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RICHARD COBDEN: IDEAS AND STRATEGIES IN ORGANIZING THE FREE-TRADE MOVEMENT IN BRITAIN

Today it is easy to be despondent about the prospects of bringing about radical change in public policy or the political and social order. Policies that are widely recognized to be foolish and self-defeating (such as the "war on drugs") seem to be immoveable. There are a plethora of analyses of faults in policy or in political institutions, but most of these lack the crucial ingredient of a plausible way of getting from A to B, from where we are now to somewhere better. However, history gives us a number of counterexamples that should lead us to think more carefully about how to understand both the need for certain kinds of political change and the ways of achieving this. One of the most striking of these counterexamples is the career of ***Richard Cobden*** *and in particular the way that he pioneered forms of advocacy and organization in the Anti-Corn Law League in the late 1830s and early 1840s that were highly effective in his own time, had long-lasting effects, and are still relevant today. The Lead Essay has been written by Steve Davies who is education director at the Institute of Economic Affairs in London. The commentators are Gordon Bannerman who is a freelance writer and researcher, Professor Anthony Howe who is professor of modern history at the University of East Anglia, and Sarah Richardson who is associate professor of history at the University of Warwick.*

RICHARD COBDEN: IDEAS AND STRATEGIES IN ORGANIZING THE FREE-TRADE MOVEMENT IN BRITAIN

by Stephen Davies

Today it is easy to be despondent about the prospects of bringing about radical change in public policy or the political and social order. Policies that are widely recognized to be foolish and self-defeating (such as the "war on drugs") seem to be immoveable. There are a plethora of analyses of faults in policy or in political institutions, but most of these lack the crucial ingredient of a plausible way of getting from A to B, from where we are now to somewhere better. Moreover, there is now an entire literature in economics and political science to tell us that this is inevitable. The incentives facing ordinary people mean that politics will always be dominated by a small number of wealthy and privileged people (political "investors");[1] the lack of impact any one voter can have means that it is rational to be ignorant, ill-informed, and apathetic;[2] the way that the benefits of policy are concentrated while the costs are widely dispersed means that the advantage is always with special interests rather than the general interest.[3] It is no surprise that the judiciary is now the favored route for political action on all sides of current debate.

However, history gives us a number of counterexamples that should lead us to think more carefully about how to understand both the need for certain kinds of political change and the ways of achieving this. When we do this we will realize that while the obstacles to change are still formidable, we can be much more optimistic and, more importantly, more effective. One of the most striking of these counterexamples is the career of Richard Cobden and in particular the way that he pioneered forms of advocacy and organization that were highly effective in his own time, had long-lasting effects, and are still relevant today.

Richard Coben

The main features of Cobden's career in Victorian politics are well known. He was a member of Parliament from 1841 to 1857 and again from 1859 to his death in 1865. During this time he was regarded as a leading political figure and was offered government office on at least two occasions. In 1860 he acted as the British government's representative in negotiating a free-trade agreement between Britain and France. Despite this, he was always a political outsider rather than a member of the inner circle, and saw himself as such. He was, however, associated with one of the great dramas of Victorian politics, the ultimately successful campaign to repeal the Corn Laws, fought between 1838 and 1846. This was more than just a change in trade policy. It meant a fundamental shift in the longer term in the fiscal basis of the British state and both symbolized and brought about a decisive move from one kind of political economy to another. There had been steady movement in this direction for some time, since the 1820s in fact, but this was still a critical moment.

Moreover, anyone who looked at British politics in 1838 with the benefit of the kind of present-day analysis described above would have decided that the odds against moving to a general policy of free trade and repealing the Corn Laws in particular were overwhelming. With a restricted franchise the control of politics and government by a privileged class was apparently stronger then than now. The obstacles and disincentives for political organization and activism by the mass of the population were also apparently more severe than they are today. The special interest that gained from agricultural protectionism (much of the landed aristocracy) was both concentrated and enormously powerful since it directly or indirectly controlled both houses of Parliament. Finally, the case for protectionism was part of a more general ideological defense of the status quo that still had a hegemonic position, despite the great reforms that had taken place since 1829.

Despite all of this, the Corn Laws were repealed. What also happened was a decisive ideological shift in the way that trade and exchange were understood. This became embedded in British popular culture to a remarkable degree, as the work of Frank Trentmann shows, which meant that the effects of the repeal were far more extensive than a simple change in trade policy.[4] Why, though, did this happen? One reason was the personal qualities of Cobden himself, his extraordinary ability as an organizer and innovator in political organization, campaigning, and education. His personal capacity, however, was effective because it was inspired by a particular kind of intellectual analysis, one that not only identified bad policy and the reasons for it while proposing an alternative, but also suggested how to bring about change. In other words, Cobden's thinking contained not only a clear sense of present evils and the alternative but also a worked-out theory of how to get from A to B that was an inherent part of the analysis itself rather than a tactical afterthought. Finally there were structural changes in British society at this time, both technological and social, that made this easier than would have been the case a hundred years before. The question for ourselves is whether there was something historically specific about Cobden's success, dependent upon the particular circumstances of his times, or alternatively that his methods and analysis are still applicable.

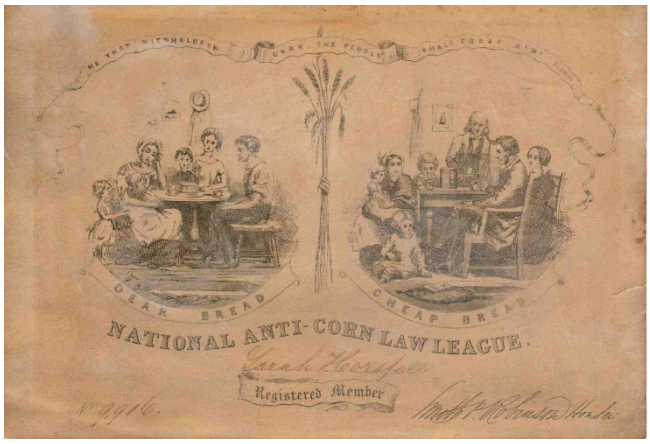
The crucial point to grasp is that Cobden's decision to organize and run a campaign to repeal the Corn Laws was tactical and derivative rather than primary. In other words

it was a consequence of a more general perspective and was chosen as being the most effective action rather than as an end in itself.

What, though, was that perspective?

Cobden's central ideas were not commonplaces and had a definite "oppositional" quality to them, but they were also widespread among people of all social ranks. They had been developed and articulated by a range of thinkers over the previous two generations. Much of this had been done by economists, and it is easy to see this as a narrowly economic way of thinking. Certainly Ricardo's theory of comparative advantage and the consequent benefits of free trade was a crucial part of the arguments of Cobden and others. However, as reading of the speeches and pamphlets of the time will show, purely economic theses as we would understand them were embedded in and incorporated into a wider kind of analysis, and it was this kind of political economy that generated an understanding of what to do in order to change things.

One obvious element was the (accurate) perception that government and its power was used by sectional interests to benefit themselves at the expense of the wider community. Government as it was at the time was understood as being simply the creature of special interests. In her life of Cobden, Wendy Hinde quotes the economist Robert Torrens as saying about the proposed Corn Law in 1815: "It would be tantamount to laying a tax upon bread, for the purpose of pensioning off the landed aristocracy. It would be nothing better than legalized robbery, taking money out of the pockets of the poor and industrious, in order to lavish it on the idle and the rich."[5] This was very much the view of Cobden and his colleagues in the Anti-Corn Law League.



Anti-Corn Law Membership Card

However, the understanding went deeper. The key insight was that government power was also the *creator* of special interest and privilege. The key terms in the Torrens quote are "industrious" and "idle" as the defining features of two kinds of social entity. On the one side were the "industrious classes," those who created wealth and gained income by work and exchange. On the other were the "idle classes," which acquired wealth and income through force and the use of political power. The problem for Cobden and his allies was not a particular policy per se but rather the nature of government and the way it created a privileged class that then used it to support itself, both directly through things such as state pensions and employment, and indirectly by effective income transfers such as those brought about by the Corn Laws. In other words the real problem was aristocratic government, and agricultural protectionism was one part of that system.

This insight also explained the connections between trade policy and other areas. Free trade was seen as promoting peace, and protectionism war, for a number of reasons and not just because greater trade relations would lead to mutual dependency and greater personal contact between the inhabitants of rival states, important as those arguments were. War, the organized use of violence, was seen as both the ultimate source of aristocratic power and an important source of support. Cobden's colleague John Bright captured this when he described British foreign policy and the wars it had led to as "an enormous system of outdoor relief for the aristocratic classes."[6] Thus to

undermine the economic power of the aristocracy and its ability to extract rents from the rest of society would also reduce its ability to maintain the war system of excessive armaments and secret diplomacy combined with regular panics about foreign threats. For Cobden this was actually the main benefit to be got from free trade, even over the enormous economic gains that would result.

The other key element in Cobden's thinking was the idea that all government ultimately rested not upon force but on opinion (as Hume had put it). In other words, the key thing was the beliefs of the mass of the population as to the rightness or otherwise of political institutions and current policy. The innovation in thinking about this was the concept of "public opinion," which came into being in Cobden's own early life. As defined by authors such as William McKinnon in 1828, public opinion was the settled view and understanding of the educated part of the population (which meant that its scope could be enlarged by education, whether formal or informal) and was formed by public discussion and conversation through a number of media, including the early forms of what we would now call the "mass media."[7] For Cobden and others this public opinion could be and often was formed and manipulated by elites through official propaganda and the stirring up of panics, but it could also be shaped by organized action on the part of private individuals. If public opinion was moved decisively, then certain kinds of institution and policy would simply become unsustainable or impossible to advocate successfully, while policy could also be moved actively in a different direction.

This explains why Cobden thought, as he said to a correspondent in 1836, "The Corn Laws are only part of a system in which the Whig and Tory Aristocracy have about an equal interest. The Colonies, the Army, Navy and Church, are, with the Corn Laws, merely accessories to our aristocratic government."[8]

Why then decide to launch a campaign to repeal the Corn Laws rather than to attack the system as a whole or some other part of it? Cobden's own correspondence shows that he considered other targets but decided on the Corn Laws because, firstly, their repeal would have far-reaching effects beyond the obvious ones (such as a decline in the price of bread and an increase in prosperity). Even more importantly, he felt that they were the weak point in the aristocratic fortress and thus a campaign on this subject was winnable. The reason was that this was a subject that directly affected and interested a huge and diverse range of people. Consequently it would be possible to extend and even in some sense create public opinion on the subject of free trade and protection (with the Corn Laws as a proxy for the general argument) in a way that would redefine the range of political possibilities. What this meant was that the key strategy had to be to create, inform, and mobilize public opinion rather than to make arguments within Parliament or to seek to influence or persuade the elite. (Not that he was averse to either of these, but they were seen as supportive rather than as primary.) This in turn meant there were practical activities that would bring this about.

It was here, in devising the kinds of activity that would bring about a revolution in opinion, that Cobden's practical organizing genius became apparent. There had been campaigns before, and there were others going on at the same time, most notably the campaign for the People's Charter, but these were not as effective as the Anti-Corn Law agitation. If we look at the amazing range of activities that Cobden and his colleagues engaged in over the eight years between 1838 and 1846, we can see it as having two main aspects. The first was the project itself. While the goal was the immediate and total repeal of the Corn Laws, the means was through what became known as "pressure from without," that is, not by lobbying or seeking to directly influence the elite.[9] This pressure, however, was not to be created through the implicit or explicit threat of disorder or large public demonstrations and aggressive demands (which were the methods of the dominant faction among the Chartists or later Irish Nationalists). Rather it was done by creating and informing public opinion. This was done by creating and then propagating a series of arguments, narratives, and images that were then picked up and internalized not only by those who were already interested or involved but also others who had previously not been concerned. To

use a current term, me may think of this as being the creation and propagation of a set of "memes."

The important point is that this was not just aimed at the "political nation," i.e., those who had the vote. Rather the idea was to create a set of settled convictions, beliefs, and opinions that could be articulated in a range of common arguments and be triggered by widely recognized narratives and images; these would be held by a very large part of the population most of whom could not vote. What this would do first, it was hoped, would be to press the entire "political nation" (and not just the part of it that actually sat in Parliament) to change its policy, partly through its becoming actually persuaded and partly through a feeling that the existing policy was not sustainable because ordinary people would simply not cooperate with it. Secondly, to the extent that this became settled it would constrain the range of policy options by making the entire policy of protectionism and all it implied impossible to take seriously as an option.

A button or badge which is probably made of wood or cardboard and which states: "No Corn Laws. We demand Total & Immediate Repeal." The call for immediate and total abolition was a deliberate strategic decision rather than agitiating for partial reform.

Medallion of the National Anti-Corn Law League. The symbol of the sheaf of wheat was commonly used by the ACLL in its propaganda.

More images about the Anti-Corn law League

This was done through a massive campaign of both education and activism. Here Cobden and his colleagues on the League Council created or perfected a whole range of methods of political mobilization and activism. These included the systematic use of mass public meetings, the use of paid and trained lecturers and public speakers, the creation of a national membership organization with local branches, the use of paid memberships and subscriptions to raise large sums of money from large numbers of geographically dispersed small donors, the use of membership lists to keep in contact with people and to identify activists, and organized education through lectures. But even more importantly, the campaign pressed its case through the production on a large scale of pamphlets and leaflets, making use of literature such as the poetry of Ebenezer Elliot,[10] using large-scale social events such as bazaars both to raise funds and to build and strengthen networks and personal contacts, and taking advantage of political events such as by-elections as a political platform.[11]

Looked at analytically, what Cobden and the League did was to educate a large number of people in a way that created an active and engaged public opinion and at the

same time, by the very way this was done, to make that public opinion more effective. This was done by mobilizing people and connecting and networking them, and above all by reducing the cost of political participation in a way that enabled a dispersed, diverse, and large group of people, each of whom had a definite but small interest, to cooperate and contribute. The fact that they were a large and general group rather than a specific and concentrated one was actually an advantage once these organizational innovations had made it possible to do this at a reduced cost.

All of this raises some interesting questions. First of all, did it actually work? Some would argue that it was in fact the conversion of members of the elite, above all Peel, that was crucial, rather than mass campaigning. There are two responses to this: firstly, while Peel's change of mind probably was a matter of genuine intellectual conversion, the shift in position of others such as Lord John Russell was more due to the effect of "pressure from without." Secondly, the real effect of the campaign was felt not just in 1846 but in the longer run. What resulted was what Trentmann describes: a popular culture in which free trade had a central place and was seen as a moral imperative. This remained the case for a long time, so that when Joseph Chamberlain tried to overturn it between 1903-6 (using exactly the same methods as Cobden) the result was an electoral disaster for his party.

On the other hand, Cobden was less successful in his great endeavor after the repeal of the Corn Laws, namely, his involvement in the organized Peace Congresses in the 1840s and 1850s. Here a similar strategy failed to bring about a shift in public thinking, and he and Bright were both decisively rebuffed with the outbreak of the Crimean War. This may suggest that there was something contingent or particular about his previous success.

