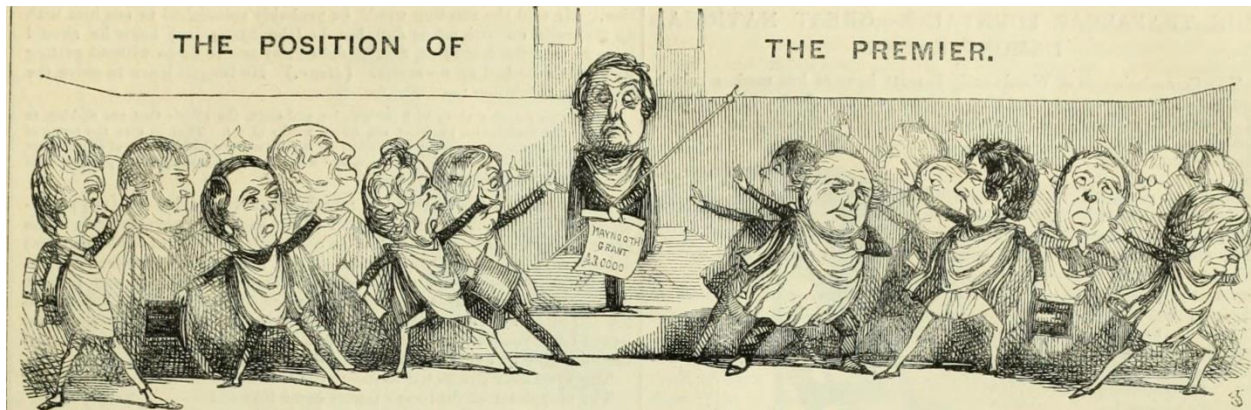


Figure 1. The Position of the Premier

The cartoon illustrated the internal problems Peel's Tamworth Conservatism was having by 1845. While many leading members of the party saw Peel as praiseworthy, the Tories increasingly saw him as an apostate of Tory social values. Peel's own beliefs on the expansion of Maynooth College were simple: for the long-term security of Protestant rule over Ireland concessions had to be made, an opinion he shared with many of his supporters despite Tory and public outcries. Still, no matter how carefully reasoned, the Maynooth Grant, like Peel's acceptance of Catholic emancipation in 1829, made many Tories suspicious of his Conservative ideology.

The public and press were also all too familiar with Peel's changes of heart on major issues and had their suspicions even of his dedication to Protestantism. Once again, Peel was

<sup>195</sup> "The Position of the Premier" *Punch*, Vol. 8 1845, 191.

attacked for his betrayal of Tory values and of the Protestant cause.<sup>196</sup> Reactions to Peel's changing politics were maliciously satirized in an 1845 edition of *Punch*:

How wonderful is Peel  
He changeth with the Time,  
Turning and twisting like an eel  
Ascending through the Slime.<sup>197</sup>

*Punch's* satire on Peel reflected the intense division over the issue of the Maynooth Grant. Comparing the Prime Minister to an eel moving through slime was an image many Tories already had of Peel. Still, despite the anger and feelings of betrayal towards Peel, the Maynooth Grant was passed. To many, the modifications of the Corn Laws in 1842 and 1843 were also indicative of Peel's betrayal of "conservative" ideology. Speeches made by Peel hinted at modification or repeal of the Corn Laws and confirmed many Tory back-benchers suspicions that he was willing to betray what they viewed as fundamental conservative principles.<sup>198</sup> The Tories had seen him betray their principles during the debate for Catholic emancipation in 1829 and to them changes to the Corn Laws in 1842-3 were enough evidence to confirm suspicions that Peel was going to approach Corn Law reform again by the close of 1845.<sup>199</sup>

The division on the Maynooth grant had been problematic for Peel and internal dissent over his leadership was becoming more vocal.<sup>200</sup> While the Maynooth Grant had passed in the House of Commons (1845) it drastically weakened Peel's government and his ability to lead a

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<sup>196</sup> Mr. Vernon Smith's Speech on Maynooth College, April 28, 1845. *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series Vol. LXXIX § § 1373-432 § 1381

<sup>197</sup> "Anti-Maynooth Anti-Strophe" *Punch*, Vol. 8 1845, 191.

<sup>198</sup> Robert Peel's Address in answer to the Speech from the Throne-Adjourned debate- (forth night), August 27, 1841. *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. LIX § § 342-450 § 413-29.

<sup>199</sup> Hilton, *A Mad Bad & Dangerous People? England 1782-1846*, 507.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 1846, 508.



unified Conservative party. The internal Conservative problems after the passage of the Maynooth Grant began to bring elements of Conservative division into center stage. This reflected the underlying flaw of Peel's second ministry, the lack of party unity. Peel had successfully returned as Prime Minister in 1841 with Tory votes, but his reforms starting with the expansion of the Maynooth Grant were perceived as an apostasy of Tory social values instead of necessary reform for the good of the nation.

After the passage of the Maynooth Grant, Peel's government became more involved with the Corn Laws. The attacks by the ACLL had increased dramatically since 1841 and debates over the free-trade nature of Britain were infecting every branch of the political sphere. In correspondence between Peel and Croker, Peel suggested that coming debates over the Corn Laws must, at the very least, be centered around the continued maintenance of the nation's commercial prosperity.<sup>201</sup> While Peel had not yet decided to repeal the Corn Laws in August 1845, he knew that the next time the Corn Laws were up for review, the idea of repeal would be forced into the debate by the ACLL's national campaign.<sup>202</sup>

In October of 1845, with news of the potato blight in Ireland, the ACLL changed its usual approach and began pressuring the government to repeal the Corn Laws as a form of humanitarian relief.<sup>203</sup> This placed Peel in a difficult position. By autumn 1845 the League had organized a massive national movement to repeal the Corn Laws and endorse free trade. While Anti-League organizations had been founded many of those behind these organizations, such as the CAPS, did little to pressure Peel for a continuation of protectionism out of fear of breaking

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<sup>201</sup> Robert Peel to John Wilson Croker August 31, 1845. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. III.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 194.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Robert Peel to Lord Heytesbury October 15, 1845. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. III.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 121-123.



up the party.<sup>204</sup> The CAPS organization, unlike the ACLL, had refused to act in elections and purchase freeholds and by December of 1845 could do little to expand its influence beyond the already converted. Additionally, with news of the potato famine in Ireland worsening daily, the League had the perfect political ammunition against any hopes Peel might have had to maintain the Corn Laws. The famine in Ireland allowed the League to launch a new and popular national campaign, both for total repeal of the Corn Laws and humanitarian relief in Ireland.<sup>205</sup> With the non-voting public undoubtedly on the side of the League, by late autumn 1845 Peel had to make a choice; repeal the Corn Laws and alienate many of his own party supporters or face a national crisis.<sup>206</sup> Historians have long debated Peel's decision to undertake total repeal of the Corn Laws, but if one considers the key principle of his personal brand of Conservatism, that reforms which he believed to be absolutely necessary to the preservation of the state must be undertaken in a proactive fashion, – Peel was actually being quite consistent in his decision to pursue total repeal of the Corn Laws.

The fight to repeal the Corn Laws starting in late autumn of 1845 placed Peel and the majority of his party at odds. Peel was now convinced that repeal was a necessary reform and had to convince his party to pass a total repeal of the Corn Laws. Peel's ultimate reasoning behind repeal, rather than a temporary suspension, was that repeal was the necessary reform required to preserve the other institutions of the state, that is to say the Church and the aristocracy. Peel's handling of the Corn Laws through careful reform in 1842-3 had passed his

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<sup>204</sup> Stewart, *The Politics of Protection*, 56.

<sup>205</sup> Robert Peel Cabinet Memorandum November 1, 1845. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. III*. ed. Charles Stuart Parker 141-148.

<sup>206</sup> Gaunt, *Sir Robert Peel*, 3.

party with relative ease and he had believed those reforms had worked.<sup>207</sup> However, he knew that pursuing a total repeal in late 1845 was likely to break his ministry and possibly his party.<sup>208</sup> Peel had a history of changing positions (in his own mind always for the greater good) on reforms that he deemed to be necessary. Peel's changing position on the Corn Laws by 1845 was observed by many Tory backbenchers as nothing more than the result of pressure exerted on the Prime minister from the ACLL. In the famous cartoon published by *Punch* Peel is depicted as a small child led on a free trade walk by ACLL founder Richard Cobden.<sup>209</sup> This kind of imagery illustrated to both the public and the Tories that Peel was being led by the ACLL pressures into repealing the Corn Laws rather than by his own agenda. Tory backbenchers had argued that it was Peel, not the opposition, who had chipped away at the Corn Laws enough to cause them to become unenforceable and to force repeal.<sup>210</sup> Historians have debated whether or not this accusation was true. For his part, Peel would later state that repeal at that moment was a profoundly conservative decision and had been absolutely necessary for the security of the nation.<sup>211</sup>

### Corn Law Repeal and Conservative Crisis

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In any event, by early August of 1845 Peel's Conservative government had clearly begun to divide over the issue of the Corn Laws. Peel himself had been ambiguous before on the issue

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<sup>207</sup> Robert Peel to John Wilson Croker July 27, 1842. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. II* . ed. Charles Stuart Parker 529-530.

<sup>208</sup> Gaunt, *Sir Robert Peel*, 3.

<sup>209</sup> "Papa Cobden Taking Master Robert [Peel] A Free Trade Walk" *Punch* Vol. 8 1845 197.

<sup>210</sup> Stewart, *The Politics of Protection*, 70.

<sup>211</sup> Robert Peel The Resignation of the Ministers June 29, 1846. *The Speeches of the Late Right Honourable Sir Robert Peel 2<sup>nd</sup> Bart. Vol. IV.*(London: Routledge 1853),710.

of the Corn Laws but pressure to repeal the Corn Laws from the public began to overtake his commitment to his party's position. His decision to repeal the Corn Laws, like his earlier decision to support Catholic emancipation, was a process in the making. Announcing that he would seek total repeal of the Corn Laws in October of 1845 Peel was subject to a massive backlash from the Protectionist wing of his own party. Because Parliament was not then in session – having been in recess since August– Peel remained in power. As Charles Greville stated before Peel publicly announced his decision on the Corn Laws, the Whigs could not challenge him and although the Tories despised him they could not publicly oppose him.<sup>212</sup> Peel's official address to Parliament, when that body reconvened in December, calling for a total repeal of the Corn Laws was met with opposition all around the House.<sup>213</sup> Nevertheless, it was the members of the Conservative party that reacted the most negatively to Peel's decision to repeal the Corn Laws.

A few years earlier, the Conservatives had willingly supported his changes to the Corn Laws and saw those changes as conserving the institution of protectionism. As previously stated, the Protectionist faction of the Conservative party had already organized a society to counter the ACLL and to help convince the government to maintain protectionism. The formation of the CAPS in 1843 to counter the League's influence over Parliament had also increased the tensions over the Corn Laws.<sup>214</sup> While the Duke of Richmond's society was supposed to be non-partisan the bulk of the CAPS membership consisted of Tory Protectionists who did not like the direction Peel seemed to be taking the party. Peel had remained silent on the issue of protectionism in

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<sup>212</sup> Charles Greville August 21, 1845. *The Greville Memoirs: A Journal of the Reign Queen Victoria from 1837 to 1852 By the Late Charles C.F. Greville Vol. II.* ed. Henry Reeve. (London: Longmans, Green and Co. 1885), 290.

<sup>213</sup> Charles Greville December 5, 1845. *The Greville Memoirs Vol. II.* ed. Henry Reeve 310.

<sup>214</sup> Edward Stillingfleet Cayley Esq., MP. *Reasons for the Formation of the Agricultural Protection Society Addressed to the Industrious Classes of the United Kingdom.* (London: John Olivier, 59, Pall Mall 1844), 1.

1841 and his subsequent modifications to the Corn Laws in 1842-3 had created suspicion. While he had received Protectionist support for his reforms his announcement to repeal the Corn Laws was met with overt hostility. Peel's decision to work towards repeal marked the beginning of a truly profound Conservative political fragmentation in both Houses of Parliament.<sup>215</sup> The fracturing of the Conservative party over the Corn Laws turned the electoral victory Peel had achieved in 1841 into a tragedy.

The greatest obstacle in maintaining Peel's leadership of the Conservative party was the Tory backbench. These traditional Tory Conservatries were the most vocal opponents of Peel's decision to repeal the Corn Laws. Peel's support for the expansion of the Maynooth Grant had been a point of tension with the backbenchers, but in their minds his decision to repeal the Corn Laws was outright treasonous and they could no longer follow him. Protectionist disgust in 1845 began to mount and the divisions between the Protectionists and those remaining loyal to Peel became more overt. Long pent up anger from the backbenchers directed at Peel, became problematic for the continued unity of the government. Peel's Conservative supporters knew a backbench revolt would be disastrous. As Sir James Graham had foreseen, the Protectionists were going to be problematic for Conservative unity if repeal of the Corn Laws was going to be discussed. Months before the potato famine had started Graham had noted, rather presciently that, "The time will come when this party [Protectionists] will bitterly deplore the fall of Sir Robert Peel, and when in vain they will wish that they had not overthrown a Government, which its enemies could not vanquish, but which its supporters abandoned and undermined."<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Charles Greville December 5, 1845. *The Greville Memoirs Vol. II* ed. Henry Reeve 311.

<sup>216</sup> Sir James Graham to John Wilson Croker March 22, 1845. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. III.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 172.