Another question is the one posed at the start. Was there something peculiar about Cobden's own time that made this possible, and is it possible now? Certainly there were a range of structural developments that made this kind of action much easier, of which the most important were reductions in the cost of travel and communication via the mail, and the appearance of the cheap press and other publications. Conversely, in the course of the 20th century a number of developments raised the cost of political organization and made this kind of campaign more difficult for private actors while expanding the capacity of governments. Among these we may note the rise of electronic mass media such as radio and television and the rise (due to deliberate political choice in many cases) of suburbia as the principal living arrangement. On the other hand, it may well be that, even if that point is granted, current developments such as social media are once again reducing the costs of political mobilization. What is lacking is rather the kind of organizational skills that Cobden had and a systematic body of thought that connects theory, analysis, and action.

Endnotes

[1.] See, Ferguson, Thomas. *The Investment Theory of Party Competition and the Logic of Money-Driven Political Systems*. University of Chicago Press, 1995. Chicago, IL.

[2.] See Bryan Caplan, *The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies choose bad Policies* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 2007).

[3.] See Tullock, Gordon. *The Vote Motive* Institute of Economic Affairs, 2006 (1st ed 1976). London

[4.] See, Trentmann, Frank. *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain*. Oxford University Press, 2008. Oxford.

[5.] Hinde, Wendy. *Richard Cobden* Yale University Press, 1987. London., p, 61.

[6.] See the quote of the week "John Bright calls British foreign policy "a gigantic system of (welfare) for the aristocracy" (1858)" from John Bright, *Selected Speeches of the Rt. Hon. John Bright M.P. On Public Questions*, introduction by Joseph Sturge (London: J.M. Dent and Co., 1907). .

[7.] See, McKinnon, William Alexander. *On the Rise, Progress and Present State of Public Opinion in Great Britain and Other Parts of the World* London, 1828.

[8.] Hinde, *Richard Cobden*, p. 61.

[9.] See, Hollis, Patricia (ed). *Pressure From Without in Early Victorian England.* Edward Arnold, 1974. London.

[10.] Ebenezer Elliot was known as the "corn-law rhymer". See, *The Poetical Works of Ebenezer Elliott, the Corn-Law Rhymer* (Endinburgh: William Tait, 1840). Especially the "Corn-Law Hymns No. I to XX," pp. 167-73. Dedicated to Thomas Hodgskin.

[11.] See, Edsall, Nicholas. *Richard Cobden: Independent Radical.* Harvard University Press, 1986. Cambridge, Mass., especially chapter 11.

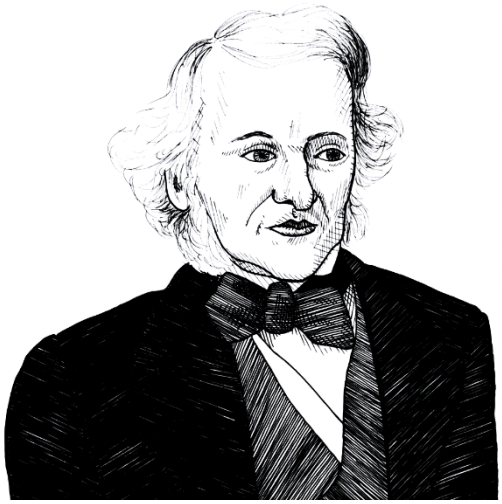
WHY COULDN'T COBDEN REPLICATE HIS ANTI-CORN LAW SUCCESS?

by Anthony C. Howe

> "I am not sanguine as you know about the success of any effort to recall to the attention of the public the details of our long agitation – I doubt the possibility of any body making the history an interesting one. In fact, it is not a pleasant chapter to go over again in all its minutiae; for it was but a blundering unsystematic series of campaigns, in which we were indebted for our success to the stupidity of our foes, & still more to the badness of their cause.' --Richard Cobden to Archibald Prentice, 13 September 18523. [12]

Cobden's own comment on the history of the Anti-Corn Law League suggests that he was less certain about the roots of his own success than Davies's careful reconstruction of his ideas and strategy implies. Nevertheless, in combating the Corn Laws, not only did Cobden benefit from the weakness of the protectionist cause, but unlike those seeking change today, he also rode the wave of recent political activism. For following the Reform Act of 1832, the 1830s in Britain had seen a revolution in political participation with the emergence of a vastly increased electorate, local party politicization, and the revitalization of municipal government, whose councils were in effect the "soviets of the bourgeoisie." (Hence Cobden began political life as "Alderman Cobden of Manchester.")

Inspired by the successful antislavery movement, a huge number of pressure groups were also already in action seeking goals as diverse as temperance, disestablishment of the Church of England, and the repeal of the Union with Ireland. The free-trade movement also existed at various levels – within the bureaucracy, the Political Economy Club, and in various localities -- while the Manchester Anti-Corn Law Association from which the League sprang existed independently of Cobden. Indeed he had been absent in Germany when it was formed.[13] Cobden's success lay therefore in harnessing growing activism to a better-focused free-trade movement, although all this may have been unnecessary had the Liberal Tory William Huskisson (1770-1830), often deemed the father of free trade, succeeded in the late 1820s in his planned reform (possibly even abolition) of the Corn Laws.



Richard Cobden

Cobden's own animus against the Corn Laws did, as Davies argues convincingly, stem from his wider intellectual outlook, but it is useful to recall that this was originally expressed in his pamphlets on foreign policy in the mid-1830s,[14] designed to attack reliance upon the bogey of the "balance of power" to justify expensive entanglements abroad, which in turn served only to benefit the few at the cost of the many. Significantly these

tracts were published under the sobriquet of "A Manchester manufacturer." This was important, for Cobden remained an outspoken representative of the entrepreneurial classes, seeking to free industry from the exactions of the aristocratic state, although his own rural roots added a strong strain of radical hostility to landlordism or "territorialism."[15] But Cobden's anti-aristocratic sentiment ran through his entire career, fueling inter alia his campaigns for peace and the reform of foreign policy, his opposition to colonial expansion, and his campaigns for financial and land reform. Here in many ways therefore he held to a consistent worldview which directed his efforts at reform.[16] This therefore leads us to the question Davies rightly asks – was his success over the Corn Laws "contingent" upon other factors -- and to the question Davies prompts but does not answer – why did Cobden's later campaigns fail to replicate the success of his anti-Corn Law campaigns? Why did his single-minded strategy work over the Corn Laws but not over land, peace, and foreign policy.

Interestingly Cobden himself used the success over the Corn Laws to formulate in effect a seven-year model of successful reform, combining the education of opinion, pressure from without, and parliamentary campaigning: "We must serve our apprenticeship in these great legislative measures … and it is well we have to do so, for if we were to succeed too soon we should not consider our advantages worth preserving." (*Morning Post,* 27 November 1849) Why did he not successfully put this into subsequent practice? One cardinal rule he emphasized in the case of the League was single-issue politics, a clear decisive legislative goal. This proved far more difficult in later radical campaigns when goals were often confused, for example, financial and parliamentary reform in the late 1840s. Nor did later reforms lend themselves to such well-orchestrated social support – Cobden often referred to the League's success as that of "a middle class set of agitators,"[17] with the cotton masters of northern England (of whom Cobden was one) providing the spearhead and the vast majority of its funds while using the Corn Law issue to assert their presence and identity within the political system.[18] Virtually all later reforms fragmented rather than united the middle classes. Thus education, to which Cobden attached huge importance, immediately fell victim to the church and chapel consciousness of the Victorians, with the fissure between the Church of England and the serried ranks of Dissenters and Catholics proving a fatal obstacle to reform. Over land reform, the direct assault of the bastion of the aristocracy, the middle classes as urban property owners remained indifferent, or alternatively, as nouveaux riches aspiring to their own landed estates, became hostile.

POLES OFFERING CORN.
(*Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 1839.)

Frontispiece.] [*See page 167.*

On major issues of foreign policy, especially the Crimean War, Cobden felt isolated from the patriotism of the many, fed he believed by the war-mongering martial spirit inculcated by the elite. Even before the end of the Crimean war the Radicals Cobden and Bright appeared as "generals without armies." Against this background, despite his efforts to cultivate public opinion, Cobden remained unable to recreate the enthusiasm generated by the anti-Corn Law movement, which remained the outstandingly successful reform pressed from without. Equally, following the suggestion in the quotation from Cobden above, we may surmise that other causes were both "better" in themselves and better defended, for example, the case for the reform of international maritime law, where Cobden found J. S. Mill among his leading opponents.[19] Interestingly other reforms with which Cobden was identified, for example, the important introduction of limited liability in 1855, seemed to pass without great visible external pressure, while the highly important repeal of the taxes on knowledge (completed in 1861) has passed almost unnoticed by historians until recently.[20] In later life Cobden lost confidence in his

own ability to orchestrate reform from without, but he also looked in vain for the new generation to succeed him. Perhaps the greatest "missed opportunity" lay in terms of the peace movement, where Cobden had the capacity to unite the disparate strands of utilitarian pacifist and religious opposition to war.[21] Yet here too the context remained unfavorable to success as war enveloped the Near East, Italy, and the United States.

This therefore left repeal of the Corn Laws as the chief achievement of Cobden's career. Although he rightly took great satisfaction from the 1860 Anglo-French commercial treaty, this had been achieved by working within the political system, although Cobden's purpose was still to use foreign economic policy in order to subvert aristocratic rule, a consistency of ideas although not of strategy. This also helped cement the gains of the 1840s, and here, while Davies rightly points to the long-term impact of repeal, repeal in itself, while necessary, was not sufficient for Britain's becoming the free-trade nation.[22] Not only was the memory of repeal carefully orchestrated in popular history and memory, but institutions such as the Cobden Club[23] worked avidly to cement this legacy, which was also central to the popular politics of the Liberal party under Gladstone. In this way later challenges of "Fair trade" and tariff reform were defeated by the deep-rootedness of the popular loyalty to free trade created after 1846.[24]

Finally, as to context, the repeal movement undoubtedly benefited from the new postal facilities of the 1840s, but free trade was also part and parcel of the wider communications revolution in which the railways, the telegraph, canals, and steam shipping reduced time and distance and sustained trade and capital flows within the world economy. Here the third quarter of the 19th-century proved to be a period of considerable globalization, of which Cobden himself was an optimistic proponent, believing that all nations might be united by trade, that imperial power was unnecessary as were wars, and that popularly governed nations, on the model of the United States, would have "no foreign politics."[25] This vision was already under threat before his death 150 years ago; whether it is capable of resurrection in a new age of globalization will certainly require at the very least an individual of supreme organizational skills and systematic thought, but might be expected more readily to emerge within institutions (of which Cobden himself was profoundly suspicious) devoted to global governance.

Endnotes

[12.] See, Howe, Anthony, ed. *The Letters of Richard Cobden Volume 2 1848-1853* (Oxford, 2010).

[13.] See, Howe, Anthony, ed. *The Letters of Richard Cobden, Volume 1 1815-1847* (Oxford, 2007) .

[14.] See Cobden, *England, Ireland, and America* (1835) </titles/82#lf0424-01_head_007> and Russia (1836) </titles/82#lf0424-01_head_015>.

[15.] See, Howe, Anthony, *Free Trade and Liberal England, 1846-1946* (Oxford, 1997) .

[16.] See, Cain, Peter, "Capitalism, War, and Internationalism in the Thought of Richard Cobden," *British Journal of International Studies 5* (1979), 229-47.

[17.] See for example, "Our opponents have been fond of telling us that this is a middle-class agitation. I do not like classes, and therefore have said that we are the best of all classes; but this I believe, that we have enough of the middle class, and the propertied portion of the middle class, to beat the landlords at their own game in all the populous counties in England." in Richard Cobden, Speeches on Questions of Public Policy by Richard Cobden, M.P., ed. by John Bright and J.E. Thorold Rogers with a Preface and Appreciation by J.E. Thorold Rogers and an Appreciation by Goldwin Smith (London: T.Fisher Unwin, 1908). 2 volumes in 1. Vol. 1 Free Trade and Finance. "Speech on Free Trade XIII. London, Dec. 11, 1844." </title/927#Cobden_0129.01_399>.

[18.] See, Howe, Anthony, "The 'Manchester School' and the Landlords," in M. Cragoe and P. Readman eds. *The Land Question in Britain, 1750-1950* (Basingstoke, 2010).

[19.] See, Varouxakis, Georgios, *Liberty Abroad: J. S. Mill on International Relations* (Cambridge, 2013).

[20.] See, Hewitt, Martin, *The Dawn of the Cheap Press in Victorian Britain* (London, 2014).

[21.] See, Ceadel, Martin, "Cobden and Peace," in Anthony Howe and Simon Morgan, eds., *Rethinking Nineteenth-Century Liberalism: Richard Cobden Bicentenary Essays* (Aldershot, 2006) .

[22.] See, Trentmann, Frank, *Free Trade Nation* (Oxford, 2008).

[23.] See, Howe, Anthony, *Free Trade and Liberal England, 1846-1946* (Oxford, 1997).

[24.] See, Howe, Anthony, "Free trade and its Enemies," in M. Hewitt ed. *The Victorian World* (London, 2012).

[25.] "We know of no means by which a body of members in the reformed House of Commons could so fairly achieve for itself the patriotic title of a national party, as by associating for the common object of deprecating all intervention on our part in continental politics. Such a party might well comprise every representative of our manufacturing and commercial districts, and would, we doubt not, very soon embrace the majority of a powerful House of Commons. At some future election, we may probably see the test of "no foreign politics "applied to those who offer to become the representatives of free constituencies. Happy would it have been for us, and well for our posterity, had such a feeling predominated in this country fifty years ago! " in "Part I. England" in *England, Ireland, and America* (1835), in Richard Cobden, *The Political Writings of Richard Cobden, with a Preface by Lord Welby, Introductions by Sir Louis Mallet, C.B., and William Cullen Bryant, Notes by F.W. Chesson and a Bibliography,* vol. 1, (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903). <</titles/82#Cobden_0424-01_331>.

COBDEN'S SINGLE-ISSUE POLITICS

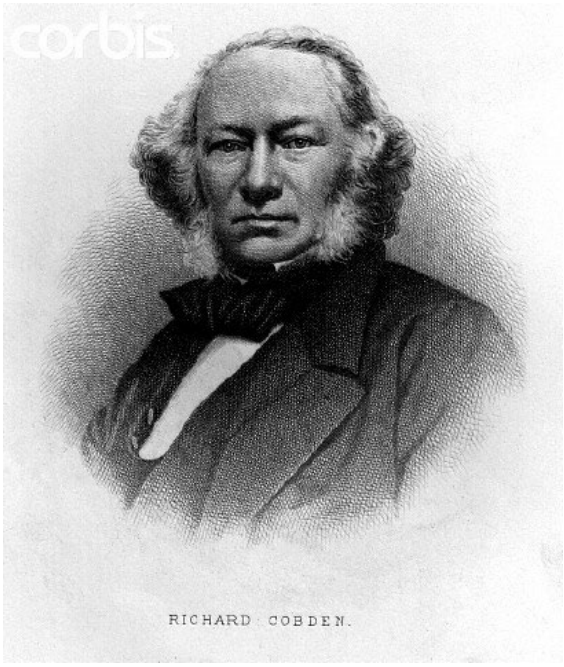
by Gordon Bannerman

The illuminating essay by Stephen Davies clearly identifies the strengths in Richard Cobden's intellectual armoury. Practical business experience, foreign travel, and wide reading all contributed towards his great political acumen, along with his ability to vibrantly assert and convey a coherent set of principles encompassing a progressive worldview. These intellectual attributes marked Cobden out as a unique figure outside the mainstream of political opinion, most definitely a "Victorian outsider." Equally, Cobden's advocacy of commercial liberalism and free exchange has led to his being known as "the International Man."[26] It was particularly appropriate and just recognition of the importance Cobden placed on freedom in international commerce as the facilitator and driver of economic growth, international peace, and more philosophically, the progress of ethical values and human civilization. Cobden built on Herbert Spencer's distinction between "militant" and "industrial" societies:[27] the former organized primarily for war with free reign for militarism and aggressive instincts, while the latter sublimated these instincts in work and commerce: civilized, peaceful activities which contributed towards wealth-creation.[28] Here was the broad basis for the division between "productive" and "idle" classes which permeated Cobden's social theory.