With news of the potato blight in Ireland in October of 1845 Robert Peel undertook the difficult decision to work towards total repeal. Writing to Graham, Peel noticed that the reports from Ireland indicated that up to a third or even half of the potato crop was lost due to blight. This to Peel was very alarming.<sup>217</sup> Suggestions to suspend the Corn Laws to provide immediate short-term relief were made but pressure from the ACLL and worries about insurrections in the North of England made this goal impractical. Historians have often wondered why Peel felt compelled to pursue total repeal rather than short term suspension. Whatever the ultimate rationale for his decision, be it as a form of humanitarianism, or more likely a desire to offer proactive (instead of reactionary) reform designed to prevent a larger crisis in England and Ireland, by November of 1845 Peel was committed to total repeal. Correspondence with Wellington, Goulburn and Graham in late October and early-November of 1845 proved that Peel was determined to affect a total and immediate repeal of the Corn Laws.<sup>218</sup> On November 3, 1845, Peel received a letter from Stanley expressing his difference of opinion regarding the necessity of total repeal of the Corn Laws. Stanley wrote that “I have reflected much and anxiously upon it; but I cannot bring my mind to any other conclusion.”<sup>219</sup> Stanley’s argument was that the Prime Minister’s decision to repeal the Corn Laws had been undertaken without careful review and if he were to continue on this path Stanley would oppose him on this measure.

As the battle lines were drawn at the close of the year, Peel began to lose the support of the majority of his party. In the December 13<sup>th</sup>, 1845 edition of *Punch* magazine, a poem titled

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<sup>217</sup> Robert Peel to Sir James Graham October 13, 1845. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. III.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 223.

<sup>218</sup> Robert Peel to Henry Goulburn October 18, 1845. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. III.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 225.

<sup>219</sup> Lord Stanley to Robert Peel November 3, 1845. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. III.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 231.

New Sennacherib summed up the situation rather neatly: "Sir Robert came down so bold, and his backers felt savage and sorry and sold."<sup>220</sup> Peel's bold decision to repeal the Corn Laws in early winter had effectively caused a rift in his party. The Protectionists who had pledged their support to him in 1841 now felt betrayed as Peel decided to pursue total repeal of the Corn Laws. However, as Peel had argued in 1841 he did not seek the approval of the Protectionists, his decisions on the Corn Laws or any other necessary reform were tied to his belief that he must act for the good of the nation.<sup>221</sup> Peel's decision to seek total repeal sparked vocal opposition from within his party. Those who spoke out against Peel included Benjamin Disraeli, Lord George Bentinck, the Duke of Richmond, and Lord Stanley.<sup>222</sup> These opponents of Peel's decision argued that repeal was both a poor decision and a wrong national policy. Attack from the Protectionists starting in the winter of 1845 marked the beginning of the decline of Peel's leadership of the Conservative party. Indeed, the collapse of Peel's Conservative government was now virtually inevitable.

Peel's insistence on total repeal was ill received by a majority of his party. As a result the Prime Minister took the unusual step of suggesting that he and his government should resign and that the opposition should try to form a government. In an interview with the Queen it was agreed that John Russell should be asked to attempt to form a government.<sup>223</sup> Peel wrote to his wife expressing concern and worry about the future of a Conservative government in the days

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<sup>220</sup> "New Sennacherib" *Punch* Vol. 9 1845 262.

<sup>221</sup> Robert Peel's Address in answer to the Speech from the Throne-Adjourned debate- (forth night), August 27, 1841. *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. LIX § § 342-450 § 413-29.

<sup>222</sup> It is important to note that both Stanley and Bentinck began their political careers as Whigs and had until the Corn Law crisis been supporters of Peel's reforms since their union with the Conservative party in 1835.

<sup>223</sup> Robert Peel to Wellington December 13, 15, 1845. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. III*. ed. Charles Stuart Parker 244-245.

after the meeting.<sup>224</sup> He was concerned about the ability of Russell to form a ministry but was convinced that the actions he had taken in order to work towards repeal of the Corn Laws were absolutely justified: “Not only have I acted with the best intentions but firmly believe that which I have done is the best that under the circumstances could have been done.”<sup>225</sup> Peel knew that if Russell were to form a government the Conservative party would split before the Corn Laws could be successfully repealed. Peel believed that even if Russell could form a (minority) government Russell could not hope to repeal the Corn Laws alone, that task would still have to fall on Peel.<sup>226</sup> Rumors that Russell had succeeded in forming a minority government on the 18<sup>th</sup> of December had Peel on edge.<sup>227</sup> However, such rumors were without foundation and Russell failed to gather support sufficient to form a government. Thus, Peel remained the Prime Minister and, even with a majority of his party opposed to him he made it irrevocably clear on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December 1845 that upon his return to the House after the Christmas break, he would make it his objective to repeal the Corn Laws in their entirety.<sup>228</sup> His return to the House in January was marked with the strong division in the Conservative party; his intentions to repeal the Corn Laws left the majority of the party opposed to his leadership.

Interestingly enough, Peel’s unseating would come not at the hands of the old line Tories but from a newly developing type of Conservative. Lord George Bentinck, Lord Stanley, and Benjamin Disraeli would become representatives of the new Conservative Tories. Each of these

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Robert Peel to Sir Thomas Fremantle December 19, 1845. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. III.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 254-255.

<sup>226</sup> Sir Robert Peel to Queen Victoria December 18, 1845. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. III.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 253.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>228</sup> Robert Peel to Lord Heytesbury December 23, 1845. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. III.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 228.

Conservatives had been suspicious of Peel after his stance on the Maynooth Grant and to them the decision to repeal the Corn Laws was proof of his complete betrayal of Conservative ideology. Their fundamental opposition to Peel concerned his over extension of reform. By pressing for a total repeal of the Corn Laws many Protectionist Conservatives thought that, just as it the case of the Maynooth Grant and Catholic emancipation, Peel was disregarding important institutions of the state; one of Conservatism's founding principles. The most vocal of these Conservative rebels in the spring of 1846 was Benjamin Disraeli.<sup>229</sup>

An early admirer of Robert Peel's political genius, Benjamin Disraeli had eventually become critical of Peel's Conservative idea as lacking a central doctrine. The young politician had initially joined Peel as a vocal opponent of the Whigs while his Jewish family background had been something that had prevented him from aligning with the most reactionary of Tories.<sup>230</sup> This had left Disraeli as a unique kind of Tory Conservative.<sup>231</sup> While he wanted to be among the ranks of the elite he often found himself ridiculed because of his Jewish background. Disraeli began his political career for the constituency of Maidstone in 1837. However, the expenses of that seat were too much for the debt ridden young Disraeli. By 1841, he secured the Conservative nomination for Shrewsbury. In addressing a crowd at his new constituency of Shrewsbury, members of the audience brought bits of pork on a stick and taunted him by shouting 'Bring a bit of Pork for the Jew'.<sup>232</sup> This kind of ridicule followed Disraeli his entire life and was not limited to the lower orders of society. Mistrust and taunts because of his Jewish

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<sup>229</sup> Stewart, *The Politics of Protection*. 64.

<sup>230</sup> Disraeli, *Letters of Runnymede*, 79.

<sup>231</sup> Charles Richmond, Paul Smith, *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli 1818-1851* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998), 114 .

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.



background forced the young Disraeli to work much harder to earn respect from his colleagues and sponsors.

In Disraeli's attempts to distance himself from his Jewish background he sought acceptance by the aristocratic class through his writings and dress. Known for his foppish appearance the young Disraeli would wear a flowery vest and was always concerned with his appearance. As a novelist, he was often critiqued as an outsider looking into the world of the aristocracy through a lens that gave him a romanticized view of the country's most privileged class.<sup>233</sup> It was through these writings that Disraeli attempted to outline the ideology of the modern Tory or Conservative.<sup>234</sup> His writings would provide one of the most telling critiques of Peel's Conservatism and policies since 1834.

Disraeli's political novels had attempted to identify in words what it meant to be Conservative and what Conservative principles were supposed to be. An element he often addressed in his works was the positive role of the aristocracy both in Conservatism and in British life. His works combined a mix of politics and ethics illustrating how he perceived the development of government and political parties after the Reform Bill. Disraeli, like many other Conservatives, questioned Peel's post-Reform Bill idea of Conservatism. Disraeli's core critique was that Peel's Conservatism lacked serious principles and his criticism manifested itself in his writings. In his two most famous political novels, *Coningsby or the New Generation* and *Sybil or the Two Nations*, Disraeli questioned the Conservatism that Peel had created and argued that Conservatism should stand for a strong set of principles and values founded in

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>234</sup> Disraeli, *Letters of Runnymede*, 2.

Toryism.<sup>235</sup> Disraeli, unlike his contemporary the novelist Charles Dickens', argued that the working classes should be led by an enlightened aristocracy. Disraeli's political novels, published respectively in 1844 and 1845 offered a critique of the direction of Conservatism under Peel. He argued that Robert Peel's Conservatism had failed to act on behalf of all classes. In *Sybil* Disraeli proposed the idea that Conservatism should be representative of the nation regardless of class identification. His notion of what would later be called one-nation Conservatism was a critique of the 'two nations' (and Peel's Conservatism) that were developing in industrial Britain. *Sybil* traced the plight of the working classes of England and argued that the aristocracy should take the initiative to protect the poor, leading many critics to note that *Sybil* – and therefore Disraeli – advocated a return to a very medieval and paternalistic relationship between the classes.<sup>236</sup> The work also indicated Disraeli's personal sympathies for the Chartist movement; however, the main focus of the novel was the growing division of the country because of industrialization. Disraeli argued that both the people and politics of Great Britain had begun to divide into 'two nations'. Disraeli outlined this problem through his characters' dialog,

Two nations between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by different food, are opened by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws'.

You speak of- 'said Egremont hesitantly. 'The rich and poor.'<sup>237</sup>

Disraeli had believed that Conservatism for one nation across all classes would keep and maintain the important institutions of the state. Disraeli argued that by creating 'two nations'

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<sup>235</sup> Disraeli, *Coningsby*, 41.

<sup>236</sup> Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil or the Two Nations* (London: Henry Colburn [1845] 2010), 90.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid* .,65-66.

and ignoring the negative changes associated with industrialization, the suffering of the working classes at the hands of the manufacturers would only increase. Conservatism, Disraeli argued, needed to be more than a veneer over old Toryism; it had to evolve from it to address the needs of the people of England. Additionally, its origins in Toryism were an essential embodiment of a national identity.<sup>238</sup> Toryism, and Conservatism, Disraeli argued had the responsibility to the nation to lead and to preserve it.<sup>239</sup> Therefore to prevent the division of classes, Disraeli argued Conservatism needed to have real substance, Conservatism had to be paternalistic.

His change of heart concerning Peel's Conservatism was also in part an act of vengeance against his idol for failing to recognize his genius. By 1841, Disraeli had, in his own opinion, been the most loyal and supportive follower of Peel (since his election to office in 1837) and felt that at the age of 37 he was ready for a cabinet position in Peel's new Conservative Ministry.<sup>240</sup> A whole group of men younger than him, including Gladstone, Dalhousie, Lincoln, and Cardwell were all given office. As each office was announced and filled Disraeli had felt increasingly abandoned and brushed aside despite his loyalty to Peel. To Disraeli these men represented the very best of the upper class English political crop and to be excluded devastated him.<sup>241</sup> In September of 1841 Disraeli wrote to Peel out of desperation, wanting to know why he was passed over in cabinet appointments,

I confess to be unrecognized at this moment by you appears to me to be overwhelming; and I appeal to your own heart to that justice and that

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<sup>238</sup> Benjamin Disraeli, *Whigs and Whiggism. The Vindication of the English Constitution XXXII* (Washington D.C.:Regnery Publishing [1913] 2006) ,165.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>240</sup> Benjamin Disraeli to Robert Peel September 5, 1841. *Benjamin Disraeli Letters Vol. III.* ed. Michael W. Pharand et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1987) 1186.

<sup>241</sup> Robert Blake, *Disraeli.* (London: Fabar & Faber 1966), 355.

magnanimity, which I feel are your characteristics to save me from an intolerable humiliation- Believe me, dear Sir Robert<sup>242</sup>

Peel had little choice in the matter of denying the young politician, with virtually no experience, a position in the cabinet. Although Disraeli had proved ambitious and skillful, Peel did not see Disraeli as suitable for a cabinet position. His lack of experience and record gave Peel no choice in the matter of passing over the young Conservative.<sup>243</sup> Peel never wrote a reply to Disraeli who in turn, never forgot Peel's lack of respect. The letter Disraeli wrote to Peel would become a point of contention down the road between the two men. Disraeli's petition for office was perhaps in part because he was overconfident in his own talents but more so because it was a position that came with a salary. Regular MP's were often unpaid and Disraeli's earlier failures in finance meant that he had acquired massive debts. Disraeli's desire for office was twofold; he was a man of immense ambition but he had also amassed huge debts. His debts, accounting to roughly £30,000 (approx. £1.2 million in present values) were always a burden upon him despite his marriage to a wealthy widow in 1839.<sup>244</sup> He felt that a paid position could help soften the burden of his debts as well as expand his political career. The debts from Disraeli's failures in finance and his extravagant lifestyle would not fully be paid off until 1849.<sup>245</sup>

Disraeli's negative opinion of Peel and of his 'reforms' had a history which predated the Prime Minister's decision to repeal the Corn Laws. He saw Peel as early March of 1845 as a man who would possibly modify the state institutions (especially the church) out of existence if such reforms kept him in power. Peel, in Disraeli's mind, was an agent supporting the ever increasing

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<sup>242</sup> Benjamin Disraeli to Robert Peel September 5, 1841. *Benjamin Disraeli Letters Vol. III.* ed. Michael W. Pharand et al. 1186.