Cobden first came to public prominence as the author of two pamphlets, *England, Ireland, and America* (1835) and *Russia* (1836) under the (significant) pseudonym "A Manchester Manufacturer."[29] Foreign policy and nonintervention were Cobden's main concerns early in his career, and his opposition to traditional balance-of-power diplomacy was expressed in vigorous but disarmingly plain terms:

> Those who, from an eager desire to aid civilization, wish that Great Britain should interpose in the dissensions of neighbouring

states, would do wisely to study, in the history of their own country.… To those generous spirits we would urge, that, in the present day, commerce is the grand panacea, which, like a beneficent medical discovery, will serve to inoculate with the healthy and saving taste for civilization all the nations of the world.[30]



Richard Cobden

Although often viewed as a highly progressive and modern thinker, elements of Cobden's thought clearly owed something to the oppositional 18th-century "Country" tradition.[31] Yet, while there were many different aspects to Cobden's thought, and his radical ideas were developed and refined over time, the fundamental principles he advocated in the 1830s remained largely intact throughout his life.[32] Before taking his message to the world Cobden had to convince his own countrymen of the desirability of free trade. The notion of greater commercial freedom had a long history in Britain, with abortive moves towards liberalization in the 1780s, and a more systematic implementation of freer trade by reciprocal commercial treaty arrangements promoted by Huskisson in the 1820s. Despite these steps, protectionism remained entrenched within the British body politic, for fiscal and political reasons which had evolved over centuries.

At a theoretical level the astonishing growth in political-economy ideas promoted by the disciples of Adam Smith did not stop at the lecture-room but entered the public domain through periodicals, pamphlets, and abridged and/or cheaper volumes for working men.[33] Theoretical development, particularly Ricardian comparative advantage in international commerce,[34] proved to be hugely influential. Enlightened statesmanship and theoretical rigor were accompanied by a vibrant, expanding manufacturing sector pursuing open markets as a means of procuring cheap raw materials and selling finished products. Cobden himself served an apprenticeship as a clerk and commercial traveler before becoming a partner in a Lancashire calico-mill in 1828, and British manufacturing expansion and industrial development raised suspicions that for all the moralistic talk surrounding open markets, free trade, international peace, and civilization, far more base motives were at work. Domestic protectionists claimed Cobden and his business associates, particularly cotton manufacturers, in the Anti-Corn Law League were primarily motivated by personal gain. The nefarious activities of League "millocrats" were attacked by protectionists and Chartists, and abroad the free trade ideas of "perfidious Albion" were denounced more widely as a tool for ensuring British political and economic hegemony.[35] This type of critique has been maintained by historians in a less pejorative sense, with Cobden characterized as a "middle-class Marxist" based on his blend of "interest and principle."[36] Certainly manufacturers were important in financing and providing leadership, but the League represented more than merely an organization established to obtain Corn Law repeal for the benefit of manufacturing industry. For tactical reasons, Cobden had to downplay the wider implications of repeal, not only because it was potentially divisive but also because it risked diluting and detracting from the repeal campaign. Cobden patiently explained to colleagues that corn and provisions alone must be the focus of the campaign, and by keeping to single-issue politics he successfully avoided division, though, as the Chartist movement demonstrated, divisions could also occur over means rather than ends.

The radical lineage relating to the Corn Laws went back to the immediate aftermath of the 1815 Corn Law, and anti-Corn Law associations existed earlier in the 1830s, providing an example of how the Corn Laws could be viably agitated against as a single-issue question.[37] Cobden understood the importance of repeal towards other policy areas. For him the Corn Laws were the "keystone of monopoly" within the protective system,[38] and repeal would unlock further reforms as a means of undermining the aristocratic "territorial Constitution" in Church and State. Cobden clearly had vision and imagination, particularly notable in his speeches (and letters) which were characteristically tersely argued, vividly described, and highly politicized. As the most prominent and convincing advocate of repeal, his ability, determination, and capacity for hard work were vitally important to the League campaign. Equally though, repeal was a multifaceted issue, and the League drew on many influential and often somewhat contradictory sources of political thought including theology, secular radicalism, and older popular anti-aristocratic notions of moral economy. In practical terms, repeal was a cause that encompassed different groups and possessed a cross-class and cross-sector appeal. As Marx perceptively noted, the objective of the League was "very general, very popular, very palpable."[39]

The League was innovative in its methods of agitation and propaganda, and employed numerous rhetorical and theatrical devices to deliver its message; political theatres and staged "events" were often very successful in obtaining publicity and were a potent ideological vehicle. Engels flippantly paid tribute to the ubiquitous nature of the League campaign in citing a delegate to the Economic Congress at Brussels in 1847 as stating "the stalest and most platitudinous shibboleths of the Anti-Corn-Law League, long since known by heart to almost every street urchin in England."[40]

Nevertheless, the campaign was not all-conquering, and mistakes were made. The annual parliamentary motion for total and immediate repeal did not achieve much, and the petitioning campaign merely diverted opposition to the Corn Laws into innocuous constitutional channels. Moreover, while the noble democratic course of changing opinion was always important in the League campaign, less politically reputable methods of legally challenging votes by the use of revising barristers, and the creation of votes by property qualification were also sanctioned, albeit intermittently, by the League.

Attempting to quantify influence is always difficult, and ultimately Peel was responsible for repeal against the opposition of much of his party and many people in the country. Clearly, the constant agitation and pressure exerted by the League was influential in forcing the issue on to the political agenda, and even into the 20th century, Corn Law repeal remained a symbolic motif embodying a complex skein of quasi-populist, anti-aristocratic and democratic principles. Conversely, many of the causes Cobden espoused in the post-repeal period failed to gain significant traction during his lifetime. Initial support for financial reform, international arbitration, and disarmament was curbed by the 1852 French invasion scare, prompting years of international instability. Yet by the later 1850s, after the Crimean debacle, increasing support for nonintervention and retrenchment in defense spending represented "visible signs of a shift towards Cobdenite sensibilities within English liberalism."[41]

The standard Cobden set for practical political organization and mobilization of opinion remains relevant today. While impossible to doubt the extent or importance of Cobden's organizational or rhetorical abilities, contemporary politics, notably Britain's anti-poll tax campaign, illustrate the potency of a single political issue which can somehow encapsulate a wider philosophy, especially when incorporating a blend of morality, oppositional ideology, and participation in an anti-establishment battle against elite power. Contemporary political cynicism and a more diffuse political culture appear to militate against mobilizing public opinion on the scale and nature of the anti-Corn Law campaign. Yet the Tea Party in the United States, the UK Independence Party in Britain, and the pro-independence "Yes" campaign in Scotland have made significant progress, and all contain elements strikingly similar to the Anti-Corn Law League in terms of their attack on entrenched vested

interests, a shared populist rhetoric, and the mobilization of public opinion on single issues, albeit issues highlighting a deeper and wider malaise in the body politic.

Endnotes

[26.] See, Hobson, J. A. 1919. *Richard Cobden: The International Man*. London: H. Holt and Company.

[27.] On Herbert Spencer's distinction between "militant" and "industrial" societies, see Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology, in Three Volumes* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1898). Vol. 2. </titles/2632>. Part V. Political Institutions. Chap. XVII. The Militant Type of Society and Chap. XVIII. The Industrial Type of Society.

[28.] Cain, Peter. 1979. "Capitalism, War, and Internationalism in the Thought of Richard Cobden". *British Journal of International Studies* 5, p. 230.

[29.]*England, Ireland, and America* (1835) </titles/82#lf0424-01_head_007> and *Russia* (1836) </titles/82#lf0424-01_head_015>, which are both in *The Political Writings of Richard Cobden, with a Preface by Lord Welby, Introductions by Sir Louis Mallet, C.B., and William Cullen Bryant, Notes by F.W. Chesson and a Bibliography* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903), vol. 1.

[30.] In *England, Ireland, and America* (1835). Part I. England, reprinted in *The Political Writings of Richard Cobden, with a Preface by Lord Welby, Introductions by Sir Louis Mallet, C.B., and William Cullen Bryant, Notes by F.W. Chesson and a Bibliography*, vol. 1, (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903), p. 20. </titles/82#Cobden_0424-01_335>

[31.] Conway, Stephen. 1995. "Britain and the Impact of the American War, 1775-1783". *War in History* 2, p. 136.

[32.] Porter, Bernard. 2007. *Critics of Empire: British Radicals and the Imperial Challenge*. London: I.B. Tauris, p. 12-14)

[33.] [Editor] Cobden's own speeches were circulated in cheap editions such as *The Corn Laws. Speech of R. Cobden, Esq., M.P. in the House of Commons, on Thursday Evening, February 24, 1842.* (Manchester: J. Gadsby, n.d.). The 12 page pamphlet was priced at "one penny" and it was the "Sixteenth Thousand-Revised" edition. One might also mention the work of Thomas Hodgskin who regularly lectured to working men's groups at "Mechanics Institutes" and worked for James Wilson's pro-free grade magazine *The Economist*. One of his lectures was published as *A Lecture on Free Trade, in connexion with the Corn Laws; delivered at the White Conduit House, on January 31, 1843* (London: G.J. Palmer, 1843). </titles/321>.

[34.] On Ricardian comparative advantage in international commerce: "Under a system of perfectly free commerce, each country naturally devotes its capital and labour to such employments as are most beneficial to each. This pursuit of individual advantage is admirably connected with the universal good of the whole." in *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817) "Chap. VII. On Foreign trade". *The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo*, ed. Piero Sraffa with the Collaboration of M.H. Dobb (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005). Vol. 1. </titles/113#Ricardo_0687-01_454>

[35.]See, McKeown, T. J. 1983. "Hegemonic Stability Theory and 19th Century Tariff Levels in Europe." *International Organization* 37: 73-91.

[36.] See, Briggs, Asa. 1965. *Victorian Cities*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 127.

[37.] See, Cameron, Kenneth J. 1979. "William Weir and the origins of the "Manchester League" in Scotland, 1833-39". *Scottish Historical Review* 58: 70-91.

[38.] "I say, then, that whatever may be the fate of the Navigation Laws, the Corn question is a different thing. I was always an advocate for confining the public mind to that one question; I call it the keystone of the arch; the rest will fall of itself." in "Speech on Free Trade XXIII. House of Commons, March 8, 1849," *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy by Richard Cobden, M.P., ed. by John Bright and J.E. Thorold Rogers with a Preface and Appreciation by J.E. Thorold Rogers and an Appreciation by Goldwin Smith* (London: T.Fisher Unwin, 1908). Vol. 1 Free Trade and Finance. <http://oll.libertyfu/title/927#Cobden_0129.01_655nd.org>.

[39.] Marx, Karl. 1855 [1973]. "On the Reform Movement." pp. 286-8 in Karl Marx, *Surveys from Exile: Political Writings*, vol. 2, ed. David Fernbach. London: Penguin, p. 288.

[40.] Engels. Frederick. 1847 [1976]. "The Economic Congress." pp. 274-8 in Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 6 (1845-48). London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd, p. 277.

[41.] Taylor, Miles. (ed.). 1994. *The European Diaries of Richard Cobden, 1846-1849*. Aldershot: Scolar Press, p. 31.

WHAT NEXT, AND NEXT? THE COBDEN MOMENT: FLEETING OR FUNDAMENTAL?

by Sarah Richardson

Stephen Davies's eloquent essay tackles one of the enduring issues of Richard Cobden and his legacy: what traces did his philosophy, so influential and so effective at mobilizing public opinion in the mid-19th century, leave and is there anything of relevance in his ideas for politics today? To borrow Cobden's title for his pamphlet assessing the Crimean War and relations with Russia: what happened next, and next?

The picture looked gloomy in 1903 when F. W. Hirst, the journalist and ardent Cobdenite (he married Cobden's great niece and for a period resided at Dunford House, Cobden's childhood home), wrote:

> During the last decade it has been the fashion to talk of the Manchester School with pity or contempt as of an almost extinct sect, well adapted, no doubt, for the commercial drudgery of a little, early Victorian England, but utterly unfitted to meet the exigencies or satisfy the demands of a moving Imperialism.[42]

Other, more recent commentators have supported this pessimistic assessment, with Frank Trentmann arguing that Cobden's vision of a free-trade nation fell out of favor in the interwar period with liberal economists preferring a new internationalism which supported regulation of the global economy.[43]

It is clear that many aspects of the economy and society dear to Cobden's heart were severely failing in the immediate decades following his death in 1865. Although universal, mass education had been introduced by the Education Act of 1870, many working-class children had an inferior and sporadic experience of school, and educational standards remained low. The numbers of unskilled workers continued to be stubbornly high. Wages were falling, and wealth was unevenly distributed. The 1873 *Return of Owners of Land* demonstrated that 43 percent of land was owned by a small group of around 1,600 landowners (although it also revealed that there were numerous freeholders owning very small parcels of land). Farms were generally getting larger and relying on smaller numbers of wage laborers, restricting employment in the countryside. The abolition of the Corn Laws had not led to universal free trade policies. Nations such as Russia remained obstinately resistant and tariffs, and monopolies were used to develop industry and infrastructure in India and other parts of the Empire. The cost of the army and navy continued to increase, and foreign policy was increasingly militaristic.

Richard Cobden

As Davies notes, free trade was but one aspect of Cobden's worldview and his philosophy was far broader. It is difficult to pin this down precisely as his political writings tended to be commentaries rather than a setting out of a coherent ideological standpoint, and his views were reinterpreted and refashioned by his wide circle of followers. He had a holistic approach, believing that social progress towards political democracy depended on the interaction of economic, moral and religious, and educational factors. Liberty was core to Cobden's set of values. The Corn Laws were just one manifestation of the consequences of centuries of aristocratic dominance. Others included the corrupt political and electoral system, the intertwining of church and state, militarism, and the unequal distribution of land. Cobden had connections to the complete suffrage movement arguing for household suffrage, the ballot, shorter parliaments, and curbs on the House of Lords. His support for free trade in land was key to his ideology and would become the centerpiece of Cobdenist thought in the late 19th century. A few months before his death, Cobden wrote:

> If I were five and twenty or thirty, instead of, unhappily, twice that number of years, I would take Adam Smith in hand – I would not go beyond him, I would have no politics in it – I would take Adam Smith in hand, and I would have a League for Free Trade in Land just as we had a League for Free Trade in Corn.[44]

Davies poses a challenging question in his essay: "whether there was something historically specific about Cobden's success, dependent upon the particular circumstances of his times, or alternatively that his methods and analysis are still applicable."

It is clear that the Great Reform Act inaugurated many reform agendas: in the church, law, women's rights, freedom of the press, health, local government, and the arts. These are ably articulated and assessed in an edited collection by Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes[45]. The 1830s witnessed a raft of legislation including civil registration, the commutation of tithes, Jewish emancipation, banking reform, the abolition of slavery in the British colonies, and the reduction in duties on the press. Extra-parliamentary activities also grew in scale and may be gauged by metrics such as the vast increase in the number of petitions presented to parliament; the growth of pressure groups, societies and associations for the social and economic issues such as temperance, education and the treatment of the poor; and the number of mass meetings and campaigns taking place in communities across Britain. Although the pace of reform diminished from the 1840s onwards, there is no doubt that the "people" had begun an important conversation with parliament which shifted the contours of debate. The establishment now had to engage with the language of reform.

Cobden thus had a fertile environment on which to launch the campaign to repeal the Corn Laws. But was the Cobden moment only fleeting? Some would argue that the lack of success for his later endeavors for land reform and international peace demonstrate that the success of the Anti-Corn Law League was due more to timing than to any ideological or organizational strategy. However, this negative conclusion may be countered by considering the political education gained by those participating in the mass campaign to repeal the Corn Laws – particularly for those hitherto largely excluded from the public sphere.

Jane Cobden

The League was a pivotal movement for both radicalizing women and for providing a model for the organization of later political campaigns. Strategies which were to prove successful in later campaigns for women's rights, such as fund-raising, lobbying and electoral canvassing, were shaped by the experiences gained by participation in the movement. Paul Pickering and Alex Tyrrell have analyzed the varied nature of female commitment to the Anti-Corn Law League and women's contribution to developing the League as a truly national movement[46]. My own work has further demonstrated the rich and vibrant female political culture that proliferated in this period.[47] That this was an enduring, rather than a fleeting, legacy may be demonstrated by the activities of the daughters of Richard Cobden in the later 19th century, at the very time when many commentators argued Cobden's influence and vision was fading. Jane Cobden carried forward the fight for land reform via her two published books, *The Hungry Forties: Life under the Bread Tax* (1904) and *The Land Hunger: Life under Monopoly*. *The Land Hunger* (1913)[48] was dedicated "To the memory of Richard Cobden who loved his native land, these pages are dedicated by his daughter, in the hope that his desire – 'Free Trade in Land' – may be filled." Cobden's daughters were refashioning his democratic ideas for the political circumstances of their own age. They were conscious that they were taking his work forward. As well as harnessing his political philosophy, Cobden's daughters built on the organizational techniques which had made the Anti-Corn Law League so successful. They utilized the courtroom and the streets as well more formal methods of lobbying to keep issues such as land reform, education, and women's rights at the top of the political agenda in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This is just one illustration of how Cobden's ideas remained at the forefront of radical and progressive politics well into the 20th century, demonstrating that his contribution was not only sustained but remodelled for a new age.

But what of today? Could Cobdenite ideas and tactics be successful in a televisual age? Davies is cautious on this point arguing that the political environment is more hostile to the activities of private individuals. However, whilst the rise of radio and television has meant that face-to-face politics is increasingly mediated through broadcasters, a campaign's turning-point may still hinge on an unscripted personal encounter between a politician and the public. Thus many argue Gordon Brown's 2011 election campaign was scuppered when he termed Gillian Duffy a "bigoted woman" after a bruising encounter on the street. With the rise of the Web 2.0 generation, politics is entering a new phase. The activities of the 2009-10 Iranian Green Movement were termed the "Twitter Revolution" because of the protesters' reliance on Twitter and other social-networking sites to communicate with one another. Attempts by political parties in Britain to control the political blogosphere have gone seriously awry with politicians deviating from the party message and coordinated smear campaigns. Thus, there is potential for Cobden's ideas and tactics to thrive and prosper in the 21st century.

Endnotes

[42.] Hirst, F. W. ed., *Free Trade and Other Fundamental Doctrines of the Manchester School. Set Forth in Selections from the Speeches and Writings of Its Founders and Followers*. Harper and Brothers, 1903. London. <</titles/94#Hirst_0575_2>>

[43.] See, Trentmann, Frank. *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain*. Oxford University Press, 2008. Oxford.

[44.] Morley, John. *Life of Richard Cobden*. 2 vols. T. Fisher Unwin, 1881. London. Vol. ii, p. 456. <</titles/1742#Morley_0553_1602>>

[45.] See, Burns, Arthur and Innes, Joanna. *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain, 1780-1850*. Cambridge University Press, 2003. Cambridge.

[46.] See, Pickering, Paul, A. and Tyrell, Alex. *The People's Bread: A History of the Anti-Corn Law League*. Leicester University Press, 2000. London.

[47.] See, Richardson, Sarah. *The Political Worlds of Women: Gender and Political Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Routledge, 2013. London. See also the collection of images on the Flickr account of Manchester Archives which demonstrate how the anti-Corn Law

League appealed to and utilised women in its campaign, many of which can also be found here in the "Images of Liberty and Power" collection in the essay on "Cobden and the Anti-Corn Law League". They include a membership card of Manchester branch illustrating how the League is campaigning to protect the vulnerable, an invitation to a meeting encouraging attendees to bring their family, a poster encouraging voter registration asking women 'the best of our auxilliaries' to support the campaing, and a poster for a Manchester Bazaar.

[48.] Jane Cobden, *The Hungry Forties: Life under the Bread Tax. Descriptive Letters and other Testimonies from contemporary Witnesses, with and Introduction by Mrs. Cobden Unwin. Illustrated* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1904); Jane Cobden, *The Land Hunger: Life under Monopoly. Descriptive Letters and other Testimonies from those who have suffered, with an Introduction by Mrs. Cobden Unwin and an Essay by Brougham Villiers* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1913).

ARE OTHER COBDENS OUT THERE?

by Stephen Davies

The three responses all raise specific questions connected with Cobden's career and legacy while at the same time sharing a great deal in terms of perspective. This shows that there is a wide agreement among historians about many parts of Cobden's intellectual and political biography but varying emphases when it comes to interpreting them. I agree with Gordon Bannerman, Sarah Richardson, and Anthony Howe that a coherent ideology stands behind Cobden's career and political activism; we also agree on what the content of that ideology, or worldview, was. As Gordon Bannerman says, Cobden shared with Spencer and many other 19th-century liberals a vision of both the development of history and the nature of class and political divisions in his own time. Bannerman correctly points out that this worldview descended in part from the older "Country" tradition of 18th-century opposition, but it derived mainly from a combination of radical interpretations of political economy and a highly individualistic conception of human action and agency that came ultimately from religious thinking. (This was perhaps less clear in the case of Cobden than in others such as the Quaker John Bright). Two additional points can be made here. Firstly there was a clear difference between this way of thinking and that of the Philosophic Radicals and their intellectual descendants, no matter how much they may have agreed on specific points of policy. Secondly this ideology was not simply Cobden's personal *Weltanschaung*; it was clearly shared by many others, including most of the active members of the Anti-Corn Law League, as well as the obvious cases such as John Bright, Harriet Martineau, Joseph Sturge, and later on people such as Francis Hirst (who is cited by Richardson).

John Bright

This way of thinking and the agenda it inspired came partly, as all three respondents point out, from a particular place and social context, which was the manufacturing districts of Britain and particularly, of course, Manchester. Howe and Richardson both

emphasize the essential part that a particular way of thinking about foreign policy and international relations played in this. As Bannerman points out, Cobden's first venture into national politics came with two pamphlets on foreign policy, and this was to remain a central concern for him throughout his life. The point surely is that rather than a concern with free trade leading to a particular position on international affairs, the arrow rather went in the other direction. It was the concern with the war system and its connection to aristocratic power that then led to his decision to focus on free trade and the Corn Laws.

Howe and Richardson both address the question of why Cobden was unable to reproduce his success with the Anti-Corn Law campaign later in his life and with regard to other issues. The obvious campaign is that of the organized peace movement, which for Howe was perhaps Cobden's big failure. Certainly this was an area where he and Bright suffered bruising political defeat, thanks to their opposition to the Crimean War. Richardson emphasizes the importance of the idea of "free trade in land" for Cobden and the way this became a central issue for followers of his (such as G.C. Broderick) but without success – British land ownership is, if anything, even more secretive and just as concentrated as it was at the time of the 1873 Return that she alludes to.

What to say then about this? One point is that there were many campaigns in the 19th century that drew on Cobden's model without enjoying the same ultimate success. One was the cause of disestablishment, as advocated by the Liberation Society and Edward Miall. Another was that of temperance, perhaps the biggest single popular movement in later Victorian Britain. However, we should also remember that even "failed campaigns" had major effects in terms of their impact on the popular culture and mentality. Thus the temperance movement played a major part in both a real shift in behavior and the development of an autonomous working-class and artisan-political culture. Moreover, as Howe points out, there were also considerable successes which are simply ignored or taken for granted by much of the historiography. A good example is the one he cites: the abolition of the newspaper duty (taxes on knowledge) 1861.[49] This was a major event, controversial at the time, and the outcome of a large and impressive campaign. (Another one he mentions, the adoption of limited liability in 1855, interestingly was one that divided those who shared the ideology mentioned, with Cobden a strong supporter and Herbert Spencer a vocal critic).[50]

One explanation for the later failure to repeat the success of 1846, offered by both Howe and Bannerman, emphasizes the lack of a single issue that could attract a broad coalition of support. I think there is something in this, but it is not principally a matter of finding it hard to mobilize support in the absence of a single issue. The point about the campaign for free trade was that there was a single specific political action that, if taken, would ultimately bring down the entire protectionist structure – the knot of policy could be unraveled by pulling on a single string. By contrast this was not the case with either international relations or the land system. Even a measure such as prohibiting entail would not have the same kind of extensive effects on land ownership that repealing the Corn Laws had on trade and fiscal policy, while in international and military affairs, there was no single move that would change the nature of the system. Rather there had to be a gradual movement to build up a different way of doing things, together with sustained pressure over a long time on the military establishment. This was obviously much more difficult. In the case of land, there would have to be a sweeping measure of land reform (as happened in Ireland), and as Howe points out, this was hugely divisive.

In addition, there is the vexed question of how public opinion moved on these other issues that Cobden was concerned with. One of the great, perhaps the greatest, failures of 19th- and 20th-century liberalism was the way in which the ideal of a cosmopolitan world society (which Cobden clearly and consciously adhered to) was overcome in popular culture by the ideology of nationalism. Here it is worth pointing out that there were serious divisions and disagreements among the broad class of liberals, with many strongly supportive of the kind of romantic nationalism represented by people such as Kossuth and Garibaldi. This led to support for what we might now call "liberal interventionism" in addition to the traditional policy of the balance of power. Moreover, the dominant whig tradition of historiography led to a perception of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism, which militated against a more cosmopolitan outlook.

On the other hand I would disagree with both Howe and Richardson that the cultural and political legacy of Cobden's work had declined by the 20th century (the view Trentman also takes). Even at the peak of an economic crisis in 1931, candidates who supported free trade still got a majority of the vote. (The Labor Party and the Liberals both supported it, and a significant part of the National Liberals who would later leave the government over this issue also favored it.) Even today, surveys show that the British public is more strongly supportive of free trade than is the case in most other developed countries and particularly the United States.[51]

What this suggests is that the legacy of Cobden's campaign is much more robust than many think. One reason is the way, described by Howe, in which there was a systematic effort by organizations such as the Cobden Club, and the *Economist*, to "fix" a particular way of thinking about this issue in the public mind and to associate it with democracy, popular activism, and a whole series of cultural norms (the process Trentman describes).

Harriet Martineau

Moreover, Richardson makes the hugely important point that Cobden's example inspired a whole series of other movements that went on to have a transformative effect, above all the women's movement. Harriet Martineau was one of Cobden's closest allies and in addition to his daughter Jane, most of the founders of so-called "first wave feminism," such as Lydia Becker, Jesse Boucheret, Helen Blackburn, and Barbara Bodichon, were both great admirers of Cobden and people who went on not only to emulate the organizational and propaganda techniques he had developed in the 1840s but also to develop them. The 19th century-liberal movement can be thought of as in some sense a coalition of movements seeking particular changes but united by a foundational ideology, overlapping memberships and personal connections, and, increasingly, a shared political methodology (however mixed the results). The bundle of issues described as "the Woman Question" was central in all this because of the vital part played by women in all kinds of social and political activism, something that had begun in a small way with their participation in the repeal campaign.

The final question raised by my initial piece and addressed by the responses is whether there was something specific about Cobden's own times that does not translate to ours in terms of enabling his kind of organization and activism. Howe, Richardson, and Bannerman all point to the great upsurge of activism and campaigning of all kinds that took place during the "Age of Reform" and offer various explanations for this. Perhaps we can combine all of these using a simple economic analysis. During the 18th century the cost of political activity for individuals (both

literal monetary cost and the virtual opportunity cost) rose steadily as compared to the benefits that most individuals could expect as a result, until at least the 1760s. The result was the political system described by Lewis Bernstein Namier,[52.] dominated by aristocratic patronage and factionalism and the systematic use of office and legislation for personal and class benefit. Access to politics was effectively open only to the seriously wealthy except in a number of exceptional constituencies. (This all sounds fearfully familiar).

In the 1770s people such as Christopher Wyvill and the antislavery campaigners started to develop ways of getting round these obstacles. What happened in Cobden's time, however, were the changes described by Howe, Richardson, and Bannerman. The common factor was that these all reduced the cost of political participation, mobilization, and propaganda. Cobden was the political entrepreneur who took advantage of this opportunity most fully and effectively. One key aspect was bundling the "public good" of political action with private goods such as entertainment and even religious observance. With the passage of time the scene became more crowded and defenders of the status quo also became adept at using these new techniques.

In the course of the 20th century the process went into reverse and the cost of political organization rose again, mainly due to the advent of mass media. I am actually less pessimistic and cautious, however, than Sarah Richardson supposes. I think in fact that the kind of developments she alludes to, such as the rise of Twitter and other social media and the dramatic decline in the cost of publishing and propaganda, mark the start of another period where campaigns like Cobden's will once again become both easier to organize and more effective in shaping popular consciousness. The question then is, what issue or issues can play the same role as the Corn Laws and free trade? (My own favored candidates are intellectual property and home schooling, but no doubt others will have different candidates). The final questions of course are these: is there another Richard or Jane Cobden out there and is there an environment like that of early 19th-century Manchester that can produce people like that?

Endnotes

[49.] The newspaper duty was abolished in 1861 in one of Gladstone's budgets. The final regulation of the press was done away with in 1868 (after a case involving Bradlaugh). The best book on this is by Hewitt, Martin *The Dawn of the Cheap Press in Victorian Britain: the End of the 'Taxes on Knowledge', 1849 – 1869*. London, Bloomsbury Press 2013.

[50.] Limited liability by a standard procedure was effected by the Companies Act of 1855. (before then it required a Royal Charter or special Act of Parliament.

[51.] For example, see the evidence presented here <http://conversableeconomist.blogspot.co.uk/2014/09/national-attitudes-on-international.html>.