<sup>243</sup> Ian St. John, *Disraeli and the Art of Victorian Politics.* (London: Anthem Press 2005), 15.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

division of the nation by appeasing the Whigs through excessive and damaging reforms. His disgust with Peel became heated after a discussion concerning agricultural interests and the Corn Laws in March of 1845. Disraeli argued that Peel ought to resign over the matter, “Dissolve, if you please, the Parliament you have betrayed, and appeal to the people, who, I believe, mistrust you. For me there remains this at least—the opportunity of expressing thus publicly my belief that a Conservative Government is an organised hypocrisy.”<sup>246</sup> The effect produced in the House by calling the Prime Minister’s government ‘an organised hypocrisy’ created a considerable uproar. Disraeli’s comments, as he would later write, received a silent nod of approval from some Backbench Tories. As he put it “the Tory gentlemen beneath the gangway who swelled the chorus did so with downcast eyes, as if they yet hesitated to give utterance to feelings too long and too painfully suppressed.”<sup>247</sup> Disraeli’s speech in March of 1845 and his perceived acknowledgment by backbench Tories began in his mind a Conservative opposition to Peel’s reforms and leadership. Disraeli would go on to oppose Peel even more vocally following the increase of the Maynooth Grant and by December of 1845 Disraeli would lead a backbench revolt against the Prime Minister’s decision to repeal the Corn Laws.

Disraeli’s support of the Corn Laws was not bound by his belief in some antiquated economic policy but rather from their symbolic importance. Disraeli had linked the Corn Laws to the maintenance of the landed aristocracy and the structure it provided for a stable society. Therefore, it was part of his argument that Peel’s movement against the Corn Laws was a betrayal of traditional institutions and their conservation.<sup>248</sup> Disraeli’s own opinions were made

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<sup>246</sup> Benjamin Disraeli’s Speech on Agricultural Interest, March 17, 1845. *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series Vol. LXXVIII § §962-1039 § 1038.

<sup>247</sup> Benjamin Disraeli, *Lord George Bentinck: A Political Biography* (London: Colburn and Co., Publishers [1852] 2009), 41.

<sup>248</sup> St. John, *Disraeli and the Art of Victorian Politics*, 27.

clear as early as 1843 in an address to his constituents at Shrewsbury, a point he would reiterate again in December of 1845. He stated that “ I will not pledge myself to miserable questions of 6d. in 7s. 6d or 8s. of duties about corn... but what I want and what I wish to secure...is the preponderance of the landed interest.”<sup>249</sup> Disraeli’s statement about the Corn Laws suggested that he like other Protectionist supporters were not as concerned with the amounts of money generated by the tariff or the need for protection as for the position of the landed class in the state. The removal of the Corn Laws not only represented the takeover of economic policy by the new middle classes but an abandonment of the traditional class in the management of the economy and the nation. Disraeli attacked Peel’s decision to repeal the Corn Laws as a betrayal of Conservative/Tory values.

Of course, Disraeli was not the only Conservative who questioned Peel’s Conservatism. The one who came to be the most vocal in the context of the Corn Law crisis was Lord George Bentinck. His alliance with Benjamin Disraeli instigated a rebellion against the Prime Minister from the backbenches, which brought down Peel’s Conservative leadership. As the Member of Parliament for the borough of King’s Lynn<sup>250</sup> Bentinck began his political career as a Whig but fell into the New Conservative party of Robert Peel with other supporters of Lord Stanley. Bentinck was a model old-line politician but in no sense of the word a Tory. He had crossed the floor of the Commons from the Whigs in 1835 with Lord Stanley to join Peel’s new Conservative party. As the epitome of a landed gentleman, Lord George Bentinck treated the Commons more like a gentleman’s club than a house of government.<sup>251</sup> Bentinck himself had

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<sup>249</sup> ed. MoneyPenny & Buckle. *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli: Earl of Beaconsfield* Vol. 1 1804-1859. 539.

<sup>250</sup>George Bentinck was the second member of King’s Lynn from 1828-1848 he served the borough along with Viscount Jocelyn (1842-1854) during the Corn Law Crisis.

<sup>251</sup> Disraeli, *Lord George Bentinck*, 4.

rarely spoken in the House and was often absent until the Corn Law crisis; a crisis, which in his opinion, reflected the very problem of a Conservative ideology. When Peel announced his decision to repeal the Corn Laws Bentinck began to attack the policies of the Prime Minister.

Lord Bentinck was perhaps the perfect example of the protectionist branch in the Conservative party. His efforts to maintain the Corn Laws were based on his beliefs in the Protectionist cause but more so upon his beliefs concerning the aristocratic role of the landed elites within the constitution. Like Disraeli, he did not see the Corn Laws as a superior economic system; he saw them as a crucial link to the aristocracy's role in government. Additionally like many other Protectionists, Bentinck was much more inclined to support a system that had worked historically. Repeal would result in the retreat of aristocratic power from the economic development of the country. This explains why a country gentleman, jockey, and aristocrat, who until 1845 had remained largely unheard, became heavily involved in defending the Corn Laws.<sup>252</sup>

In Disraeli's biography of Bentinck, he observed his friend to be one of the strongest supporters of Robert Peel. He argued that until the Corn Law crisis; "[h]is trust in that minister was indeed absolute."<sup>253</sup> While Bentinck had reluctantly supported Peel's policy over the Maynooth Grant he grew suspicious of Peel's actions towards state institutions, especially his attitude towards the Corn Laws. When Peel announced his decision to repeal the Corn Laws in their entirety Bentinck was outraged. He believed that Peel had betrayed the Conservative values he had advocated in the election of 1841.<sup>254</sup> Disraeli argued in his book, *Lord George*

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<sup>252</sup> Hawkings, *The Forgotten Prime Minister Vol. I*, 310.

<sup>253</sup> Disraeli, *Lord George Bentinck*, 4.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

*Bentinck: A Political Biography* that until the Corn Law crisis Bentinck, like other Conservatives, had been satisfied with Peel's leadership. However, after Peel's decision to repeal the Corn Laws became known Bentinck lost all faith in Peel's ability to act as a Conservative leader. Instead Bentinck and the other Protectionists saw him as someone who was willing to retreat on "Conservative" issues in order to gain public approval.

Bentinck flew in the face of the Conservative establishment and argued that Peel had abandoned the Conservative triumph of 1841 and the sentiments of his own party in favor of taking an un-conservative direction.<sup>255</sup> Disraeli argued that men like Bentinck soon represented the majority within the Conservative party. Disraeli wrote that,

[I]f it could shown to the country, that the great bulk of the Conservative party were true to their faith, and were not afraid, even against the fearful odds which they would have to encounter, to proclaim it, the confidence and the courage of the country would rally, and the party in the House of Commons would find external sympathy and support.<sup>256</sup>

While men like Disraeli and Bentinck held optimistic views that their cause would gather support Peel on the other hand argued against their cause. Peel's rebuttal was that these Conservative backbenchers were selfish and refused to think of the greater good.<sup>257</sup> In reply, Bentinck argued that his Tory rebellion was doing its "fair share of the government for the country."<sup>258</sup> However, Bentinck's vocal attacks on Peel were more often than not counterproductive to the debate. Bentinck's ruthlessness, single-mindedness and determination, coupled with the anger and ferocity with which he attacked Peel, gained the once silent member from Kings Lynn notoriety

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<sup>255</sup> Lord George Bentinck's Speech on the Total and Immediate Repeal of the Corn Laws, May 14, 1846. *Hansard*, 3rd Series. Vol. LXXXIV § 553-76 § 554.

<sup>256</sup> Disraeli, *Lord George Bentinck*, 7.

<sup>257</sup> Robert Peel's Speech on the Total and Immediate Repeal of the Corn Laws, March 3, 1846. *Hansard*, 3rd Series. Vol. LXXXIV § 527-75 § 557.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*



among the backbenchers. Bentinck became even more vocal concerning the widespread imperial effects of repeal.

As a staunch Protectionist, Bentinck had believed in the maintenance of the Corn Laws for both national and colonial security. While Bentinck was not a highly skilled orator he was well versed in the facts and figures behind the free trade debate.<sup>259</sup> His argument, much like Disraeli's, was that repeal of the Corn Laws was not so much about the pricing of grain but the fundamental change of the institution of empire. He argued that repeal was not only a mistake but an outright betrayal of the Canadian colonies.<sup>260</sup> During the debates to repeal the Corn Laws Bentinck stressed what he believed was an abandonment of the colonies to the uncertainty of the market. During the third reading of the bill to repeal the Corn Laws in May of 1846 Bentinck argued,

It was only in 1843 the Canada Corn Bill was passed, which was held to be a compromise—almost a bargain—with our Canadian Colonies, ... The Canadas were then led to believe that that was a permanent measure; but three years had not elapsed before all the capital which had been vested on the faith of that measure was to be sacrificed by the adoption of a different system of commercial policy.<sup>261</sup>

Bentinck and other Conservatives saw total repeal as an abandonment of that other core institution of Conservatism, the Empire. A total repeal of the Corn Laws would, in Bentinck's mind, be tantamount to the economic abandonment of British North America, which less than three years prior had been granted special treatment.<sup>262</sup> Bentinck and other backbench rebels in

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<sup>259</sup>Disraeli, *Lord George Bentinck*, 7.

<sup>260</sup> Gambles, *Protection and Politics*, 199.

<sup>261</sup> Lord George Bentinck's Speech on the Total and Immediate Repeal of the Corn Laws, May 14, 1846. *Hansard*, 3rd Series. Vol. LXXXIV § 553-76 § 554.

<sup>262</sup> William Mure. *The Commercial Policy of Pitt and Peel. 1783-1846* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street. 1847) 294

1846 now argued that Peel's previous modifications to the Corn Laws in 1842-3 were clear indications that Peel was moving the nation towards free trade.<sup>263</sup> While this accusation against Peel appears to illustrate his slow movement towards free trade, in reality Peel's modifications in 1842-3 were designed to work within the system to make it more efficient rather than fundamentally change it.

The bold attacks on Peel from the vocal partnership of Disraeli and Bentinck fueled the backbencher revolt as more Conservatives joined the Protectionist cause to uphold the Corn Laws. This partnership between Bentinck and Disraeli was derisively known by many, as the "Jockey and the Jew".<sup>264</sup> Bentinck's partnership with Disraeli gave political strength to the young Disraeli and defeated suspicions that he was nothing but a disgruntled upstart who didn't know his proper place in the party.<sup>265</sup> These two Protectionists began to organize an internal Protectionist party of sorts within Peel's Conservative ministry.

Their backbench revolt had expressed legitimate arguments concerning the question of the Corn Laws. Repeal would mean an abandonment of empire, a further lessening of the aristocracy's power, and the collapse of a time tested economic system. Although Bentinck was regarded as crass, his partnership with Disraeli made up for his often weakly driven speeches and un-parliamentary attacks on Peel. Their joint actions in early 1846 increased the strength of the backbench revolt insuring that if Peel succeeded in repealing the Corn Laws, it would be a Pyrrhic victory, as it would certainly cost him the Premiership.

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Hawkings, *The Forgotten Prime Minister*, 309.

<sup>265</sup> Dick Leonard, *The Great Rivalry: Gladstone and Disraeli A Dual Biography* (London: I.B Tauris & co. Ltd 2013), 58.

While Disraeli and Bentinck emerged as the figureheads of the protectionist revolt in the House of Commons it would be a different Conservative that took the leadership of the Protectionists after they decided to split with Peel. Lord Stanley, who had joined Peel's Conservative party after his own Derby Dilly party collapsed, would emerge as the new leader. His support for Peel, like Bentinck's, remained constant until the decision to repeal the Corn Laws.<sup>266</sup> Stanley had supported Peel even with the Maynooth Grant but Peel's decision to repeal the Corn Laws was more than he could tolerate.<sup>267</sup> The developing Corn Law crisis reshaped how Stanley saw Peel and the future of the Conservative party. While no longer a member of the House of Commons at the time of the Corn Law Crisis, (he had been elevated to the Lords in 1844) Lord Stanley remained the most cautious supporter of the protectionist rebellion.

Stanley's elevation to the House of Lords in 1844 was met with unease by Peel. In correspondence with Wellington, Peel indicated that the loss of Stanley in the Commons was going to be difficult but the Duke assured Peel that Stanley would support his cause in the upper chamber.<sup>268</sup> From his position in the House of Lords, Stanley was pressured by Bentinck to oppose Peel's plan for total Corn Law repeal.<sup>269</sup> However, this was not the route Stanley took, he instead listened to Bentinck and agreed with him concerning the role of the Corn Laws but refused to use the House of Lords to oppose the Prime Minister.<sup>270</sup> It was Stanley's objective to maintain and preserve the Conservative party in order to prevent the radical Whigs from entering

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<sup>266</sup> Lord Stanley to Robert Peel November 3, 1845. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. III.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 231.

<sup>267</sup> Stewart, *The Politics of Protection*, 61.

<sup>268</sup> Robert Peel to Wellington July 29, 1844. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. III.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 157.