[52] Namier, Sir Lewis. *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* London, Macmillan 1957 (2nd Edition).

HOW PERMANENT WAS COBDEN'S INFLUENCE?

by Anthony C. Howe

This conversation on the ideas and strategies of Cobden and the Anti-Corn Law League has perhaps taken an unduly negative turn in asking why no further reforms followed from the repeal of the Corn Laws. This turn has come at the expense of asking what had changed and how permanent the impact of repeal was. Here, as I have argued elsewhere[53], the 1840s debate fundamentally shifted the terms of political argument in Britain, establishing the primacy or hegemony of a popular language of political economy which suffused all levels of society. This remained dominant into the early 20th century, and even, as Davies argues, well into the 1930s and beyond, although "free trade" as such receded from the center of political debate after 1931. Crucial to the success of the language of free trade was the priority it gave to consumers over producers, and this remained its

strongpoint into the early 20th century, recruiting support from the newly enfranchised agricultural laborers after 1885, while the emphasis on "cheap food" fitted well into the Edwardian vocabulary of household management and added a new layer of appeal to groups such as the Women's Co-operative Guild. As the civil servant Edward Hamilton concluded in 1902, "In the days of Protection, producers were more powerful than consumers. Nowadays consumers are more powerful and will remain so."[54] Ironically, had the land-reform movement succeeded, creating a new class of small agrarian producers, this may have jeopardized support for free trade and helped regenerate a rural protectionist movement. As it was, whatever the movements in real wages, free trade was seen as a vital defense of working-class living standards, and the high degree of male and female literacy in Edwardian Britain saw this message effectively communicated to voters and nonvoters. Free trade had become part of a political consensus, however much Cobden in his day remained an "outsider," although in fact less one than he has been sometimes presented. (How many outsiders expected *The Times* to give leaders on their speeches?) This was a fundamental, not a fleeting, change in political life.

Adam Smith

This adoption of free trade also reminds us that whatever the complexities of Cobden's ideas, the central message was, as he repeatedly emphasized, that contained in Smith's *Wealth of Nations*: to prevent powerful interests from threatening the welfare of the many.[55] This, however, was a message which after 1867 relied as much on political parties (Liberal and Labor) as on pressure groups, whose heyday had been between 1832 and 1867. Arguably, therefore, after 1867 no more "Cobdens" were necessary, although the Cobden Club guarded zealously his legacy, and periodic challenges to free trade led to supplementary bodies such as the Free Trade Union, linked to the Liberal Party. If we look too at those parties, we find more of the Cobdenite message than previous contributions to this debate have recognized. For example, Cobden's hostility to empire and liberal internationalism remained deeply entrenched and, I would argue against Davies, did not in Britain succumb to the appeal of romantic nationalism.[56] This contributed a central strand to debates on foreign policy into the interwar period.

With the decline in the effectiveness of political parties in the present day, perhaps there is scope once more for new "Cobdens" and new styles of politics, whether in the blogosphere or through the ever-proliferating world of voluntary associations and NGOs. Here we might add, however, that their power may be more that of a veto than to promote positive change – we should not in this context lose sight of the powerful global protest behind the antiglobalization campaign as seen at Seattle in 1999. However, this also reminds us that it was part of Cobden's strategy to avoid physical confrontation with the state, drawing the hotter heads of the Anti-Corn Law League back from this in the dangerous crisis of 1842.

Endnotes

[53.] Howe, Anthony, "Popular Political Economy," in D. Craig and J. Thompson (eds.), *Languages of Politics in Nineteenth-century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013).

[54.]Howe, Anthony, *Free Trade and Liberal England, 1846-1946* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

[55.]See Adam Smith's classic statement in favour of free trade in the *Wealth of Nations*, Book IV: Of Systems of

political Œconomy. Chap. II. "Of Restraints upon the Importation from Foreign Countries of such Goods as can be produced at Home," in Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations by Adam Smith, edited with an Introduction, Notes, Marginal Summary and an Enlarged Index by Edwin Cannan* (London: Methuen, 1904). Vol. 1. </titles/237#lf0206-01_label_925>. Especially the quote on how "furious monopolists" will fight to the bitter end to keep their privileges </quotes/367>.

[56.] Howe, Anthony, "British Liberal Internationalism in the Nineteenth Century," Bologna, 29 September 2014, <http://www.bipr.eu/eventprofile.cfm/idevent=6FDD634B-D495-9FD0-3A3574A08251CB06/Anthony-Howe-British-Liberal-Internationalism-in-the-19th-Century&zdyx=1>.

THE CONTINUING RELEVANCE OF COBDENITE INTERNATIONALISM

by Gordon Bannerman

Stephen Davies correctly points to the distinctive nature of Cobden's thought, while also alluding to the shared values and opinions of those in the forefront of the League campaign. Clearly, however, Cobden's rural background combined with his education, industrial experience, and broad knowledge gained from foreign travel made for an interesting form of radicalism which was more nuanced and erudite than others from the manufacturing interest.

Corn Law repeal was a facet of Cobden's wider internationalism. Indeed in December 1847, referring to his pamphlets of the 1830s concerning balance-of-power politics, secret diplomacy, and militarism, Cobden said, "Free trade has been only a labour of love with me, in order that I might carry out those views."[57]

While it was the aristocratic warmongering basis of the British State, and its convoluted, tortuous, and secretive diplomacy and foreign policy, which primarily propelled Cobden into political activity, there was an interesting juxtaposition in early League propaganda between war, antimilitarism, and free commerce which was a very apt reflection of Cobden's linkage of these issues. Thackeray's woodcut "Illustrations of the Rent Laws," published in the *Anti-Corn Law Circular* in 1839, strikingly displayed the legal and military forces of the State forcibly preventing grain imports.[58]

POLES OFFERING CORN.
(*Anti-Corn Law Circular*, 1839.)

Frontispiece.] [*See page 167.*

As Davies notes, nationalism proved to be too powerful for the type of cosmopolitan internationalism advocated by Cobden. Cosmopolitanism was easily equated with antipatriotism, and as an old anti-Jacobin rhyme put it, the cosmopolitan was:[59]

> A steady patriot of the world alone The friend of every country but his own

Curiously enough, Cobden was rarely criticized for lack of patriotism. While many opposed his views, he remained respected for the principled, robust, and consistent stance he maintained. Cobden himself was never "co-opted" to the British political elite. His role in the Anglo-French Treaty negotiations was the nearest he came to acting in an "official" capacity, and his refusal to consider political office often puzzled those like his political nemesis Palmerston. Uncompromised by office, Cobden's intellectual legacy has remained untarnished, for maintaining his principles was never tested against the trammels of House of Commons majorities, collective responsibility, and ministerial discipline.

Cobden's political career was facilitated by constitutional reform and economic development. As Davies argues, the greater activism of the 19th century was clearly related

to the reduced cost of political activity. Ironically the increasing cost of elections in the 18th century was perhaps largely owing to greater accumulation of wealth from those involved in "modern" economic activity, that is, wealthy merchants, nascent industrialists, and upstart "nabobs," securing the representation of small boroughs. As Howe convincingly argues, the anti-Corn Law agitation was an element of the new political activism inaugurated by the 1832 Reform Act. Yet though there was scarcely a feature of the unreformed system that could not be found in existence after 1832, reform paved the way for the influence of local manufacturers in civic and parliamentary life.[60]

In 19th-century Britain, it was the "local state" which "provided the setting where a self-confident middle class built its characteristic institutions and culture."[61] (Daunton, 152) Nevertheless, the political contours of the British State remained largely dominated by the aristocratic elite. Significantly, on his election to Parliament in 1841 Cobden informed his brother that he was "looked upon as a Gothic invader."[62] The impulse given to reform movements in the wake of the League, noted by Sarah Richardson and Stephen Davies, was clearly vitally important. Indeed, despite the practical political need to isolate the Corn Law issue, the repeal campaign effectively fueled related issues such as land reform and the Game Laws. These were incorporated within the League campaign, serving as powerful ancillary evidence in the League's case against landlord legislation and the "usurpations of our feudal lords."[63]

Despite recent claims of the robust, rounded, and representative nature of the League in national terms, the extent of the League's popularity must be questioned. While the League campaign was ultimately successful, it did take nearly 10 years to achieve its aim, and the impact of anti-Corn Law meetings, speeches, and literature was highly variable. Attempts to wean workers away from Chartism, though not entirely unsuccessful, met with disappointing results. Bids to construct a hybrid movement failed, with even many notable radicals, including Thomas Hodgskin, trying in vain to win over the working classes towards supporting repeal.[64]

Moreover, agricultural protectionism was buttressed by the complex network of City of London interests, with much support for protectionism, especially relative to sugar and shipping.[65]

Ultimately, the fears of conservatives, if not protectionists, were largely not realized. While Corn Law repeal did bring down the "entire protectionist structure," repeal seemed to stand as a self-contained, if momentous, reform rather than the precursor of fundamental reform in Church and State. The "Age of Reform" did not fundamentally alter the political foundations of the State, and as John Bright stated in 1866: "There is no greater fallacy than this—that the middle classes are in possession of power."[66]

The fragmentation of the radical ranks of the 1840s in later decades was clearly a deeply disappointing and disillusioning experience for Cobden.[67] Nevertheless, as Howe points out, there was clearly a paradigm shift in commercial policy which was not overturned until 1931. Equally, the participation of women proved to be inspirational and an important exemplar and template for future political activity. We can therefore agree that there were many positive elements of repeal, and its impact, influence, and legacy were great.

In response to Stephen Davies's query about the future trajectory of popular movements, I would like to offer a slight variant by alluding to recent events where elements of Cobdenite thought seem to have entered the policy space or at least converged with developments and approaches in international relations. For example, would Cobden have approved of the exercise of "soft" power? While preferable to the "hard" power of coercion and military force, is this not merely a warmer, friendlier term for the economic imperialism and market hegemony of earlier centuries? What of the use of international institutions to resolve and avert conflict? While the record of the United Nations and the European Union is questionable, the principles of conciliation, diplomacy, and pacification embodied by these institutions would surely be approved by Cobden. Yet it is doubtful whether he would have approved of another layer of bureaucratic and highly politicized institutions regardless of the ideals,

or the greater emphasis on transparency, accountability, and democratic legitimacy.

If international institutional developments have fallen short of attaining Cobdenite ideals, greater parliamentary consultation and scrutiny of the decision to go to war, emanating from within the UK government, appears more promising. The erosion of the "war prerogative" held by the Crown (though exercised by ministers) is not yet legally enshrined, but after the Iraq debacle, amid accusations that the government waged an "illegal" war, the government is now wary of committing troops without parliamentary consultation and, in the recent case over Syria, parliamentary approval. This change in the operation of the "war prerogative," inserting democratic accountability and public opinion into the decision to go to war while providing safeguards for national security and operational efficiency, is highly significant.[68] For while Cobden advocated international commerce to completely obviate the need for war, in the absence of this counsel of perfection, moves towards diplomatic transparency and democratic accountability must surely be considered advances in the direction of a Cobdenite conception of international relations.

The legal, political, and diplomatic technicalities inherent in these issues make them unlikely to either capture the public imagination or to provide impetus and enthusiasm for activists. The interaction among political ideas, economic interest groups, and national and supranational institutions has never seemed more complex. It seems unlikely that any popular movement will be able to influence popular consciousness in the same way the Anti-Corn Law League did. Clearly there is no lack of available resources for promoting and pursuing political objectives. However, the proliferation of social media seems thus far to have led to a highly transient and fickle audience, a cacophony of discordant voices, and an ill-defined delineation of political issues, often characterized by sloganeering and oversimplification.

There are clearly limits to what technology can achieve. It can facilitate rather than create, and greater opportunities for political engagement and activism will not necessarily lead to a more politically-conscious nor more politically-active electorate and population. All future activists will have to think carefully about how to effectively deliver, as well as formulate, their message.

Endnotes

[57.]Bannerman, Gordon & Howe, Anthony (eds). 2008. *Battles over Free Trade* vol. 2. London: Chatto & Pickering, p. 45. For Cobden's fundamental philosophy, to be found in these pamphlets, see: *England, Ireland, and America* (1835) </titles/2650> and *Russia* (1836) </titles/cobden-russia>. For a good selection of Cobden's speeches, see: Cobden, *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy*, 2 vols. especially vol. 2 </titles/931>.

[58.] See, *Stray Papers by William Makepeace Thackeray. Being Stories, Reviews, Verses, and Sketches (1821-1847). Edited, with an Introduction and Notes. By Lewis Saul Benjamin. With Illustrations.* (London: Hutchinson and co., 1901). Frontispiece, pp. 167-68, p. 416. The images can be found in Cobden and the Anti-Corn Law League.

[59.]The verse comes from George Canning, "New Morality" in the last issue of *The Anti-Jacobin, or, Weekly Examiner* (No. 36, 9 July 1798). The full stanza is:

> Taught in her school to imbibe thy mawkish strain, Condorcet, filtered through the dregs of Paine, Each pert adept disowns a Briton's part, And plucks the name of England from his heart.What! shall a name, a word, a sound, control Th' aspiring thought, and cramp th' expansive soul? Shall one half-peopled Island's rocky round A love, that glows for all creation, bound? And social charities contract the plan Framed for thy freedom, Universal Man! No—through th' extended globe his feelings run As broad and general as th' unbounded sun! No narrow bigot he;—his reason'd view Thy interests, England, ranks with thine, Peru! France at our doors, he sees no danger nigh, But heaves for Turkey's woes th' impartial sigh; **A steady patriot of the world alone, The friend of every country—but his own.**

Republished in 1852 following another French Revolution in 1848, *Poetry of the anti-Jacobin: comprising the*

celebrated political & satirical poems, parodies and jeux-d'esprit of the Right Hon. George Canning, the Earl of Liverpool, Marquis Wellesley, the Right Hon. J. H. Frere, G. Ellis, esq., W. Gifford, esq., and others. New and Revised Edition, with Explanatory Notes. (London: G. Willis, 1852), No. XXXVI (July 9, 1798), "New Morality," pp. 201-20 [quote from p. 204-5.]

[60.] Howe, Anthony. 1984. *The Cotton Masters, 1830-1860*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 133-61.

[61.] See, Daunton, M. J. 1989. "'Gentlemanly Capitalism' and British Industry, 1820-1914." *Past & Present* 122: 119-58.

[62.]Morley, John. 1881. *The Life of Richard Cobden*, vol. 1. London: Chapman and Hall, pp. 184-85.

[63.] [National Anti-Corn Law League]. 1842. *The Anti-Bread Tax Almanack for the Year of our Lord 1842*. Manchester: J. Gadsby, p. 2.

[64.] Hodgskin's *A Lecture on Free Trade, in Connexion with the Corn Laws* (1843) </titles/321>

[65.] Howe, A. C. 1992. "Free Trade and the City of London, *c.* 1820-1870." *History* 77, pp. 401-4.

[66.] Bright, *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy by John Bright M.P. Edited by James Edwin Thorold Rogers in Two Volumes. Second Edition* (London: Macmillan, 1869), Speech to the National Reform Union, Free Trade Hall, Manchester on 20 November 1866, vol. II, p. 216. A larger section of Bright's speech is worth quoting at greater length:

> The middle class are told that since the Reform Bill of 1832 political power has been in their hands; before 1832 it was with the lords and great land owners, but since 1832 it has been in the hands (if the middle class; and now the middle class are asked whether they are willing to surrender that power into the hands of a more numerous, and, as these persons assert, a dangerous class, who would swamp, not the exalted class of lords and great landowners, the highest in social position, but would swamp also the great middle class with whom power is now said to rest. And they try to teach the middle class that there is an essentially different interest between them and the great body of the people who are not yet admitted into that class. They say the one class is in power, and the other class is outside, and out of power, and they warn the middle class against admitting the outsiders into partnership with them, for fear they should dethrone the middle class and set up an unintelligent, unreasoning, and selfish power of their own.That is the sort of argument which is used to the middle class to induce them to take no part in any measure that shall admit the working class to a participation in political power. I should be ashamed to stand on any platform and to employ such an argument as this. Is there to be found in the writings or the speaking of any public man connected with the Liberal or the Reform party so dangerous and so outrageous a policy as that which these men pursue? When separating the great body of the people into the middle and the working class, they set class against class, and ask you to join with the past and present monopolists of power in the miserable and perilous determination to exclude for ever the great body of your countrymen from the common rights of the glorious English constitution. There is no greater fallacy than this—that the middle classes are in possession of power. The real state of the case, if it were put in simple language, would be this—that the working-men are almost universally excluded, roughly and insolently, from political power, and that the middle class, whilst they have the semblance of it, are defrauded of the reality. The difference and the resemblance is this, that the working-men come to the hustings at an election, and when the returning-oflicer asks for the show of hands, every man can hold up his hand although his name is not upon the register of voters; every working-man can vote at that show of hands, but the show of hands is of no avail. The middle class have votes, but those votes are

> rendered harmless and nugatory by the unfair distribution of them, and there is placed in the voter's hand a weapon which has neither temper nor edge, by which he can neither fight for further freedom, nor defend that which his ancestors have gained.

[67.] Howe, Anthony, ed. *The Letters of Richard Cobden Volume 2 1848-1853* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. xxx-xxxv.

[68.] Joseph, Rosara. 2013. *The War Prerogative: History, Reform, and Constitutional Design*. Oxford: Oxford University Press., p. 219.

PEACE THROUGH TRADE – COBDEN'S LASTING LEGACY

by Sarah Richardson

I perhaps gave Stephen Davies the wrong impression of my views on the continuing influence of Cobdenite ideas and strategies as the 20th century progressed. I am not as despondent as Trentmann and others that his ideas lost their relevance, and in my response I demonstrated how his daughters (particularly Jane and Annie) carried forward his legacy in their work on women's rights and land reform. Jane was also a key figure in ensuring that Cobden's significant contribution to the ideology of the international peace movement was continued into the 20th century. Jane was active in antiwar activities, founding the South African Conciliation Committee in 1899 and publishing "The Recent Development of Violence in Our Midst" with the Stop the War Committee in 1900[69] She later donated Dunford House, her father's childhood home, to the LSE in order to further the causes of peace, free trade, and education.

As we have all demonstrated, peace was the cornerstone to Cobden's ideological world view. In one of his earliest publications, "England, Ireland and America" (1835), he bemoaned England's "fatal mania for intervention in foreign politics".[70] The following year his pamphlet "Russia" (1836) advocated "peace, economy, and a moral ascendancy over brute violence".[71]

Cobden's support for peace and noninterventionist policies was directly linked to his advocacy of free trade. He argued that the economic, cultural, and political power of the aristocracy was a key element in the pursuit of wars and the acquisition of colonies, which were a drain on national resources and benefited only a few. This landed/military alliance was a precursor to the industrial-military complex identified by Eisenhower in 1961.[72] Cobden suggested that instead national greatness should be gained through the power of trade:

> Labour, improvements, and discoveries confer the greatest strength upon a people.… [B]y these alone, and not by the sword of the conqueror, can nations … hope to rise to supreme power and grandeur.[73]

Cobden considered that the pursuit of free trade would promote peace by transforming the national government, releasing the mass of the people from the excessive levels of taxation necessary for the pursuit of military adventures. However, he also considered international free-trade policies would cause states to become dependant on each other, writing,

> England has by the magic of her machinery, united for ever two remote hemispheres in the bonds of peace, by placing European and American in absolute and inextricable dependence on each other.[74]

In an important speech delivered to the House of Commons on June 28, 1850, as a response to a motion of confidence in Palmerston's foreign policy, Cobden made direct connections between his economic and international policies:

> I believe the progress of freedom depends more on the maintenance of peace and the spread of commerce and the diffusion of education than upon the labour of Cabinets or Foreign Offices. And if you can prevent those perturbations which have recently taken place abroad in consequence of your foreign policy, and if you

> will leave other nations in greater tranquillity, those ideas of freedom will continue to progress, and you need not trouble yourselves about them.[75]

Thus, Cobden was not advocating a policy of isolationism; rather, he saw the pursuit of international trade as a positive method of intervening in the internal affairs of other nations, a policy that would ultimately lead to freedom and peace.

David Nicholls has carefully charted Cobden's contribution to the Peace Congress Movement, arguing that his ideology of international cooperation changed policy towards an emphasis on international arbitration and treaties as means of resolving disputes.[76]

In the short-term the Congress movement may be regarded as a failure. The Crimean War turned public opinion against the peace campaigners, and both Cobden and Bright lost their seats in Parliament in the 1857 general election. The last of the organizing committees of the Congress Movement was dissolved in 1859. However, Cobden remained pragmatic, strategic, and tactical, committed to a longer view. He understood that the constituency that had supported the repeal of the Corn Laws would not necessarily back the peace movement, writing: "It would be about as rational to argue that the tree which has yielded a good crop of oranges must be able to give you some apples also."[77] He did not lobby for free trade to be an intrinsic element of the Congress program, realizing that its inclusion would alienate many supporters. He gave equal weight to the moral and the economic aspects of his strategy.

In the decade before his death he was instrumental in negotiating the Anglo-French trade treaty of 1860, which averted the danger of a panic-fed war, and argued against British intervention in the American Civil War.

Notwithstanding the short-term failures of Cobden's peace program, are his ideas of any consequence for later periods? The verdict of many modern scholars is that what is termed the "Trade-Conflict Nexus" does lead to greater peace and prosperity. Thus, the international economist Solomon Polachek argued that countries with the greatest levels of economic trade have the lowest amounts of hostility, and this is measurable. On average, a doubling of trade leads to a 20 percent reduction in hostility between countries.[78] The links Cobden made between the moral and economic aspect of a peace policy have also been employed successfully by many pressure groups for peace in the 150 years since his death.

Endnotes

[69.] Cobden Unwin, J. (1900), "The Recent Development of Violence in Our Midst," London: Stop the War Committee.

[70.] The quotation comes from Cobden's Preface (p. vi) to the 1835 edition of *England, Ireland, and America* which was not included in the 1903 edition which we have online in HTML. The 1835 edition is only available in PDF format </titles/2650>.

[71.] *The Political Writings of Richard Cobden, with a Preface by Lord Welby, Introductions by Sir Louis Mallet, C.B., and William Cullen Bryant, Notes by F.W. Chesson and a Bibliography*, vol. 1, (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903). "Russia" (1836) </titles/82#Cobden_0424-01_722>.

[72.] Dwight D. Eisenhower's Farewell Address was given on January 17, 1961. Youtube video of speech <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLqWfWxqh_0>; transcription of speech <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/dwightdeisenhowerfarewell.html>.

[73.] "Russia" (1836), Chap. III "Balance of Power" </titles/82#Cobden_0424-01_667>

[74.] "Russia" (1836), Chap. I "Russia, Turkey, and England" </titles/82#Cobden_0424-01_619>.

[75.] *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy by Richard Cobden, M.P., ed. by John Bright and J.E. Thorold Rogers with a Preface and Appreciation by J.E. Thorold Rogers and an Appreciation by Goldwin Smith* (London: T.Fisher Unwin, 1908). 2 volumes in 1. Vol. 2 War, Peace, and Reform. Speech in the House of Commons (June 28, 1850) </titles/931#Cobden_0129.02_315>.

[76.] See, Nicolls, D. (1991) "Richard Cobden and the International Peace Congress Movement, 1848-1853," *Journal of British Studies*, 30: 351-76.

[77.] Hobson, J. A. (1918) *Richard Cobden: An International Man*. London: T. Fisher Unwin, p. 105.

[78.] See, Polachek, S. (1980) "Conflict and Trade," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 24: 55-78, and Robson, A. (2012), "Individual Freedom, International Trade and International Conflict," *Journal of Peace, Prosperity and Freedom*, 1: 93-112.

RICHARD COBDEN: IMPACT AND LEGACY

by Gordon Bannerman

Anthony Howe's justified cautionary note in relation to the somewhat negative tone of earlier contributions is well-timed and calls for further explanatory comment. Clearly, by his role in the successful anti-Corn Law campaign Cobden had much to live up to in later campaigns. The failure of many of the causes he advocated cannot be attributed solely to Cobden, just as the success of Corn Law repeal was not his alone. With the possible exception of the 1849 "National Budget," which was primarily his own work, Cobden was only one member of many movements which had a highly variegated membership, and it was often the case that others assumed a leading role. Movements for financial reform and parliamentary reform were highly complex and involved a clash of a wide range of ideas and interests. Education was the classic example where the competing claims of the Established Church, Dissent, and secularism were only the most obvious fault lines in a fractious issue. Moreover, reform agitation surrounding these movements reflected this complexity inasmuch as the varied proposals and recommendations did not lend themselves to an easy or convenient identification of interests which encompassed a wider socioeconomic critique.

In terms of my previous comment regarding the extent of support for the League, I would add a qualification in the sense that a simple head count of the population with a majority in favor of repeal would not, given the political culture of the 1840s, have automatically justified or legitimized repeal. Despite the 1832 Reform Act, Britain was a very long way from a democratic model whereby parliamentary representatives acted as quasi-delegates and whose votes in the House of Commons were merely a reflection of public opinion in their constituencies.

In 1817, George Canning had stated:

> When I am told that the House of Commons is not sufficiently identified with the people, to catch their every nascent wish and to act upon their every transient impression, — that it is not the immediate, passive, unreasoning organ of popular volition, — I answer, thank God that it is not! I answer, that according to no principle of our constitution, was it ever meant to be so; — and that it never pretended to be so, nor ever can pretend to be so, without bringing ruin and misery upon the kingdom.[79]

By 1846 the position was not substantially different. Despite a small number of resignations by MPs whose opinions conflicted with majority opinion in their constituencies, the trustee model of representative democracy famously outlined by Edmund Burke on 3 November 1774 in his *Speech to the Electors of Bristol* remained dominant.

Edmund Burke

Burke said:

> Parliament is not a Congress of Ambassadors from different and hostile interests; which interests each must maintain, as an Agent and Advocate, against other Agents and Advocates; but Parliament is a deliberative Assembly of one Nation, with one Interest, that of the whole; where, not local Purposes, not local Prejudices ought to guide, but the general Good, resulting from the general Reason of the whole. You chuse [sic] a Member indeed; but when you have chosen him he is not Member of Bristol, but he is a Member of Parliament.[80]

Schonhardt-Bailey has demonstrated how League activity, institutional reform, and changing economic interests at the constituency level were important variables influencing policy preferences in parliamentary votes on repeal.[81] Even if there was clearly no automatic mechanism for translating constituency opinion into parliamentary votes, bringing pressure to bear within constituencies and keeping the question alive was still vitally important. By utilizing a range of propaganda devices and instruments, the League's "multimedia" approach, in speech, text, and illustration, was innovative in popularizing repeal, but quantifying its impact is extremely difficult. [See below for two examples of illustrations (45-46) conceived by Cobden for use by the ACLL.] In defending free trade from fair traders in the 1800s and Tariff Reformers in the 1900s, free traders adopted largely the same propagandist instruments and devices. However, aided by technological advances, the expansion of the press, and the growth of political democracy, late 19th-century and early 20th-century free traders arguably reached a wider and more-informed audience than had been possible in the 1840s.

Yet, while free trade was highly influential in British political culture well into the 20th century, it was never unanimously accepted. Dissenters from free-trade policies and the worldview they represented were fairly consistent in advocating an alternative conceptual framework for the role of commerce within the State. While protectionism languished in mid-Victorian Britain, the emergence of historical economists counterposing a "national" economic policy to the internationalism of free trade provided some theoretical ballast, vibrancy, and respectability. Nevertheless, the theoretical dominance of free-trade ideas is very apparent when we consider that Friedrich List's *National System of Political Economy* was not translated into English until 1885, over 40 years after it was first published and circulated widely in Continental Europe.[82]

As we have seen, by the 20th century Free Trade was under threat from a more coherent collectivism and a more powerful rights-based socialist labor movement. Arguments for free trade were modulated and adjusted commensurately with these changes in political culture.[83] The economic case for free trade, on the basis of individual liberty, natural justice, and economic efficiency, was increasingly supplemented by a politically neutral consumerism for the benefit of working-class opinion. In the short-term the success of this approach led socialists to lament the consumer psychology which had subverted proletarian class consciousness. Theodore Rothstein described the shift from militant proletarian to petit bourgeois as characterized by workers' interest "not

so much in the income as in the expenditure side of his budget."[84]

The social contract with the Victorian state, based on the primacy of the citizen-consumer and embodying a political guarantee of working-class material welfare, proved to be powerful in securing working-class support. The continuity of free-trade principles and the policy instruments it contained made it theoretically and practically mutable, and able to serve as the basis for liberal social democracy in the early 20th century.[85]

Cobden's influence in this transformation was not lost on contemporaries. As one organ of provincial liberalism stated in the centenary year of his birth:

> Were there no fiscal revival to stimulate interest in his life and work he would nevertheless continue a living force, persisting powerfully in numerous directions.[86]

By 2004, with the passage of time and the revolution and reconfiguration of modern political ideas, appreciation of the political importance of Cobden was more the province of academics than of the popular press or popular political culture. While press comment in 2004 was limited (though not completely absent), it was the bicentenary essays in *Rethinking Nineteenth-Century Liberalism*, edited by Anthony Howe and Simon Morgan (2006), which has revived interest in the man and illustrated the contemporary relevance of his ideas.[87]

Endnotes

[79.] Canning;s "Address on the Prince Regent's Speech at the Opening of the Session" (19 Jan., 1817), *Hansard* HC Deb, 29 January 1817 vol. 35 cc. 130-31. .

[80.] Burke's Speech to the Electors of Bristol (3 November 1774) in *Mr Edmund Burke's Speeches at His Arrival at Bristol: and at the Conclusion of the Poll.* (London: J. Dodsley, 1775), pp 28-29 ; and *Select Works of Edmund Burke. A New Imprint of the Payne Edition. Foreword and Biographical Note by Francis Canavan* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999). Vol. 4. "Mr. Edmund Burke's Speech to the Electors of Bristol" (3 Nov., 1774) <</titles/659#Burke_0005-04_80>.

[81.] Schonhardt-Bailey, *From the Corn Laws to Free Trade* (2006), pp. 107-54.

[82.] Friedrich List's protectionist work *National System of Political Economy* was published in Stuttgart in 1841 with a second revised edition in 1844. It was translated into French in 1851 by Henri Richelot who was head of the Ministry of Commerce. It was first translated into English in 1856 in Philadelphia, with a London edition appearing in 1885. The 1909 edition of the London translation can be found on the OLL <</titles/315>.