<sup>269</sup> Hawkings, *The Forgotten Prime Minister Vol. I*, 308.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

government. Creating a Protectionist rebellion in the House of Lords would have damaged the Conservative party in his opinion beyond repair. Thus, although siding with Disraeli and Bentinck privately, Stanley would not openly attack Peel's decision to repeal the Corn Laws until Parliament resumed in early 1846. His criticism of the abolition of the Corn Laws became clear only when Peel announced it was his government's plan to repeal them to provide relief for Ireland.<sup>271</sup>

Unlike Disraeli and Bentinck, Stanley did not see the Protectionist revolt at first as an open rebellion against Peel, but rather as an issue of internal Conservative dissent. He also refused to rally the 'country gentlemen' together to oppose Peel but soon realized the Corn Laws were going to break the party regardless of his involvement.<sup>272</sup> Stanley knew that a firm break with Peel would not only give the Whigs political power but would also deprive Conservative forces of office for the foreseeable future due to internal division. However, the deep protectionist roots within the Conservative party shifted the internal disagreement over protectionism into solid division. Disraeli and Bentinck's rebellion had, by late 1845, successfully ruptured the Conservative Party and taken the bulk of its members away from Peel's control. Their division of the Conservative party by the end of December 1845 had brought Peel to the point of resignation. However, John Russell's failed attempt to form a minority government meant that when Parliament resumed in January Peel would be back at the frontlines attempting to repeal the Corn Laws. Disraeli and Bentinck's forces would now launch an all-out assault on Peel in order to prevent him from passing repeal in the Commons.

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<sup>271</sup> Lord Stanley to Robert Peel November 3, 1845. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. III*. ed. Charles Stuart Parker 231.

<sup>272</sup> Hawkings, *The Forgotten Prime Minister Vol I*,309.

By January of 1846, it was clear that repeal of the Corn Laws would devastate the unity of the Conservative party. Russell's failed attempt to form a government meant that Peel had to repeal the Corn Laws alone. The Duke of Wellington wrote in early January that even he did not know the intentions of Robert Peel when it came to the Corn Laws.<sup>273</sup> However, he also stated that whatever the course Peel had decided upon, he, the Duke of Wellington, would support him. The division between the Protectionists in the House and those still loyal to Peel was going to split on a final vote for Corn Law repeal or perhaps even before then. While Disraeli and Bentinck professed outrage at Peel and his supporters for their apostasy, Stanley remained level headed and wanted to mitigate the damage and look for a way to reunite the factions before an impasse was created dividing 'conservatives' again.<sup>274</sup> For his part Bentinck would not consider compromise or a reunification. In his opinion, Peel's apostasy had been final and his objective now was to prevent Peel and his allies from passing repeal before the next election.<sup>275</sup>

The final blows came in late April 1846, as both Disraeli and Bentinck ramped up their attacks against Peel. It was their intention to prevent Peel from repealing the Corn Laws by any means possible. Bentinck's fierce attacks on Peel made it clear that division of the Conservative party and the humiliation of Sir Robert Peel was the only acceptable avenue of victory for the Protectionists.<sup>276</sup> Disraeli's eloquent attacks on Peel stressed that Peel had undeniably betrayed Conservative values and side stepped the decision of the electorate in 1841 in favor of Whig and Anti-Corn Law League appeasement. In early May of 1846 the division of the Conservative

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<sup>273</sup> ed. Louis J. Jennings. *The Croker Papers Vol. III*. 53.

<sup>274</sup> Stewart, *The Politics of Protection*, 69.

<sup>275</sup> O'Brien to Disraeli Hughenden Manuscripts As cited in (Robert Stewart, *The Politics of Protection: Lord Derby and the Protectionist Party 1841-1853* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1971), 65.)

<sup>276</sup> Bentinck to Stanley April 20 1846 Derby Manuscripts 132 As cited in (Robert Stewart, *The Politics of Protection: Lord Derby and the Protectionist Party 1841-1853* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1971), 65.)

party was finalized with a vote of total repeal in the House of Commons. For his final assault on Peel, Disraeli offered the most scathing and destructive verbal attack on the man he had once idolized. His speech against the Prime Minister on May 15th 1846 was a culmination of both his hatred of Peel, his belief in the protectionist cause and the fiery rhetoric he had mastered as a writer. Disraeli's infamous speech fired every personal attack imaginable at Peel and his supporters. Disraeli characterized them as,

...political peddlers that bought their party in the cheapest market, and sold us in the dearest. I know, Sir, that there are many who believe that the time is gone by when one can appeal to those high and honest impulses that were once the mainstay and the main element of the English character. I know, Sir, that we appeal to a people debauched by public gambling, stimulated and encouraged by an inefficient and shortsighted Minister. I know that the public mind is polluted with economic fancies; a depraved desire that the rich may become richer without the interference of industry and toil. I know, Sir, that all confidence in public men is lost.<sup>277</sup>

The destructive criticism offered by Disraeli put an end to Peel's leadership of the Conservative party. However, his attack did not end at accusing Peel of selling the party to the highest bidder, it also labeled Peel as 'a burglar of others' intellect' and claimed that his career had been a crime of petty larceny on a grand scale.<sup>278</sup> This verbal assault on Peel was not only viewed as a shocking and unheard of criticism of the Prime Minister, but a final act of division between the Peelites and protectionists.<sup>279</sup> Disraeli's attack humiliated Peel and left his supporters in the House of Commons speechless. Peel's loyalists and the supporters of Disraeli and Bentinck's rebellion were from this moment on at each other's throats. Peel's response to Disraeli's speech was a direct attack on the character of Disraeli, whom Peel believed was dissatisfied because of

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<sup>277</sup> Disraeli's Speech on the third reading of the Bill for the Repeal of the Corn Laws, May 15, 1846. *Hansard*, 3rd Series, Vol. LXXXVI § 616-727 §709-719.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>279</sup> Peelites became the term used to describe the Conservative loyalists to Peel cause to repeal the Corn Laws.

his lack of a cabinet appointment in 1841.<sup>280</sup> With Peel's counter Disraeli had entered into a savage verbal sparring match, which if he was not careful would cost him his newly acquired prestige among the Protectionists. His response to Peel's accusation, especially concerning the letter he had written in 1841, was an outright lie. Disraeli claimed he had never petitioned the Prime Minister for office in 1841 (hoping that Peel would not bring forward the letter in question).<sup>281</sup> The incriminating letter was not presented by Peel for unknown reasons, securing Disraeli's political gamble.<sup>282</sup>

The third reading of the bill to repeal the Corn Laws dealt the final blow to any hopes Peel had about maintaining any form of Conservative unity. Roughly two thirds of his own party voted against his call to repeal the Corn Laws in order to provide relief for the growing famine in Ireland. Peel was only able to enact repeal with significant support from the Whigs. However, some historians have suggested that protectionism itself was a divisive issue to both parties although more so to Peel's Conservatives than the Whigs.<sup>283</sup> With a final tally of 355 in favor of repeal and 245 opposed, (Table 2) the Corn Laws were to be repealed.

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<sup>280</sup> Robert Peel's Speech on the Corn Importation Bill-Adjourned Debate- (Third Night), May 15, 1846. *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series Vol. LXXXVI § 226-99 § 710.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Leonard, *The Great Rivalry*, 60-61.

<sup>283</sup> William. O. Aydelotte, "The Country Gentlemen and the Repeal of the Corn Laws," *The English Historical Review*. 82:322 (1967): 52.

### Votes on the Third Reading of the Bill to Repeal the Corn Laws, 15 May 1846

	For Repeal No.	For Repeal Percent	Against Repeal No.	Against Repeal Percent	Totals
<b>Conservatives</b>	114	32	241	68	355
<b>Whigs</b>	235	96	10	4	245

Table 2 Division of Conservative party in the repeal of the Corn Laws<sup>284</sup>

Disraeli and Bentinck's rebellion had divided the Conservative party. Disraeli's scathing criticism of Peel and the backbench revolt had effectively terminated Peel's political career as the Conservative leader. Peel had been ousted from the Conservative leadership for breaking with what the backbenchers saw as proper Conservative principles.

Once the House Commons approved repeal it passed to the Lords. In the House of Lords a puzzling series of events transpired. While the Lords remained the bastion of landed privilege very little was argued over Corn Law repeal. Only Lord Stanley spoke against the government's decision to repeal the Corn Laws.<sup>285</sup> Stanley's three hour speech denouncing the government's repeal of the Corn Laws on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 1846 illustrated his commitment to the protectionist revolt against Peel. He had argued that repeal of the Corn Laws was a revocation of a national policy, which in one shape or another, traced back to the days of Edward IV.<sup>286</sup> Historians have investigated this series of events and have labeled it as "Peel's puzzle." The historian Norman Gash's explanation for swift passage in the Lords, was that the Duke of Wellington's strict military discipline and style of leadership over that chamber, had allowed the Lords to support

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>285</sup> House of Lords, Corn Importation Bill -Adjourned Debate- May 25, 1846. *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. LXXXVI § 1210-1286 § 1129.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.



Peel's decision despite being against the members' interests.<sup>287</sup> However, other historians have suggested that both Peel and Wellington convinced the Lords that failure to accept repeal could result in a democratic backlash whereas repeal would conserve their political privileges. This explanation seems a more likely fit with Peel's form of Conservatism that only through necessary reform could the rule of the aristocracy be maintained. In August of 1846, Peel wrote that although repeal of the Corn Laws broke the Conservative party he believed it was the most Conservative act of his life and that his sacrifice of power would inevitably uphold the principles of the nation.<sup>288</sup>

Bentinck argued that efforts made to include Canada within the protectionist system less than three years prior had been swept away in one clean stroke. The Canadian Corn bill and efforts made to build an imperial system of preference were now abandoned. Moreover, an abandonment of the Corn Laws was now an abandonment of the colonies of Canada.<sup>289</sup> Repeal of the Corn Laws, in Stanley's mind, was not only a regressive policy but it undermined national self-sufficiency, surrendering national and Imperial self-sufficiency to the whims of the free market – all in the name of Irish relief.<sup>290</sup> The resignation of Lord Stanley on June 28<sup>th</sup> 1846, from the Peel cabinet, initiated the physical collapse of the Conservative party. While Stanley's resignation from the government had been long withheld his exit in June symbolized the termination of Robert Peel as *de facto* Conservative leader. Nevertheless, Stanley's departure and Peel's termination as *de facto* leader did not mean the end of Tamworth Conservatism. Stanley

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<sup>287</sup> Norman Gash, *Reaction and Reconstruction in English Politics, 1832-1852* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1965), 54.

<sup>288</sup> Robert Peel, *Memoirs by the Right Honourable Sir Robert Peel*. ed. Edward Cardwell & Lord Mahon 2.

<sup>289</sup> Corn Importation Bill-Adjourned Debate- (Third Night), May 15, 1846. *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series Vol. LXXXVI § 226-99 620.

<sup>290</sup> Disraeli, *Lord George Bentinck*, 7.

believed that the division caused by the Corn Law crisis would eventually heal and the party would reconcile sometime in the near future.<sup>291</sup>

While Peel had succeeded in repealing the Corn Laws he had failed to maintain his young party's unity within the terms of his Tamworth Conservatism. Peel's resignation from the office of Prime Minister the next day on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 1846 signaled the official end of his leadership of both the United Kingdom and the Conservative party. While his supporters wished to see Peel as the head of a new Peelite party he refused and argued against the formation of another 'Conservative' party. The Conservative schism after the repeal of the Corn Laws became a final and seemingly irrevocable division. Roughly two thirds of his own party had opposed his position on the Corn Laws and sought his removal. Peel had revived the Tories but during the course of the Corn Law crisis had watched them retreat into reactionary politics for the second time in a generation.<sup>292</sup> The repeal of the Corn Laws had made Peel a number of political enemies in every corner of the House. Those remaining loyal to Peel gave their support to the formation of a new "liberal' Conservative party.<sup>293</sup>

Still, the Conservative schism over the Corn Laws was not the end of the Conservative party. The Conservatives quickly began to reorganize around the remaining leaders; Stanley, Disraeli, and Bentinck. These men became the leading faces of Conservatism in the post-repeal era. Although most of the talent and the frontbench left with Peel, two thirds of the party in the Commons stayed with Bentinck and Disraeli. While Disraeli and Bentinck became the effective leaders in the Commons, the more levelheaded Stanley took control as 'Conservative'

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<sup>291</sup> Stewart, *The Politics of Protection*, 77.

<sup>292</sup> Robert Peel to Lord Brougham June 30, 1846. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. III.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 372.

<sup>293</sup> Robert Peel to Lord Hardinge September 24, 1846. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. III.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 472.

leader.<sup>294</sup> His hesitancy to re-form the party around the ‘Protectionist’ label defined him as a careful leader that would help rebuild Conservatism after the Corn Law crisis. Stanley knew whatever kind of Conservative organization that survived, he would be its designated leader rather than the fiery Lord Bentinck or the power hungry Disraeli.<sup>295</sup>

Peel had believed in a modernized Tory party that had accepted the changes made after 1832 and would pursue necessary reform. Peel had succeeded to a certain extent but where he failed was in his judgement of just how far the party would be willing to go. The Conservative rebels Disraeli, Bentinck, and Stanley had no desire to return to a pre-Reform Bill Tory party but had believed Peel had been pressured by the ACLL and the Whigs to pursue a reform that was neither absolutely necessary nor wise. The Protectionists were reluctant to accept many of Peel’s more open compromises (Maynooth and Corn Law repeal) but still had to acknowledge him for the fundamental changes he had initiated in the process of modernizing Toryism. Differences over what constituted a proper Conservative ideology through the trials of the Corn Law crisis may have unseated Peel and deprived the Conservatives of power for a generation, but repeal forced the remaining Conservatives to reexamine themselves and rebuild Conservatism starting in 1846.