[83.] Howe, "Towards the 'Hungry Forties': Free Trade in Britain, c. 1880-1906," pp. 193-95.

[84.]Rothstein, Theodore, *From Chartism to Labourism: Historical Sketches of the English Working Class Movement* (1929), p. 264.

[85.] Howe, "Towards the 'Hungry Forties': Free Trade in Britain, c. 1880-1906," pp. 199-201.

[86.] "The Centenary of Cobden," *Dundee Advertiser*, 3 June 1904.

[87.] Howe, Anthony and Morgan, Simon, eds.2006. *Rethinking Nineteenth-Century Liberalism: Richard Cobden Bicentenary Essays*. Aldershot; Ashgate.

WHAT COBDEN HAS WROUGHT

by Stephen Davies

The comments by the other participants in this conversation contain so many interesting points that I hardly know where to begin in reacting as well as making further points of my own. As such I will highlight what I see as the most important or insightful points, but this should not be taken to mean that other parts of what they have said are not worthy of attention.

I agree with Anthony Howe that perhaps in our focus upon the question of why it proved hard in several cases

to repeat the success of the Anti-Corn Law campaign we adopted an excessively negative tone. What is important to remember, as he says, is just how extraordinary the success of the campaign was, given the obstacles it faced. It did take 10 years, as Gordon Bannerman points out, but I suspect that informed political opinion in Cobden's own time would have thought it impossible that it would ever succeed. The many images and texts that David Hart has incorporated[88] remind us of just how varied and extensive the propaganda and activities of the League were. We are in need of a proper comparative study of 19th- and early 20th-century campaigns and pressure groups (Patricia Hollis's edited collection[89] is still the best work on this) which would show, I suspect, that the League employed a far more varied range of techniques than most other campaigns.

One interesting comparison is with Irish nationalism. If we compare Cobden's campaign with the movement to repeal the Act of Union led by his contemporary (and ally) Daniel O'Connell, what becomes clear is the way that the latter was focused very closely on politics, with huge mass meetings the primary activity. The same point can be made a fortiori about Chartism or later Irish nationalism in the age of Parnell. All of these movements were about pressuring the political class to take certain measures, but beyond that, to mobilize a large group (the Irish or manual workers) so that they could gain political power. Both of these were present in the free trade campaign, particularly the former of course, but they were combined with something that was incidental in the contrasting movements, even Chartism. This was what Gordon Bannerman and Sarah Richardson allude to (particularly in the discussion of Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey's work) – a deliberate effort to shape public culture and outlook. This has much more profound and long-lasting effects arguably than political action and is much more likely to succeed, particularly when compared to an attempt to alter not just a particular government but the entire political regime. Unfortunately the kind of politics that Michael Davitt or Parnell practiced has a persistent fascination for the radical mind when the kind of cultural or institution-building politics of Cobden and others has more chance of lasting effect.

One particular point made by Anthony Howe is the way Cobden successfully brought about a radical shift in the popular perspective, from a focus on the interests of producers to those of consumers. This of course was strongly contested, and the idea that production takes place in order to create jobs rather than to produce goods for consumption is still very popular. However, polls and other tests of opinion in the United Kingdom repeatedly show that the majority of the British public continues to take the consumer-oriented position. This is a simple change of thinking and perspective that has profound and extensive consequences. The interesting contrast is with the United States, where producerist arguments continue to have enormous popular purchase and there is an entire genre of popular economic writing that calls for protection and other measures to boost production at the expense of consumption. There is no counterpart to this in the United Kingdom.

One interesting question that Gordon Bannerman raises is that of Cobden's view of international relations. Put simply, what would he make of supranationalism of the kind represented by the United Nations and other institutions and the growth of a body of international law in the form of binding treaties and covenants. This is a controversial topic, with some authors such as Razeen Sally[90] arguing that this kind of development is very much the realization of Cobden's ideas. I personally disagree strongly with that. In my view the model of international relations that Cobden and many

of his contemporaries espoused was very different, with two important elements not found in current internationalist thinking. The first was the idea that a stable order of commonly shared principles and rules would grow up piecemeal from the bottom up through repeated resort to arbitration and plebiscites to settle disputes between states. This is critically different from the top down model of sovereign states (particularly the great powers) acting to impose an order on the world. In particular the content of the emergent world order was not prescribed for Cobden or derived from abstract principles; it was rather something that would emerge or be discovered. The second was the idea found in the writings of several of his contemporaries (notably French liberals such as Charles Dunoyer) and which Cobden himself alluded to, that of the "municipalization of the world." This was the idea that as society progressed, large territorial states and empires would be replaced by a multiplicity of small self-governing communities organized collectively in voluntary confederations or leagues. In a speech Cobden gave in Manchester on January 15, 1846 he states:

> I see in the Free-trade principle that which shall act on the moral world as the principle of gravitation in the universe,—drawing men together, thrusting aside the antagonism of race, and creed, and language, and uniting us in the bonds of eternal peace. I have looked even farther. I have speculated, and probably dreamt, in the dim future—ay, a thousand years hence—I have speculated on what the effect of the triumph of this principle may be. I believe that the effect will be to change the face of the world, so as to introduce a system of government entirely distinct from that which now prevails. I believe that the desire and the motive for large and mighty empires; for gigantic armies and great navies—for those materials which are used for the destruction of life and the desolation of the rewards of labour—will die away; I believe that such things will cease to be necessary, or to be used, when man becomes one family, and freely exchanges the fruits of his labour with his brother man. I believe that, if we could be allowed to reappear on this sublunary scene, we should see, at a far distant period, the governing system of this world revert to something like the municipal system; and I believe that the speculative philosopher of a thousand years hence will date the greatest revolution that ever happened in the world's history from the triumph of the principle which we have met here to advocate.[91]

This is relevant for a point made by Sarah Richardson. She mentions Cobden's involvement in the Peace Congress movement, as examined by my former colleague David Nicholls. This was indeed much more successful and had a greater impact at the time and subsequently than we realize. One important part of this whole movement, which Cobden supported although it was most associated with his ally Joseph Sturge, was the notion of "peoples diplomacy." This meant developing what we would now call civil-society connections between the inhabitants of different states, direct personal contacts and links between ordinary people as opposed to formal diplomatic relations between governments. (One reason for this was the explicit belief that diplomats reflected the interests of ruling classes rather than ordinary people.) This kind of activity, as Sarah points out, did indeed bring about significant shifts in outlook. Unfortunately the later 19th and very early 20th centuries saw a sudden revival of the idea that relations between different national groups were zero-sum competitions and that war was actually a good, particularly as a character-building exercise. This strikes most people today as simply bonkers, but it became an important part of both elite and popular culture by the 1890s and 1900s.

Friedrich List

An important point that Gordon Bannerman makes is the enduring resistance to free trade and the later revival of economic nationalism. He mentions the crucial figure in this process, Friedrich List. As he says, List's ides did not have an impact in Britain until a comparatively late date. In fact when List's book *The National System of Political Economy* was first published in 1841, it had little success, and when he took his own life in 1846 due his having a terminal illness, he probably thought it had completely failed. It was, however, always popular in the United States (where he had actually formed his theories under the influence of people such as Henry Charles Carey[92]) and was translated into English there as early as 1856. However, the real breakthrough for List happened after 1870, particularly of course in his native Germany. In the United States the last third of the 19th century saw a robust debate between supporters of List's approach and advocates of free trade associated with the so-called Bourbon Democrats (such as Grover Cleveland) and the Mugwump faction of the Republicans. A key role in this was played by a network of Cobden Clubs as grassroots advocates of the free-trade position. In 1896, however, the protectionist side gained a crushing and decisive victory. Meanwhile in Britain, there was a challenge to Cobden's legacy with the appearance of the historical approach to economics by people such as William Cunningham. All this came to a head with the great debate over tariff reform between 1902 and 1906.[93] Both sides, as Gordon points out, employed the methods pioneered by Cobden in the 1840s but with much greater reach. The result at the time was a decisive victory for the free-trade side, even greater than the contrary outcome in the United States in 1896.

One final point is that of how to assess current technological developments and whether they make the kind of cultural politics Cobden pioneered more or less likely. I think it is fair to say that Sarah and I are more optimistic, Gordon less so. I think that Sarah and I would emphasize the mobilizing and connecting potential of social media and other developments, while Gordon is more struck by the frivolous and often ill-tempered and splenetic side of phenomena such as Twitter conversations. Certainly it can seem that all that social media have done so far is to provide a megaphone for popular ignorance and bile. However, what it also does is allow opportunity for the correcting and often the shaming or ridiculing of that ignorance (as we have seen a splendid example of recently in the case of the Fox News "terrorism expert" who thought that Birmingham was a majority Muslim city [94]). Clearly we will have to wait and see which of these perceptions is more correct. But I remain hopeful.

Endnotes

[88.] See, Images of Liberty: "Cobden and the Anti-Corn Law League " </pages/cobden-and-the-anti-corn-law-league>.

[89.] Hollis, Patricia (ed). *Pressure From Without in Early Victorian England.* Edward Arnold, 1974. London.

[90.]Razeen Sally, *Classical Liberalism and International Order.* Routledge, London 1998.

[91.] Cobden's quote comes from *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy by Richard Cobden, M.P.,* (1908), Vol. 1 Free Trade and Finance. Free Trade Speech XX. (Manchester, Jan. 15, 1846) </titles/927#Cobden_0129.01_579>. Charles Dunoyer (1786-1862) was a lawyer, social theorist, and president of the Political Economy Society. He wrote two books during the 1820s in which he

showed how America provided the model for how liberty and industrialism would "municipaliser le monde" (municipalize the world). By this he meant that as industrial societies advanced, they would reach a point where all large political structures would break down into smaller municipalities of self-governing cities and their hinterlands. See, Charles Dunoyer, *L'Industrie et la morale considérées dans leurs rapports avec la liberté* (Paris: A. Sautelet et Cie, 1825), p. 366-7, fn 1.

[92.] Henry Charles Carey (1793-1879) was an American economist who was a strong critic of British free trade policies and a supporter of Alexander Hamilton's "American system" of high tariffs and government funded public works ("internal improvements"). His main works were *Principles of Political Economy*, in 4 vols. (Philadelphia: Carely, Lea & Blanchard, 1837-1840), and *The Harmony of Interests: Agricultural, Manufacturing, and Commercial* (Philadelphia: J.S. Skinner, 1851).

[93.] See Illustration 52: "Free Trade Shop vs. Protection Shop (c. 1905-10); Illustration 53: "An Eye Opener" (c.1905-10); Illustration 54: "How the Tories Have Increased the Cost of Living" (c.1905-10); Illustration 55: "Vote for Tariff Reform" (c.1905-10); Illustration 56: Imperial Tariff Committee: "A Free Trade Forecast" (c1905-10) in the collection "Cobden and the Anti-Corn Law League" </pages/cobden-and-the-anti-corn-law-league>.

[94.] Steven Emerson, "Fox News 'terrorism expert' apologises for calling Birmingham 'totally Muslim city'", *The Independent*, Friday 16 January, 2015 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/fox-news-terrorism-expert-steven-emerson-apologises-for-calling-birmingham-totally-muslim-city-9971666.html>.

MANCHESTER OR MIDHURST?

by Sarah Richardson

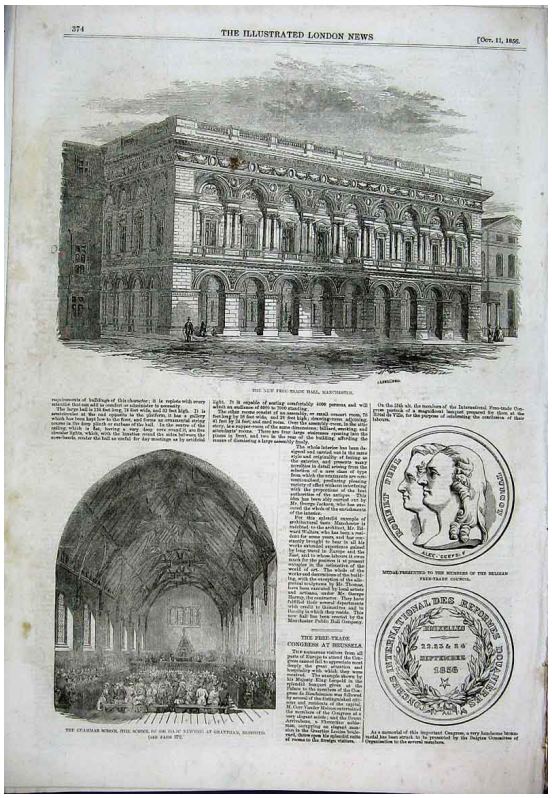
One aspect of Cobden's success was his ability to present himself equally effectively as the Manchester Manufacturer or the Sussex Yeoman Farmer. This dual identity enabled him to be all things to all men: the cotton merchant campaigning for free trade or the rural agriculturalist urging land reform.

In his earliest pamphlets, Cobden wrote anonymously as A Manchester Manufacturer, using these credentials to speak authoritatively on aspects of economic and foreign policy. As the "Manchester School," he worked effectively with radical business leaders, including John Bright, Archibald Prentice, Edward Miall, and J. B. Smith. The term "Manchester School" was actually coined by Cobden's arch enemy, Benjamin Disraeli, who in a mocking speech to Parliament in 1846 accused the repealers of a naïve belief that other nations would sign up to commercial free-trade treaties :

> I want to ask the right hon. Gentleman a very important question—does he believe that he can fight hostile tariffs with free imports? That is the point. ["Hear!"] "Hear, hear," from the disciples of the *school of Manchester*! A most consistent cheer! They have always maintained they can; and if their principles are right, as they believe they are—as I believe they are not—I can easily understand, that their premises being assumed, they may arrive at that conclusion. They believe they can fight hostile tariffs with free imports, and they tell us very justly, "Let us take care of our imports, and every thing else will take care of itself."[95]

According to William Dyer Grampp, who wrote a key monograph, *The Manchester School of Economics*, Cobden was pleased with the nomenclature and apparently liked to term himself and John Bright as "professors" of the school.[96] Manchester too remained loyal to Cobden and the Manchester School. The Free Trade Hall was

built on land donated by Cobden in St Peter's Fields, Manchester between 1853 and 1856. Its name keeping the policy firmly in the minds of the population of the city. A statue to Cobden was also erected in St Ann's Square, Manchester funded by public subscription. The surplus was given to educational causes including funding a Chair of Political Economy at Owens College (later the University of Manchester). The statue was unveiled in 1867 with great pomp, attended by leading northern Liberals, although a notable absence was John Bright. Among the banners and artefacts there were two imitations loaves of bread: a larger one inscribed with the message 'Free Trade' and a smaller one entitled 'Protection'.