The Conservative split over the repeal of the Corn Laws was incredibly harsh upon Conservatism itself. Peel had worked to build a new type of political party that would pursue reform and seek to better the institutions of the state through those reforms. His Tamworth Conservatism was designed from the start to act on reforms when necessary. The Corn Law crisis had been an example of necessary reform Peel knew he had to pursue. Peel’s decision to

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<sup>294</sup> The two thirds of the Conservative party that opposed repeal were effectively known as the Protectionists until a re-adoption of the Conservative label in 1852.

<sup>295</sup> Stewart, *The Politics of Protection*, 70.

repeal the Corn Laws has been argued to have been a fundamental change in his Conservative ideology. However, much like his decision to support Catholic emancipation in 1828 Peel believed himself to be working to preserve another institution of the state, the aristocracy. Earlier attempts to reform the Corn Laws had worked for both Peel and his Conservatives but when total repeal became necessary many of his Conservatives thought Peel had abandoned his principles rather than remaining consistent. However, his decision to conserve larger institutions of the state was, in 1846, in his opinion, a profoundly Conservative action.<sup>296</sup> Whatever Peel's stance on protection was in 1841 or the exact nature of his supposed 'conversion' to free trade in 1845, what remains consistent and important in the history of Peel's own politics was the idea of the necessity of reform to protect what he perceived to be the larger interests of the nation.

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Peel's second ministry was a case of triumph turned into tragedy. He had succeeded on one hand by transforming the Tories into a new and modernized political organization. He had passed reforms to the Corn Laws and Factory Acts with strong support from his fellow Conservatives. However, this success turned to tragedy starting in 1845. Peel's decision to expand the Maynooth Grant sparked a long held suspicion that he was betraying Conservative principles. With news of the potato blight in autumn of 1845 Peel, in order to provide relief, announced that he had decided to repeal the Corn Laws. This announcement created outrage within the party and fueled an ideological split. Peel's decision to repeal the Corn Laws transformed his triumph of 1841 into a Conservative tragedy in 1846. The division of the Conservative party in 1846 resulted in a failure by Peel to see a full application of his Tamworth Conservatism as the official party doctrine.

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<sup>296</sup> Peel, *Memoirs by the Right Honourable Sir Robert Peel*. ed. Edward Cardwell & Lord Mahon 2.

However, the application of Tamworth Conservatism as the official party doctrine did not fail entirely. Until the Corn Law crisis (or at least the Maynooth Grant) a majority of his party accepted his idea of necessary reform as a way to preserve institutions of the state. Even Peel's great opponent Benjamin Disraeli had praised Peel for this type of forward thinking.<sup>297</sup> Peel's reforms to the Corn Laws in 1842-3 were met with Conservative support and his reforms to the Factory Act were even expanded and pushed further independent of Peel. The application of Peel's Tamworth Conservatism had, until the Corn Law crisis, succeeded in transforming the Tories into a modernized political party. Peel's Tamworth Conservatism failed during the Corn Law crisis not because it was a weak ideology but because the Tories were still in the process of being transformed into Conservatives. Stanley's takeover as leader of the party, post-repeal, illustrated the ongoing transformation because despite his beliefs about protection and the Corn Laws, Stanley and, to a lesser extent, Disraeli were looking to reconcile the two groups of Conservatives within one party. The irony in the post repeal Conservative party would be that the second application of Peel's Tamworth Conservatism would be carried out by the very people that had unseated him in 1846. Their return to Peel's founding ideas would solidify the political discourse that Peel had initiated in 1834.

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<sup>297</sup> Disraeli, *Letters of Runnymede*, 1.

## CHAPTER IV THE LEGACY OF TAMWORTH CONSERVATISM

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By the end of June of 1846, the collapse of the Conservative party had been finalized. The backbench revolt had caused a schism within the young Conservative party over the repeal of the Corn Laws. With the Corn Laws effectively repealed, Peel had resigned as Prime Minister. His resignation and retreat from leadership signaled a crisis within the Conservative party. Stanley's departure from the Cabinet the day before Peel's resignation on June 28<sup>th</sup> had formalized the creation of a Protectionist faction within the majority of the Conservative party.<sup>298</sup> The chaos of the Corn Law crisis had deprived the remaining Conservatives of their leaders and left the new Peelite faction without a sizeable body in the Commons. This problem forced the remaining Conservative party leaders to establish an ideology that separated them from the Peelites and which could become the basis of a re-imagined party.

However, it was not a simple task confronting the Conservative rebels. A new party for a new age was something Peel himself had attempted to build in 1834 with his Tamworth Manifesto. Stanley, Bentinck, and Disraeli as the triumvirate of new Conservative leaders had to reform the Conservative party and either accept the repeal of the Corn Laws or continue to fight what appeared to be the losing battle for protectionism. Peel's Tamworth Conservatism after 1846 would diverge into two directions under new leadership. The Peelite faction would attempt to assert its independence but, until the death of Peel in 1850, the Peelite ideology remained

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<sup>298</sup> Stewart, *The Politics of Protection*, 77.

rather stagnant. The Protectionists meanwhile would struggle with protectionism for another six years before officially casting it off as a party policy. A redesign of Conservatism after the Corn Law crisis became a question of principles that both the Peelites and Protectionists faced. While Peel's Tamworth Conservatism remained part of the central framework, a new series of changes arose that helped to reshape his Conservatism in the post repeal era.

### Peelite Conservatism beyond the Corn Law Crisis

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The repeal of the Corn Laws had essentially divided Conservatism into two groups in 1846, the "Liberal" Peelites and the Protectionist Tories. Despite the major difference separating the two Conservative 'parties' – essentially the question of free trade– the Peelites and Protectionists still shared a common core Conservatism.<sup>299</sup> However, the rift created by the fight to repeal the Corn Laws was much larger and more personal than a disagreement over free trade. Peel's decision to repeal the Corn Laws had left his party in shambles and he was not prepared for the political outcomes of repeal. Peel had professed that repeal was a Conservative action, however, the Protectionist rebellion illustrated that he and his party were not on the same page. His resignation as leader of the Conservative party and refusal to become the leader of the Peelite 'party' left his post-repeal loyalists in a difficult position. For the Peelites the lack of leadership from Robert Peel was highly problematic. Peel's loyalists did not want to force him to act as a leader but his reluctance to do so left them questioning his leadership..

On the same night in which Wellington was able to pass repeal through the Lords Peel's Irish Coercion bill was defeated in the commons 292 to 219. The defeat of this Bill brought a formal end to Peel's tenure as Prime minister. His defeat and resignation, although finalized by

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<sup>299</sup> Gladstone Papers 186 As cited in (J.B. Conacher, "Peel and the Peelites, 1846-1850" The English Historical Review, Vol. 73, No. 288 (Jul. 1958): 433)

the failed attempt to pass an Irish Coercion Bill, was clearly the result of the repeal of the Corn Laws. To that end Peel's resignation speech recognized the skill of the ACLL orator and MP Richard Cobden. As Peel put it, "the name which ought to be and will be associated with the success of these measures is the name of Richard Cobden. Without scruple, Sir, I attribute the success of these measures to him."<sup>300</sup> Peel's mention of Cobden in his resignation speech was a deliberate rubbing of salt in his party's wounds. The resignation of Sir Robert Peel was illustrated in the July 11<sup>th</sup> edition of *Punch*. Titled *Manager Peel Taking his Farewell Benefit* Peel is seen receiving praise from all corners of the stage except from the lone figure of Benjamin Disraeli, who is shaking his fist in disgust at Peel.<sup>301</sup> Disraeli was mocked again by *Punch* in the January 1847 issue. *Punch's* ridicule of Disraeli in the cartoon titled *The Rising Generation in Parliament* illustrated the foppish upstart plotting his next move against Peel and Parliament (Figure 2.2).<sup>302</sup> In the cartoon, Peel asks Disraeli "Well, My little man, what are you going to do this session Eh!" Disraeli responds with "Why-aw-aw-I've made arraignments-aw-to-smash-aw-everybody."

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<sup>300</sup> Robert Peel The Resignation of the Ministers June 29, 1846. *The Speeches of the Late Right Honourable Sir Robert Peel 2<sup>nd</sup> Bart. Vol. IV.* 710.

<sup>301</sup> "Manager Peel Taking his Farewell Benefit," *Punch* Vol.11. July 11, 1846.

<sup>302</sup> "The Rising Generation in Parliament," *Punch* Vol. 9. January 30, 1847.





Figure 2. The Rising Generation in Parliament

*Punch*'s depiction of Disraeli in 1847 illustrated both the continued division of Conservative forces and the widespread mistrust of Disraeli after his brutal treatment of Peel in June of 1846. Many of the Peelites felt Disraeli's attacks on the Prime Minister were completely uncalled for and could not see themselves reunited with a 'snake in the grass' such as he. Likewise the Protectionists were not too keen on a reunification either as they believed Peel had been abandoning Conservative institutions right and left in favor of national prestige and Whig appeasement.<sup>303</sup>

For the next four years both the Protectionists and Peelites sat on the same front bench with Peel and Disraeli only three seats away from one another.<sup>304</sup> Peel, after his resignation,

<sup>303</sup> J.B. Conacher, "Peel and the Peelites, 1846-1850," *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 73, No. 288 (Jul. 1958): 431.

<sup>304</sup> Duncan Watts, *Tories, Conservatives and Unionists 1815-1914* (London: Hodder & Stoughton 1994), 83.

retreated to the life of an average MP. However, the former premier could not simply withdraw himself and expect to be left alone. Although he continued to represent the borough of Tamworth Peel refrained from entering major political debates or acting as a figurehead to his Conservative loyalists. In a letter to Peel the Duke of Bedford stated that the moment Peel had chosen to repeal the Corn Laws was perfect. By suffering the political ramifications, Peel had acted as a true Conservative to preserve the nation from the class warfare that surely could have developed had the Corn Laws remained.<sup>305</sup> In his own opinion Peel agreed with the Duke of Bedford and believed that repealing the Corn Laws was a profoundly Conservative action.<sup>306</sup> It was this belief that kept many of the Peelites from joining with Russell's Whigs. His Peelites had a foot in both parties but were part of neither.

One of Peel's greatest supporters, W.E. Gladstone, followed Peel to support repeal and became an important figure in the Peelite faction. Gladstone despised what the Protectionists, especially Disraeli, had done to Peel and, together with Sir James Graham and the Earl of Aberdeen, formed the core of the Peelite leadership in the post repeal era.<sup>307</sup> However, Gladstone was critical of Peel's defeatism and Peel's complete refusal to lead the Peelite faction as he had lead the Conservative party before. Gladstone wrote that "in the midst of the struggle he [Peel] came to feel its real intensity he seems in his own mind to have substituted indifference about the destruction of the party which was so eminently HIS."<sup>308</sup> The Conservative schism that had occurred over the Corn Laws had broken the party and politics of Peel. Gladstone argued that

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<sup>305</sup> Robert Peel to the Duke of Bedford December 5, 1849. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. III.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker. 525.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> Leonard, *The Great Rivalry*, 62.

<sup>308</sup> Gladstone Papers 186 As cited in (J.B. Conacher, "Peel and the Peelites, 1846-1850" *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 73, No. 288 (Jul. 1958): 433)

Peel should take back control over what he had created: “It might have been in his power to make some provision for the holding together, or for the reconstruction, of that great party which he has reared”.<sup>309</sup> As Gladstone had argued, Peel seemingly remained defeated by the beating he had suffered at the hands of Disraeli and his refusal to move towards reconciliation meant that the party he had created, based on his principles and ideas, remained completely estranged from him.

Gladstone was not alone in his criticism of Peel’s defeatist attitude. Peel’s close associate and former Chancellor of the Exchequer, Henry Goulburn, petitioned Peel in late December of 1846, and argued that Peel should lead the Peelites as a new party against the Protectionists.

Goulburn wrote,

My own view is that the position which we ought to take would be one of observation rather than of party opposition to the government, showing ourselves constantly alive to the real interests of the country, neither refusing to support the government in opposing the mad projects of the Protectionists<sup>310</sup>

Goulburn’s petition to Peel suggested a middle ground for the Peelites. They could oppose the Protectionists by supporting Russell but they should also oppose Russell on certain issues to state their own Conservative independence. Peel’s reply to Goulburn illustrated that such appeals were to no avail. The personal abuse he had taken from Disraeli and Bentinck over protectionism had been so devastating that he could not- or would not- seek office again, and was unwilling to lead the Peelites as a new party. Peel wrote back to Goulburn arguing,

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> Goulburn to Peel 19 December 1846. Goulburn Papers 243 As cited in (J.B. Conacher “Peel and the Peelites, 1846-1850” *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 73, No. 288 (Jul. 1958): 433).

As I am not prepared to enter into that combination-as from feeling which I cannot control the necessity of resuming power would be perfectly odious to me. I am wholly disqualified for the reorganization of a party.<sup>311</sup>

Peel's defeatist attitude towards party reorganization after repeal meant that while he was the 'leader' of the Peelites he refused to actually lead them anywhere. Since repeal the majority of the frontbench had abandoned the Conservative party, and formed the Peelite faction. Arguably the Peelites had a strong talent pool, but with the lack of guidance and direction from Peel it left many questioning the future of the Peelite faction.

The four years after repeal were ones of great frustration for Peel's loyalists. His defeatist attitude and refusal to act as a leader meant that his supporters were stuck between the Whigs and the Protectionists with virtually no direction. Peelite Conservatives like Gladstone and Goulburn expressed disappointment with Peel. Their disapproval of Peel's leadership centered around his desire to have them support every measure of the Whig government without any restriction. Their criticism in this regard was that if they were to support the government unconditionally how could they maintain their independence as Peelites? Gladstone and Goulburn set up meetings in 1849 with Peel to discuss their policy over the repeal of the Navigation Acts. To their embarrassment, Peel was unwilling to support any kind of 'conditional legislation' for Peelite support of repeal and desired to see Russell's government remain undefeated.<sup>312</sup> Peel believed that a second battle over free trade and protection would take place if Russell's government was defeated, and that to prevent a re-imposition of protectionism, Russell's government had to stand.<sup>313</sup> This unconditional support for the

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> Conacher, "Peel and the Peelites," 452.

<sup>313</sup> Robert Peel to Sir James Graham July 24, 1849. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. IV.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 523.

government was tolerated by many of the Peelites and the Navigation Acts were successfully repealed.

To the Peelites, the repeal of the Navigation Acts signaled the last hope the Protectionists had to reinstate protectionism. As Graham wrote, “they are carrying on a Conservative Government, and to keep the ship afloat they have to pitch over, day by day.”<sup>314</sup> Graham’s metaphor of bailing out a sinking ship illustrated that the Protectionist support of protectionism was slowly undoing itself. The reality as of late 1849 was that protectionist principles were becoming more and more unfashionable and unrealistic. Therefore many of the Peelites did not share Peel’s fear of a coming second battle of protection versus free trade. They believed that sooner, rather than later, the Protectionists had to abandon protectionism for their own sake. Peel’s fear of the Protectionists implementing a New Corn Law was, by late 1849, becoming increasingly unrealistic. However he still believed that until the Protectionists could no longer re-introduce protection the Peelites had to support the Russell government in all its endeavors.<sup>315</sup>

For four years, the Peelites had given the Whig government their firm support, in every matter of policy. Their alliance remained close until the Don Pacifico debate of 1850. This incident illustrated that although Peel believed in supporting the Whigs, to prevent the revival of Protectionism, Peel and the Peelites had not entered into a union with Russell’s party.<sup>316</sup> Peel’s response to the government’s (especially Lord Palmerston’s) actions during the Don Pacifico affair illustrated his dedication to Conservative principles. To him the irresponsible behavior on the part of the government went against the principle of a careful approach to all matters for the

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> Sir James Graham to Robert Peel April 3, 1850. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. IV.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 536.

<sup>316</sup> Sir James Graham to Robert Peel April 7, 1850. *Robert Peel From his Private Papers Vol. IV.* ed. Charles Stuart Parker 541.

good of the nation that he had advocated for his entire life. The debate focused on the compensation of a British subject who had been attacked in Athens. The subject, Don Pacifico, had appealed to the Greek government for compensation for loss of property and when that was denied he appealed to the British. It was in Peel's opinion that the response by the British government to pressure the Greeks, through military blockade, to compensate Pacifico was outrageous. The blockading of Greece's main port by a British naval squadron caused diplomatic tensions between Greece and Britain, which was supposedly under British protection. This poorly managed diplomacy was something which Peel felt was not right, and he argued that the Peelites ought not to remain silent. The speech Peel delivered on June 28<sup>th</sup> 1850 was his last recorded speech in the House of Commons and was one not unworthy of being his final political statement. Lord Palmerston had argued that it was the duty of the British government to protect its citizens all over the world and he invoked the phrase '*Civis Romanus sum*' (I am a Roman citizen) to support his reasoning.<sup>317</sup> Peel's response showed no compromise of principle in its delivery. He argued that Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston's actions in securing compensation for the British subject Don Pacifico were extreme and not an act of careful, well thought out diplomacy. As Peel argued,

Diplomacy is a costly engine for maintaining peace, a remarkable instrument used by civilised nations for the purpose of preventing war. Unless it be used to appease the angry passions of individual men and check the feelings which arise out of national resentment, it is an instrument not only costly but mischievous.<sup>318</sup>

Peel's final speech concerning the approach by the government to such diplomacy suggested that such actions were not only rash but also outright irresponsible. The government should not have

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<sup>317</sup> Lord Palmerston's speech on the Affairs of Greece June 25, 1850. *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. CXII § § 380-444 § 444.

<sup>318</sup> Robert Peel. The Affairs of Greece June 28, 1850. *Speeches of the Late Right Honourable Robert Peel, Bart Peel Speeches*, Vol. IV. 853.

taken such a heavy-handed action and acted without careful consideration for the broader national interest, the main touchstone of Peel's entire career.

Tragically, the very next day, while out riding Peel was thrown from his horse and succumbed to his injuries only three days later on July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1850. The Prime Minister, John Russell's tribute to Peel, noted that Peel's actions both before and during the Corn Law crisis had crafted him into the finest statesman of his age.<sup>319</sup> The Conservative/Protectionist reaction to Peel's death also came with praise, despite the remaining feelings of his betrayal over protectionism. Disraeli wrote that despite Peel's desertion from his own party twice (Catholic emancipation and the Corn Laws) he was able to accomplish reforms of which the Whigs could only have dreamed.<sup>320</sup> Peel's legacy was recognized by his allies and opponents alike. Peel's Tamworth Conservatism had established the fundamental idea behind a political party based around the preservation of institutions central to the state through careful reform. His Tamworth Manifesto was the key document behind this idea, and outlined how Conservatism was to approach reform and guide institutions of the state from the past into the present.

With the untimely death of Peel the leadership of the Peelites shifted to W.E. Gladstone, Henry Goulburn, the Earl of Aberdeen, and Lord Ripon.<sup>321</sup> While each of these former Conservatives had been critical of Peel in his last four years of life, they still remained followers of his Tamworth Conservatism. With Peel dead, the continuation of the Peelites as an independent party became difficult. Their alliance with the Whigs for the past four years had created a strong bond. Additionally, the Peelites had voted unconditionally with the Whig

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<sup>319</sup> M. Guizot. *Memoirs of Sir Robert Peel* (London: Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street 1857), 357.

<sup>320</sup> Disraeli. *Whigs and Whiggism*, 337.

<sup>321</sup> Lord Ripon had over the course of his career been a Tory, Whig, Stanlyite, Conservative, and Peelite.

government on nearly every occasion with the Don Pacifico debate being the sole exception. Peel's death in 1850 cemented the division between the Peelites and Stanley's Conservative/Protectionist party. Gladstone himself had refused to rejoin the party in which his great rival Benjamin Disraeli had unseated his hero Sir Robert Peel.<sup>322</sup> Gladstone, now at the helm of the Peelite party, would eventually become the quintessential Victorian Liberal based on the ideas of Robert Peel. His rivalry with Disraeli would see both aspects of Peel's politics (liberal and conservative) played out as the two dominant forms of political thought throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>323</sup>

Peel's coalition with the Whigs was an unhappy marriage, but one that he (and the Peelites) infinitely preferred to one with the Protectionists. His last four years of life have been observed by historians and his contemporaries alike to be the anti-climax to his political career.<sup>324</sup> However, his 'defeatism' as Gladstone had portrayed it, was not without motivation. Peel's unquestioning support for the Whigs, until his death, was done to ensure that when Stanley's Conservatives/Protectionists regained control of the government they would be unable to re-impose protection. This strategy to prevent a return to protection, some historians have argued, was why Peel never took the Peelite faction and fashioned it as a new political party. Other historians like Boyd Hilton have argued that Peel's support of the Whigs helped to fashion an alliance that would become the Liberal party.<sup>325</sup> Whatever the case, Peel's refusal to act as a leader of the Peelites, and his aversion to a return to office meant that his personal role in shaping Conservatism had ended. The final years of Sir Robert Peel's life saw the torch of his

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<sup>322</sup> Leonard, *The Great Rivalry*, 62.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>324</sup> Conacher, "Peel and the Peelites," 451.

<sup>325</sup> Hilton, 'Peel: A Reappraisal', 613.



Tamworth Conservatism being passed on to others. While his Peelite supporters namely Aberdeen, Goulburn, and Gladstone, remained highly critical of Peel's defeatist attitude after 1846, they would be instrumental in advancing their versions of Peel's ideology in the Peelite and later Liberal parties.

### The Remaking of the Conservative Party

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Conversely, the Protectionists led by Stanley, Bentinck, and Disraeli had to fashion their own party in the post-repeal era to separate it from Peel. The attempts to return to protection after the Conservative schism did not work thanks to the Peelite support for the Whig government. Additionally, the repeal of the Navigation Acts in 1849 signaled an increasingly difficult battle for the Protectionists. With both the Corn Laws and the Navigation Acts repealed Stanley had argued that the Protectionists should return to calling themselves 'Conservatives' in order to distance themselves from the growingly unpopular issue of Protectionism. Bentinck had rejected Stanley's earlier suggestion in 1848 to return to calling themselves 'the Conservative party' and advocated calling the party 'the Protectionists'. While Bentinck had some support, building a party on such a single idea (economic protectionism) was not a long term plan likely to win the support of the electorate. Stanley's attempt to return to the Conservative label was the first step towards a return to Peel's Tamworth Conservative message.<sup>326</sup> As the leading advocate Stanley could not have been a better candidate. His earlier Knowsley Creed nearly mirrored Peel's Tamworth Manifesto and the Conservatism they both shared. A decision by the Protectionists to return to Tamworth Conservatism in 1852 was decided upon only after a serious reorganization of the Conservative party, the death of a leading Protectionist and defeat of

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<sup>326</sup> Hawkings, *The Forgotten Prime Minister Vol. I*, 340.

protectionism itself. Stanley's objective in his return to Tamworth Conservatism was in part a way to reconcile the differences between the Protectionists and the Peelites but more importantly as a way to maintain a Conservative force to oppose what he saw as the destruction of state institutions under the pretext of reform.<sup>327</sup>

In the aftermath of the Corn Law crisis the Protectionists had retreated into opposition. While the Protectionist leadership struggled to maintain some type of control over the party it did not fade like the Tory party had after the Reform Bill. The Conservative/Protectionist party from 1846 until 1852 had remained a legitimate opposition to the Whigs and Peelites despite its internal fracture over the Corn Laws. The new Protectionist leaders, struggled to reestablish the party. Repeal had devastated the electoral majority that the Conservatives once had, and the Peelite support of the Whig government contributed to a brain drain of the party's best talents. Table 3 shows how the Conservative party fared in the elections of 1847 and 1852. Official figures for the Peelites were counted into the Conservative block despite internal party difference. Rough estimates suggest that out of the 325 Conservatives in 1847 about 1/3 (112) were Peelites and after the death of Peel (1850) the number had dropped further (80) by 1852 as more either returned to the Conservative party or joined the Whigs.

**General Election Results 1847 & 1852**

	<b>1847</b>	<b>1852</b>
<b>Conservatives/Peelites</b>	213/112 (325)	250/80 (330)
<b>Whigs</b>	292	324
<b>Irish Repeal</b>	36	0
<b>Chartist</b>	1	0

Table 3 Election results for 1847 & 1852<sup>328</sup>

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 340.

<sup>328</sup> Craig, British Electoral Facts 1832-1987, 5-6.

Stanley and Bentinck's dual leadership had to rebuild Conservatism as a way to prove to the electorate, that despite their opposition to repeal of the Corn Laws, theirs was the party most dedicated to preserving and maintaining the important institutions of the state. In comparison Stanley was clearly a much better leader and more pragmatic than Bentinck. However, from his position in the House of Lords he had very little control over the Protectionists in the House and he needed Bentinck's assistance to help him in the reestablishment of the Conservative party.<sup>329</sup>

The leadership of the Protectionist party in the House of Commons from 1846-1852, fell to the partnership of Bentinck and Disraeli. With Stanley in the House of Lords, Bentinck became the new 'Conservative' leader in the House of Commons. While Bentinck seems an odd choice, rather than the more cunning Disraeli, it was actually the most logical. Bentinck, the son of a Duke (William Bentinck 4<sup>th</sup> Duke of Portland), was the best representative the Protectionists could have and trust. Disraeli on the other hand was not a landed aristocrat and as the son of a converted Jew he was still perceived as an outsider. Additionally, his ungentlemanly attacks, both personal and political, against Peel made him a suspicious figure, even to the Protectionists.

Bentinck, now the head of the Protectionist Conservatives in the Commons, took every opportunity to attack the Peelites with ferocity equal to that which he had demonstrated during the Corn Law debates. In one instance, Bentinck offended Gladstone so badly that any reconciliation with Gladstone and other leading Peelites proved impossible.<sup>330</sup> Stanley, as head of the Protectionist Conservatives, attempted to keep Bentinck in check but Bentinck seemed to follow his own rules. The growing rift between Bentinck and Stanley was not going to heal

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<sup>329</sup> Angus Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister: The 14th Earl of Derby Vol. II Achievement 1851-1869* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011), 3.

<sup>330</sup> Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister Vol. I*, 316.

anytime soon and Bentinck's leadership in the Commons seemed to take direction away from Stanley as Conservative party leader.

The election of 1847 had seen the election of a single Jewish member, who like Daniel O'Connell (A Catholic Irishman) twenty years earlier, was prohibited from sitting in the House. The Whig government had proposed an amendment allowing the member to sit but Stanley and other Conservatives opposed the measure. However, both Bentinck and Disraeli (for personal reasons), supported the Bill to emancipate the Jews. Disraeli's speech in support of this measure was received by the government as brave but called blasphemous by his own party. His statement: "where is your Christianity if you do not believe in their Judaism?" was not well received by Stanley or many other Protectionists.<sup>331</sup> The bill passed its third reading in the Commons in May 1848 but was defeated by Stanley and the Protectionists in the House of Lords. Bentinck's subsequent resignation as Conservative leader in the Commons was a direct result of his failure to gather sufficient Protectionist support for the Jewish emancipation bill.

Bentinck's resignation left a gaping hole in the leadership of the Commons. Stanley pleaded with Bentinck to reconsider his resignation but Bentinck refused. With Disraeli suggested as a potential candidate Stanley instead offered the position to the Marquess of Granby. Stanley's mistrust of Disraeli remained strong both after his 'blasphemous' speech over Jewish emancipation and his memorable verbal destruction of the former Prime Minister. However, Granby upon realizing the weight of the office, resigned and the Conservative Protectionists in the Commons were left without a leader.<sup>332</sup> Bentinck still refused to return to the post and Stanley, hesitant to pass up Disraeli a second time, left the post vacant. In his

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<sup>331</sup> Disraeli's Speech on the Disabilities of the Jews, December 16, 1847. *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. XCV § § 1321-1330 § 1325.

<sup>332</sup> Hawkings, *The Forgotten Prime Minister Vol. II*, 3.

opinion, as long as Bentinck was still in the Commons, he could act as unofficial leader and Stanley could avoid dealing with Disraeli.

By early 1848 Stanley had given up on reviving Protectionism and had resolved upon a return to Conservatism.<sup>333</sup> The greatest opponent to this abandonment was, of course, Lord George Bentinck. In his exchanges with Bentinck, Stanley made it clear that the political atmosphere had changed, and that a leader and his party had to act in unison. Stanley wrote to Bentinck explaining the fundamental problem of Peel's government was that he failed to follow his own party. As he put it, "Peel's great error had always been disregarding the opinion of his party, whenever it did not exactly square with his own; and I am confident that no man in these days can hope to lead a party who cannot make up his mind sometime to follow it."<sup>334</sup> Stanley's comment to Bentinck was designed to mitigate some of the damages between the two and realign the Protectionist leadership in both Houses. But it was impossible for Bentinck to accept the 'appeasement' of free trade. To accept the repeal of the Corn Laws and the abandonment of protectionism was to accept Peel's Conservative apostasy, the very thing he had risen to fight against.

In one sense Stanley's problem of leadership in the Commons deepened when, late in September of 1848, Lord George Bentinck's body was discovered after he failed to arrive at a dinner party. The unexpected death of Bentinck from a heart attack meant that once again Stanley was going to have to address the issue of party leader in the Commons. Before his death Bentinck had been acting as the unofficial party leader in the Commons. With Bentinck dead,

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<sup>333</sup> Hawkings, *The Forgotten Prime Minister Vol. I*, 340.

<sup>334</sup> Stanley to Bentinck 27<sup>th</sup> October 1847 Derby Manuscripts Volume II 177 (as cited in Robert Stewart. *The Politics of Protection: Lord Derby and the Protectionist Party 1841-1852* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971) 122.)

Disraeli quickly took it upon himself to act as unofficial leader of the Conservative/Protectionist party in the Commons.<sup>335</sup> Although Stanley still did not particularly like Disraeli, seeing Disraeli as a bit of an upstart, he recognized him as the only remaining Conservative with any real merit. Although Stanley mistrusted Disraeli he was keen to avoid the same fate that had befallen Peel. With Disraeli already acting as unofficial leader in the Commons, Stanley succumbed to his initiative and finally offered Disraeli the position as the official leader of the Commons in January of 1849.

The following two years were especially brutal for Stanley's Protectionists. In the aftermath of the death of Bentinck, the Conservatives had a greater problem, the future of protectionism. The repeal of the Navigation Acts in 1849 spelled the greatest defeat for protection as a national policy since the repeal of the Corn Laws. Stanley realized that with the Navigation Acts repealed and Bentinck dead protection was no longer a feasible base for the party.<sup>336</sup> Stanley's wish to abandon protectionism (not endorse free trade) as an official party doctrine had been a point of tension between Stanley and Bentinck but with Bentinck's death Stanley now had the opportunity to begin a return to Conservatism. This 'return' was clearly designed to bring the Protectionists back towards the political center and revive to the successful ideas that both Stanley and Peel had held during the formative years of the Conservative party. To maintain the support of Lord Bentinck's allies, Stanley had to carefully craft the language with which the Conservatives would abandon protectionism. Both Stanley and the new leader of the Commons, Disraeli, agreed that a return to the Corn Laws and protectionist policy was

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<sup>335</sup> Disraeli , *Lord George Bentinck*, 88.

<sup>336</sup> Hawkings, *The Forgotten Prime Minister Vol. I*, 341.

impossible and politically damaging.<sup>337</sup> However, their actions in 1846 had to be justified in some way. They agreed that the battle over the Corn Laws had to be about party unity and response to the will of the electorate. Disraeli stated that the election of 1841 was about the support of protection and in 1846 Peel had acted against that decision as well as the will of his party in favor of external forces.<sup>338</sup> In this way, the protectionist rebellion against Peel was wholly justified on ethical not ideological grounds.

The abandonment of protectionist policies was not an easy pill for the Protectionists to swallow, but a necessary one. Stanley's desire to return his party to the political center required that protectionism be set aside, not abandoned. Protectionist organizations like the CAPS had struggled with the weakened position of protectionism after the repeal of the Corn Laws. The farmers within the society had advocated for the total repeal of the Malt tax ever since the Corn Laws were repealed in 1846. However, this anti-protectionist action from within a protection society was very disturbing to Richmond and Stanley. Farmers within the organization in February of 1849 had voted for the third year in a row that the Conservative party, or what was left of it, should advocate for the repeal of the Malt tax. This suggestion was met with disgust from the Protectionists who argued that such a repeal, like the repeal of the Corn Laws, was no gain to the English farmer.<sup>339</sup> Additionally, Protectionist members of the society argued that since the repeal of the Corn Laws the decline in the price of bread had not been as substantial as ACLL propaganda had suggested it would be.<sup>340</sup> Therefore they argued that repealing the Malt tax would

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>338</sup> Disraeli's Speech on the third reading of the Bill for the Repeal of the Corn Laws, May 15, 1846. *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. LXXXVI § §616-727 §709-719.

<sup>339</sup> Harvey Wyatt, *On the Repeal of the Malt Tax* (London: Longman and Co. 1852), 4.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 7.

have no long term benefits to the farmers. However, this argument did not settle matters and the farmers in the society continued to call for repeal. In February of 1850, Stanley knew that the farmers in the society would vote again to call for the Malt tax to be repealed and that the Protectionist leaders would again refuse to act. Carefully calculating his moves Stanley knew that he could never convince his party to advocate repealing a protectionist measure but also realized, that with the Navigation Acts and Lord Bentinck gone, protectionism was a dying platform. Therefore Stanley and other Protectionists argued that the defense of protection should be diverted to other institutions and that opposition should be focused selectively on the things most tied to free-trade and economic liberalism.

The notion that free-trade and economic liberalism went hand in hand with a debased democracy and the dismantling of the aristocracy, the empire, and the crown was the primary reason protectionism remained vital for Conservatives until 1852. Stanley himself had argued in 1846 that repeal was an economic abandonment of the colonial empire.<sup>341</sup> The ‘abandonment’ of protection by Stanley’s Conservatives was not to abandon those ideas associated with it, such as empire and the aristocracy. Instead, the defense of empire and the preservation of the rights of the aristocracy would take the place of protection. With the decline of the CAPS the newly formed National Association of the Protection of British Industry and Capital [NAPIC] wrote a report that illustrated the changing perception of protectionism. The NAPIC argued that the agitation led by the ACLL was only the start of a greater ‘war of the classes’ directed at the aristocracy.<sup>342</sup> This war of the classes, Protectionists argued, was part of an attempt to tear down

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<sup>341</sup> House of Lords, Corn Importation Bill- Adjourned Debate - May 25,1846. *Hansard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. LXXXVI § 1210-1286 § 1129.

<sup>342</sup> George Frederick Young, *National Association for the Protection of British Industry and Capital [NAPIC] Tracts on Protection: No 4: The War of the Classes* (London :John Ollivier 1850), 1.



the traditional institutions supported by the aristocracy. These same Protectionists argued in 1850, as they had in 1844, for an alliance of the working classes and aristocracy to defend the traditional ways of life from destruction by the manufacturing class. Additionally, members of the NAPIC argued that organizations like the ACLL had used the repeal of the Corn Laws as the starting point to “ulterior projects of a political nature.”<sup>343</sup> Democracy and the potential destruction of the aristocracy were of great concern to members of the NAPIC and the Conservative party. These ‘ulterior projects’ identified by the NAPIC were arguably aimed at destroying the political power of the aristocracy and the monarchy. Therefore protectionism was one of the first things targeted by these radical forces. As the NAPIC suggested, defending other aspects such as the power of the monarchy and the aristocracy could help to prevent a ‘war of the classes’. In order for Stanley to rehabilitate the Conservative party and convince its members to ‘abandon’ protection he would have to convince the Protectionists that defending protectionism was actually ancillary to maintaining the institutions that truly needed to be defended.

To Stanley it was clear that the remaining protectionist arguments were losing ground quickly. However, convincing the Protectionists to abandon protection was as likely as getting them to accept free-trade. What Stanley needed to do was to convince the Protectionists to focus their energy on other things associated with free trade such as democracy, and the dismantling of the aristocracy and the empire. Therefore, the ‘abandonment’ of the issue of protection in 1852 was more or less a reorganization of the Conservative hierarchy of interests, placing protection on a lower level of importance. The Conservative position on protection in 1852 was summarized by Disraeli in blatant terms: “Protection is not only dead but damned.”<sup>344</sup> His

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>344</sup> William Flavelle Monypenny, George Earle Buckle. *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli: Earl of Beaconsfield, Volume III* 241.

statement concerning the death of protectionism argued that, he, like Peel in 1829 with Catholic emancipation, had to accept repeal of the Corn Laws as a necessary reform. The final acceptance of Corn Law repeal by the Conservatives in 1852 was not surrender to free trade ideology but rather the acceptance of a policy that was now irrevocable.

The Conservative leadership after 1852 solidified around Stanley and Disraeli. The collapse of Russell's ministry in February of 1852 over borough reform brought the Conservatives back into power for the first time since the repeal of the Corn Laws. The formation of Stanley's first ministry (February 23 1852-December 19 1852), known as the "who, who?" ministry, saw to the final reformation of the Conservative party and the 'abandonment 'of protectionism.<sup>345</sup> The general election of 1852 saw a reorganization of the Conservative hierarchy of constitutional issues. Stanley, after assuming the office of Prime Minister, was more concerned about reforms to Parliament than the continuation of protection.<sup>346</sup> Protectionism, which had suffered a colossal defeat in 1849 with the repeal of the Navigation Acts, was shifted to a lower level of importance. Stanley's re-organization of the Conservative hierarchy led his government to address the more important perceived threats to the Church and other institutions of the state rather than focus on the dying idea of protectionism.<sup>347</sup> Stanley believed that the Conservatives should avoid opposing all reforms or else they may suffer defeat against the growing coalition between the Peelites and the Whigs. His suggestion to have his party support reforms, especially Parliamentary, was a return to the Conservative idea that Stanley had embraced in 1835. Stanley's argument to his party was that to support the

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<sup>345</sup> Stanley's first ministry called the "Who Who? ministry "relates to the near deaf Duke of Wellington's reaction to hearing the naming of the ministers.

<sup>346</sup> Hawkings, *The Forgotten Prime Minister Vol. II*, 4.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

institutions of the state, especially the power of the aristocracy, the Conservatives would have to work for parliamentary reform.<sup>348</sup>

Stanley's return to Tamworth Conservatism began with the reorganization of the hierarchy of Conservative importance. Stanley could not feasibly convince the party to abandon protectionism in its entirety. However, as John Wilson Croker argued in March of 1852 protection was subordinate to the 'immediate and imperious' dangers to the Constitution, Church, and State. Croker argued that by placing economic protection on a lower level of importance Conservatives could focus on 'the most pressing duty of the country, to try and preserve itself from a revolutionary government.'<sup>349</sup> The reorganization of the Conservative hierarchy allowed for Stanley's Conservatives to 'abandon' protectionism and reinstate Tamworth Conservatism as its core strategy. This decision by the party to pick and choose its battles, and selectively oppose measures that were deemed unnecessary, was identical to the message Peel had advocated in his Tamworth Manifesto nearly twenty years prior. Additionally, Stanley had come to accept that the repeal of the Corn Laws and the decline of protection were permanent. Much like Peel had done in the case of Catholic emancipation and the Great Reform Bill, Stanley too had to see repeal as a necessary reform to preserve the overall nature of the government and so too did the Protectionists. By accepting that repeal was irrevocable and necessary Stanley had followed his, and Peel's, principles that had existed as Conservative party canon since 1834.

The vote of no confidence against the Russell government in 1852 allowed Stanley and the Conservatives a chance to return to government. While Stanley (officially called The 14<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> Hawkings, *The Forgotten Prime Minister Vol. II*, 4-5.

<sup>349</sup> John Wilson Croker, "The Old and New Ministries" *Quarterly Review* Vol. 90 March 1852, 567-592, 582.

Earl of Derby) had accepted that protection needed to be abandoned many of his Conservatives still did not. Stanley was pressured by Lord Beaumont to say whether or not he planned for his Ministry to bring back the Corn Laws. Artfully dodging the question, Stanley assured his party that such a matter would not be addressed unless it needed to be.<sup>350</sup> Upon forming his Ministry, Stanley wanted to avoid another mishap with Disraeli as Peel had in 1841. Appointing Disraeli as the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his 1852 Ministry, Stanley began to work with Disraeli to reinstate Tamworth Conservatism. Disraeli may have looked like a bit of a misfit surrounded by aristocrats and landed gentry, but he was twice as bright as any of them and people like Stanley had to recognize Disraeli for his talent. In comparison, the remainder of the Conservative party lacked quality orators or basic competence but, what it lacked Disraeli could make up for tenfold, as so Disraeli thought!

The continuation of the Conservative party, albeit divided, owes its post-repeal existence to Peel's original design of the party. Stanley and, to some degree, Disraeli were keen to return to an era that had certain Conservative ideological characteristics before the split over the Corn Laws. Stanley's objective after 1852 was to steer the Conservative party out of the trouble it had placed itself in.<sup>351</sup> For him it was more than a debate between protection and free trade, it was about creating a party that could carefully move the old establishment into the nineteenth century.<sup>352</sup> Critics and historians alike have observed that the Conservative party under Stanley (Derby) from 1846-1868 was badly disoriented. However, the twenty-two years of Stanley's leadership illustrated a return to Conservatism. Under Stanley the Conservatives were led by a

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<sup>350</sup> Benjamin Disraeli to Sarah Disraeli March 17, 1852. *Benjamin Disraeli Letters Vol. IV*. ed. Michael W. Pharand et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1987), 40.

<sup>351</sup> Hawkings, *The Forgotten Prime Minister Vol. II*, 2.

<sup>352</sup> Stewart, *The Politics of Protection*, 222.

man, schooled in the successes and failures of Conservative, as well as Whig, government. The irony of Stanley's leadership was that the man who brought back Peel's Tamworth Conservatism, and the electoral success that accompanied it, was exactly the kind of man who Disraeli's characters Tadpole and Taper had mocked in *Coningsby* in 1844.<sup>353</sup> Stanley's tenure as party leader saw a revival of Peel's Tamworth Conservatism and ensured that under his leadership the Conservatives would return to be the moderate custodians of the institutions of Church and State. It was only fitting that Stanley would lead this post-repeal return to Conservatism as his original Knowsley Creed had so closely mirrored Peel's own Tamworth Conservatism.<sup>354</sup> The principles that Stanley, and Peel, had stood for again became the foundation of the Conservative party. Stanley's leadership and return to Conservatism in 1852 would bear witness to his determination to make the Conservatives part of the political center, something he had advocated for in his Knowsley Creed nearly twenty years earlier.

While Stanley remained the effective leader of the Conservative party until his death in 1869, Disraeli would also take the mantle of Peel and begin to build a new Conservative party beyond both Peel's Tamworth Conservatism and Stanley's Knowsley Creed. Disraeli's Conservatism would honor the ideas of careful reform set in motion by Peel and expand them to give Conservatism strong principles. First described in *Coningsby* and *Sybil* Disraeli began to establish a definition for a post-Tamworth Conservative ideology. It was through these ideas that Disraeli had professed in his earlier writings, commenting on Robert Peel's lack of principles, prescriptions, or preparations for the future that helped to shape the establishment of a

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<sup>353</sup> Disraeli, *Coningsby*, 41.

<sup>354</sup> Smith-Stanley, "Inauguration of Lord Stanley," 3

Conservative political ideology after the death of Peel.<sup>355</sup> Peel's position on the Maynooth Grant, the Repeal of the Corn Laws and Catholic emancipation two decades earlier were evidence enough that Peel had betrayed Tory principles. However, his 'betrayal' was not a form of Whig appeasement but an attempt to change the Tories into a new Conservative party.

As Disraeli wrote in *Sybil*, Peel's party was "an old crazy factor, vamped up, and white-washed into decency" that is to say, Peel had attempted to fix the problems the Tories faced in 1832, but Disraeli argued that they were not repaired by his Manifesto in 1834.<sup>356</sup> Peel's Conservative party was simply a disguised version of the old dysfunctional Tory party. As some historians have suggested it would be Disraeli's politics that would unify the ideas of Empire, the Church and the franchise together into his notion of one-nation Conservatism.<sup>357</sup> However, Disraeli's Conservatism could not have succeeded without the foundation that Peel had created in 1834 and Stanley had revived in 1852. Disraeli's Conservatism was to function as an ideology for both the rich and the poor. Much like Peel's Tamworth Conservatism Disraeli's one-nation Conservatism was meant to fully change the Tories into Conservatives. The legacy of Peel's Conservatism that survived the Corn Law crisis laid the crucial foundation upon which the mid-Victorian generation built its politics. It was through this second application of Peel's Tamworth Conservatism by Stanley starting in 1852, and strengthened later by Disraeli, that the Conservative party was brought back from its schism in 1846. It remains an important facet that is often overlooked, that Peel's role in setting up the Conservative party may have

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<sup>355</sup> Disraeli, *Coningsby*, 41.

<sup>356</sup> Disraeli, *Sybil*, 132.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

personally ended in 1846, but his ideas laid the foundation on which Stanley and Disraeli were able to expand upon Peel's original Conservative message.

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The legacy of Tamworth Conservatism as this thesis demonstrated continued beyond Peel and did not end with Conservative division in 1846 or the death of Peel in 1850. The developmental process of Tamworth Conservatism that began in the 'liberal' Tory era was both a product of the times and of Robert Peel. The central tenets of Peel's Tamworth Conservatism were to accept previous reforms, preserve important institutions, pursue further needed reforms, both civil and ecclesiastical, and to refuse to accept unnecessary reforms that were perceived to be so radical that they threatened to undermine the very nature of British society. These fundamental principles of Peel's Tamworth Conservatism became incredibly influential and despite their detractors were the new type of politics for the nineteenth century.

Peel's legacy, as Norman Gash has stated, was one of great importance for the formation of modern British politics and the transformation of Britain into a democracy. The legacy of Peel's Tamworth Conservatism however, was not so much a pragmatic centrist outlook as Gash had suggested.<sup>358</sup> Peel's politics have been reevaluated and in light of this work it can be concluded that Peel's Tamworth Conservatism demonstrated an adherence to a consistent form of politics dating back to the Liverpool era. An assessment of Peel's early political career illustrates that his acceptance of Catholic emancipation only occurred after nearly a decade of his opposition to such a reform.<sup>359</sup> According to Gash, his change of heart was part of his pragmatic centrist ideology. However, his anti-reformist stance on Catholic emancipation and the later Reform Bill makes this claim problematic. His rationalization behind this change of heart over

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<sup>358</sup> Gash, *Peel*, 306.

<sup>359</sup> Hilton, "Peel: A Reappraisal," 614.

Catholic emancipation and the expansion of the franchise was to maintain the stability of the state. In his memoirs, Peel argued that Catholic emancipation and the Repeal of the Corn Laws were the most difficult but necessary reforms that he ever had to support.<sup>360</sup> Therefore it may be difficult to position Peel as a great reformer through an investigation of only his early career. However, Gash may be correct in his argument that Peel, after 1832, sought to pursue reform as a pragmatic way to conserve the state. Peel's pragmatism, however, was not the sole ideology behind his Tamworth Conservatism. As Hilton argued, Peel's politics were more than a reaction to the necessary changes that the nation required.

Boyd Hilton's 1979 reevaluation of Peel's politics argues that the centrist approach to Peel by Gash had ignored the era in which Peel's politics took root. A thorough examination of Peel's entire political career illustrates that Peel was not a pragmatic centrist whose politics changed to support reforms, but rather that he had always been a follower of a certain type of 'liberalism' dating back to the Liverpool government. Peel, in Hilton's revision, remained a rigid doctrinaire who was committed to free trade as far back as the 1820s.<sup>361</sup> Hilton argued that while Peel rightfully remains the father of the Conservative party he was also the progenitor of Gladstonian Liberalism. This argument can be verified in the continuation of many of Peel's ideas by the Peelites, especially Gladstone and Aberdeen, after Peel's death in 1850.<sup>362</sup> However, this evaluation of Peelite Conservatism only focuses on the direct heirs of Peel's politics. As Angus Hawking in his work on Lord Stanley suggests, a re-adoption of Peelite Conservatism by the Protectionists, starting with the name change in 1852, indicates that Peel's

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<sup>360</sup> Peel. *Memoirs by the Right Honourable Sir Robert Peel*, 2.

<sup>361</sup> Hilton, 'Peel: A Reappraisal', 589.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, 589.



Conservatism was applied to the Conservative party a second time. However, Hawking does not pursue this argument fully, suggesting that the Protectionists revisited the politics of Peel after the slow death of protectionism.<sup>363</sup> Therefore, unlike the arguments made by previous historians, as this work has argued, Peel held a certain set of values that guided him throughout his entire career.

As this thesis has argued, these values, different from mainstream Tory values, had their roots in the 'liberal' Tory era of Lord Liverpool as Hilton argued. However, unlike Hilton, this work has shown that Peel's politics were not a simple continuation of 'liberal' Toryism, but rather a hybridization of Pittie Tory values and Whiggish liberalism. This hybridization was the fundamental element of Peel's Tamworth Conservatism. Expressed explicitly in his Tamworth Manifesto the ideas such as necessity of reform for any and all state institutions, the representation of the people (both enfranchised and those who were not), and the pursuit of reforms were all guiding themes that were consistent throughout Peel's political career. These themes have been mistaken by Gash as centrist pragmatism and by Hilton as the continuation of 'liberal' Toryism. While Peel's contemporary critics argued that he had betrayed Conservative values multiple times Peel himself argued that he had advocated dramatic measures out of their necessity to maintain the security of the state.<sup>364</sup> Peel's statement in his memoirs arguably supports this claim that he was consistent with his political beliefs and that charges of apostasy were without warrant.

He designed his new party to appeal to an audience beyond the old electorate and to create a constructive ministry. Peel's Conservatives would, through these means, turn the defeat

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<sup>363</sup> Hawkings, *The Forgotten Prime Minister Vol. II*, 404.

<sup>364</sup> Peel, *Memoirs by the Right Honourable Sir Robert Peel*, 2.

of 1832 into a series of successive victories leading up to a Conservative (Tory) triumph in 1841. Peel's electoral victory in 1841 was followed by a successful ministry built on necessary reforms to the institutions of the state. Amendments to the Corn Laws, the passage of the Factory Act and reforms to the Church were supported by a majority of his party and were successful examples of his Tamworth Conservatism in action. However, his decision to repeal the Corn Laws in late 1845 broke his party in half. Peel's personal beliefs over protectionism and the Corn Laws have been a long debated and heavily politicized topic. Gash and other historians have argued that Peel came to be enlightened by free trade principles in 1845, while others have claimed Peel had converted to free trade as early as 1820 (Hilton). Regardless of his own position on free trade, in 1820, 1841, 1846, or 1850, the important ideas behind his Conservatism during the Corn Law crisis manifested themselves as a reform to preserve the peace and security of the nation, a political principle that had remained consistent his entire life. His consistencies, rather than individual pragmatic decisions, are what shaped the modern political discourse in Britain.

As this thesis demonstrates, a reevaluation of Peel's politics cannot undervalue his political achievements and the changes his Tamworth Conservatism initiated. Peel's 1834 Tory revival had returned the party from its disaster of 1832.<sup>365</sup> Peel's early political career in the Liverpool government and his acceptance of Catholic emancipation in 1829 set his own form of Conservatism in place: one that was built around the need to pursue necessary reforms for the security of the state. Peel's influence across the political system helped to convince the political elites (both Whigs and Conservatives) to become responsive to the growing demands of the working classes, through changes to factory labor legislation and eventually repeal of the Corn Laws. His idea of Conservatism was often critiqued for its lack of principles or a definitive ideology. Members of Peel's party often questioned where the line was to be drawn when it

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<sup>365</sup> Coleman, *Conservatism and the Conservative Party in Nineteenth Century Britain*, 5.

came to the reform of state institutions. The Corn Law crisis of 1846 was the watershed moment in Peel's political career that challenged his Conservatism. The decision to repeal the Corn Laws cost Peel his political career and the unity of his new Conservative party. However, the Conservative split fueled by Peel's decision to repeal the Corn Laws was not the end of Peel's Tamworth Conservatism. The Protectionist faction lead by Stanley, Disraeli and Bentinck begin to revive the Conservative party after the Corn Law crisis and looked back to Peel's Tamworth Conservatism for guidance. The changes that Peel helped to initiate set about a new political discourse in Britain that would be built upon the necessity of reform.

Peel's politics whether 'Liberal' or 'Conservative' left a substantial mark on the political discourse of modern Britain. The making of the Conservative party through Peel's Tamworth Conservatism as this thesis has shown was an active process of transforming the old Tory party into a new Conservative one. As Disraeli later suggested the greatest strength of Peel's Conservative party was its ability to rally under any disadvantage.<sup>366</sup> Peel had attempted to redesign the Tories for a modern age far too rapidly and without taking into account the diversity of opinions within his Conservative coalition. That task of reforming the Conservative ideology would fall on Lord Stanley who, after the Corn Law crisis would look back to Peel's earlier form of Conservatism and apply it a second time, bringing about the complete transformation of the Tories into Conservative Party that Peel had initiated in 1834.

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<sup>366</sup> Disraeli, *Lord George Bentinck*, 78.

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