Free Trade Hall, Manchester

However, as Cobden's political interests moved away from repeal towards issues such as land reform, he drew on his early boyhood experience living on (and losing) the family farm at Heyshott in Sussex. Anthony Howe demonstrates how his move back to rural Sussex in 1850 enlightened him to the backwardness and feudal nature of rural society, citing this letter written by Cobden to Brougham:

> I have frequently asked myself, whilst perambulating the Duke of Richmond's villages, -- in what do these peasants differ from their Saxon forefathers? -- The range of their ideas is about the same; bounded by their daily occupations, which have not much varied in a thousand years. – Their knowledge of the world does not extend much beyond their own parish. -- No light penetrates their mind beyond their hamlets.[97]

However, Anthony Taylor argues that Cobden was reinvented as a great land-reform crusader by his brother-in-law, James Thorold Rogers, in the years after his death.[98] This reworking of Cobden's identity as a Sussex yeoman rather than a Manchester businessman was aided by Cobden's daughters. An article in the *Daily Chronicle* in 1904 based on conversations with Annie Cobden-Sanderson and Kate Cobden Fisher emphasizes that he was first and foremost a friend and advocate of the rural peasantry:

> One of Cobden's most striking characteristics was his antagonism to the feudal class as it survived in his day. He believed that the only class which possessed sufficient wealth and influence to counteract the feudal spirit was the great manufacturers and merchants of England. Mrs. Cobden-Sanderson supplied an interesting gloss on this point. "It was," she said, "living in the country and knowing so much of the lives of the people there that made him understand what feudalism meant."[99]

Kate Fisher recollected,

> He came into the country rather for rest. He loved the country. He was always particularly fond of the South Downs, and he loved all the life of Nature. He liked to watch how the crops were coming on and to visit the farmyard – he loved all the animals; and then he was always glad to talk to the labourers at their work on the farm or on the roads; indeed he was interested in everybody around him or whom he met.The country, of course, was much more Conservative

> then than it is now; but there was an old tenant farmer who had such a great admiration for my father -- both for himself and for what he had done in giving the people cheap bread -- that, after my father's death, he had a little obelisk erected to his memory, which is still standing in West Lavington. It was a brave thing at that time for a man to do who was only a tenant farmer….[100]

In 1880, Cobden's daughter Jane donated a cottage to Heyshott village to establish a Cobden Club, one of the first rural working men's clubs in England. The Cobden Club Hall moved to a new building in the twentieth century and the original was converted to a private cottage. His daughters then, were instrumental in re-inventing their father as the champion of rural labourers, to keep his legacy relevant for future generations.

Cobden was a consummate politician and propagandist. His ability to flip identities from urban industrialist to rural landowner was surely part of his success.

Endnotes

[95.] Benjamin Disraeli, speech to the House of Commons, 20 February 1846, emphasis added. <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1846/feb/20/commercial-policy-customs-corn-laws#column_1326>

[96.] William Dyer Grampp, *The Manchester School of Economics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960). </titles/2128#Grampp_1445_21>. Note: Grampp wrongly states that Disraeli's speech was delivered in 1848.

[97.] Cited in Howe, p. 84. Howe, A. "The 'Manchester School' and the Landlords: The Failure of Land Reform in Early Victorian Britain," 74-91 in Cragoe and Readman.

[98.] See, Taylor, A. "Richard Cobden, J. E. Thorold Rogers and Henry George," 146-66 in Cragoe and Readman .

[99.] Typescript of interview between Annie Cobden Sanderson and the *Daily Chronicle*, 1904. Cobden-Sanderson MS, Add. MS 6041.

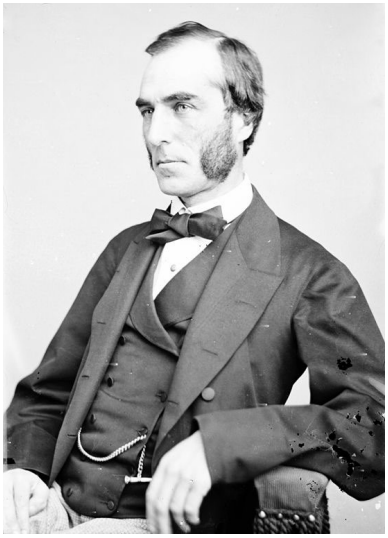
[100.] Typescript of interview between Kate Cobden Fisher and the *Daily Chronicle*, 1904. Cobden-Sanderson MS, Add. MS 6041.

RICHARD COBDEN: FURTHER THOUGHTS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

by Gordon Bannerman

Stephen Davies's excellent summary of the conversation offers much food for thought. The conversation has ranged far and wide in exploring, explaining, and defining Cobden's influence in time and space. The multifaceted influence and relevance of Cobden's ideas has been very apparent. The centrality of the League campaign is entirely understandable and justifiable but should not of course blind us to Cobden's long-term international influence, and the longevity and continuing relevance of his ideas. The domestic influence of Cobdenite ideas was indeed great, and the growth of consumer-related politics as the primary theme of free-trade agitation in a more democratic age, with a mass of working-class consumers and voters, was long-lived, despite coming to a rather abrupt end.

While clearly an important figure in forging new and more effective modes of political agitation, perhaps Cobden's most lasting achievement was in creating an intellectual outlook that linked domestic commercial policy, antimilitarism, and international commercial cooperation, which ultimately offered a vision of a better future for humanity. For Cobden international free trade should lead to a transformation in the conduct of diplomacy and foreign policy, from being the province of diplomats and politicians to that of communities, merchants, and traders. Cobden's internationalist outlook, as described by Stephen Davies, was of a world where there would be an international community sharing common principles and values, and which possessed a broad agreement on arbitration, conciliation, and the peaceful settling of international disputes.



Goldwin Smith

The practicality of these ideas was questioned even by Cobden's admirers. For example Goldwin Smith claimed that Cobden had succumbed to his own enthusiasm:

> Hardly any mind can escape the bias of its history. Cobden's had no doubt constructed a bias, and a serious one, from the Free Trade struggle. Absolutely free from any sordid sentiment, from any disposition to believe that man lives by bread alone, from any conscious preference of material over moral and political consideration, yet he was inclined to overrate the beneficent power of commercial influences, and consequently the value of commercial objects.[101]

Nevertheless, elements of Cobdenite thought remain in the international policy space, and free trade has generally retained its positive connotations despite attacks from the modern "fair-trade" movement. Of course, while many politicians pay lip-service to the moralistic and ethical aspects of free trade, in practice, the implementation of the policy, or the extent of its application, is largely dictated by national "vital interests." Clearly, this "politicking" would not be approved by Cobden, for as he famously stated on 28 June 1850:

> I believe the progress of freedom depends more upon the maintenance of peace, the spread of commerce, and the diffusion of education than upon the labours of Cabinets or Foreign-offices.[102]

While we are very far from having established this state of affairs in foreign relations, it remains a noble aspiration. Yet somewhat ironically, the desire to sustain local economies and small producers, underpinned by ethical and moral imperatives, in a "fair" global commercial environment has resulted in broad-based attacks by NGOs and anticapitalist protesters against open markets and globalization.[103] Popular protest has been supplemented by the loss of academic and theoretical hegemony, with the complexity of the international economy making the modern case for free trade appear, according to Razeen Sally, as "too narrow and mechanical" and even "a little unreal."[104]

It is certainly true that a particularly interesting aspect of the conversation has been the contemporary as well as historical relevance of many of Cobden's ideas. Perhaps new social media will more easily allow the transmission of Cobdenite ideas as well as other radical ideas to reach a wider audience with far less effort than Cobden had to exert. While it seems unlikely that the mere existence of social media can lead to a greater interest in politics or political ideas, it can certainly supplement a popular movement and create something of a community of interest. In that respect, I am not so far away from the more optimistic position of Sarah Richardson and Stephen Davies.

Endnotes

[101.] Smith, Goldwin. 1911. *Reminiscences.* Arnold Haultain (ed.) New York: Macmillan and Co., p. 246.

[102.] Cobden, "Speech in the House of Commons (June 28, 1850)," *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy,* vol. 2, 228 </titles/931#Cobden_0129.02_315>. For speeches on this theme see: *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy by Richard Cobden, M.P., ed. by John Bright and J.E. Thorold Rogers with a Preface and Appreciation by J.E. Thorold Rogers and an Appreciation by Goldwin Smith* (London: T.Fisher Unwin, 1908). 2 volumes in 1. Vol. 2 War, Peace, and Reform.

[103.] Irwin, Douglas A. 2002. *Free Trade under Fire.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 225-28.

[104.] Sally, Razeen. 2008. *Trade Policy, New Century: the WTO, FTAs, and Asia Rising.* London: Institute of Economic Affairs, p. 47-8.

COBDEN AND THE PEOPLE: THEN AND NOW

by Anthony C. Howe

Amongst the many interesting points in this conversation, two may be worth elaborating further, the timing and degree of popular support for free trade and Cobden's understanding of internationalism and people's diplomacy.

On the first, while Gordon Bannerman is right to set limits to the Anti-Corn Law League's working-class following, as he also shows, free-trade values permeated popular consciousness, as was seen in the degree of support from trade unions by the 1860s, the cult of Cobden after his death, and the many ways in which, as Sarah Richardson has shown, his legacy was reaffirmed by his daughters. Here we should not forget the huge impact of Jane Cobden-Unwin's *The Hungry Forties* (1904), which also contains interesting reminders of Cobden's Sussex rural radicalism. Hence as Ross McKibbin concluded in a celebrated article, "The free trade fiscal system had, before 1914, an ideological value for the working class far beyond any conceivable socialist doctrine." [105] Here, too, as Stephen Davies rightly notes, most British workers (including agricultural ones) saw themselves as consumers, in contrast to the producers' rhetoric in the United States.[106] This suggests that rather than comparing the League with later British reform movements we might compare it with the activities of groups such as the American Free Trade League, and compare Cobden with the aspiring "Cobden of America," David Wells.[107] This also reveals the extent to which Cobden or the Cobden Club became an object of suspicion within the rhetoric of Anglophobic economic nationalism in the United States.[108] One elderly American once contacted me to recall that in his youth he had been a member of the "Anti-Cobden Club" in Philadelphia. For Cobden himself I would argue that free trade was an essential part of emancipating the people – that tariffs represented "interests" battening on popular welfare, and that with their removal, the "natural order" would be restored, all in line with his desire to popularize Smithian economics.

More difficult to achieve was the alignment of foreign policy with what might be deemed people's diplomacy. Cobden was suspicious of congresses of nations because in his day they would have reinforced the power of existing, mostly reactionary, states. Hence, as Davies points out, Cobden wanted to maximize connections between peoples at all levels, as seen, for example, in his approval of the visit of over 2000 French male singers to the Crystal Palace in 1860: "If the relations between the two countries depended only on the conduct of the *peoples* towards each other I should have no fear;- their instincts alone & force of natures laws would keep them at peace." [109]

However, this spontaneous peacefulness was vitiated in his view by the John Bullish instincts aroused by Palmerstonian diplomacy. Cobden wrestled with the question as to whether wars were genuinely or artificially popular and by the 1860s came optimistically to believe that with greater democracy in Britain, war would become less popular, an early expression of the view that democracy favored peace.[110] What remains unclear in Cobden's thought is whether future international bodies might have been deemed to represent the collective peoples' will – arguably a Gladstonian-style Concert of Europe did promise this. Likewise, avid Cobdenites like Sir Louis Mallet favored an international body to determine tariffs, surely a route to the WTO. Here, too, while I think Stephen Davies is right to link Cobden to the "municipalization of the world" in the 1830s and 1840s, I would suggest his ideas changed after 1848, that he came to recognize more strongly the force of nationalism and therefore became a pioneer of "inter-nationalism," the building of ties between nations which became a feature of the 1860s.[111] Here, too, Gordon

Bannerman is right to stress democratic accountability of foreign policy, which became a hallmark of the Cobdenite tradition, with which a U.S. vote over Syria in 2013 would have accorded precisely; oddly the Cobdenite echoes here seem to have gone unnoticed in public debate.

In trade and foreign policy, therefore, Cobden's concern was that government should reflect the will of the governed, a view he traced back to the 18th-century "Friends of America." How far this pertains to the present day is more difficult to judge – can social media and the blogosphere reinforce democracy or not? Cobden himself, however, we can be sure valued highly active citizenship, independent judgement, and the maximum of political information, although he did not of course live to see the age of Victorian two-party representative government.

One final note, in terms of Cobden's views on government and peoples, this conversation has largely omitted Cobden's anti-imperial views, surely a major area of his legacy in late-19th- and early-20th-century Britain (and certainly one his daughters enthusiastically took up).

Endnotes

[105.] McKibbin, R. "Why Was There No Marxism in Great Britain?," *English Historical Review* 99 (1984), p. 322.

[106.]Howe, A. "Free Trade and the International Order: The Anglo-American Tradition, 1846-1946," in F. Leventhal and R. Quinault eds., *Anglo-American Attitudes* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

[107.] DMH: The American Free Trade League was founded in 1864 by the lawyer Simon Sterne (1839-1901) and the economist and statistician Alexander del Mar (1836–1926) and included among its membership the economist Arthur Latham Perry (1830-1905), the New York politician Horace White (1865-1943), the engineer and economist David Ames Wells (1828-1898), and the essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882). Related to this were regional groups such as The New York Free-Trade Club which was founded in 1878 and seems to have been quite active, publishing a magazine called *The Free-Trader,* and books like William Graham Sumner's *Lectures on the History of Protection in the United States. Delivered before the International Free-Trade Alliance* (New York: Published for the New York Free Trade Club by G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1883). The engineer and economist David Ames Wells (1828-1898) wrote many pamphlets for the League as well as an important article on "Free Trade" for Lalor's *Cyclopaedia of Political Science, Political Economy, and of the Political History of the United States* (1899). The French economist and friend and colleague of Bastiat, Gustave de Molinari (1819-1912), wrote the article on "Protection" (based upon his article on "Tariffs" in the *Dictionnaire de l'économie politique* (1853-54) ; and David H. Mason wrote the lengthy pro-protectionist article "Protection in the United States" .

[108.] Palen, M-W. "Foreign Relations in the Gilded Age: A British Free Trade Conspiracy?," *Diplomatic History* 37 (2013).

[109.] Howe, A. and S. J. Morgan eds. *The Letters of Richard Cobden. Volume 4 1860-1865* (forthcoming, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 117.

[110.]Wolf, M. "Richard Cobden and the Democratic Peace," in G. Cook ed., *Freedom and Trade, Volume 2* (London: Routledge, 1998).

[111.] Howe, A. (2). "Free Trade and Global Order: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Vision," in D. Bell ed., *Victorian Visions of Global Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

COBDEN, COMMERCE, AND EMPIRE

by Gordon Bannerman

As all the participants in this conversation have noted, the influence of the Anti-Corn Law League on the political consciousness of the British nation was of long duration. As Anthony Howe argues, the idea that taxes on food imports deleteriously impacted on the welfare of the nation was increasingly accepted. Although the League failed to attract mass working-class support, it did succeed in effecting a fundamental shift in the political

psychology of workers and in identifying free trade as a vital national interest for an expanding industrial and commercial economy. Over time, working-class opposition to protective duties (and perhaps less enthusiastically, support for free trade) became more pronounced. However, alongside the political opinion of the respectable and politically aware working class, we must set the opinion of those in late-Victorian and early Edwardian Britain who thought little of politics. In August 1903 a walking tour of Britain intended to gauge opinion on the tariff reform issue concluded:

> Above all, the wearisome lack of interest or monotonous opposition to the food taxes as they are known universally throughout the land by the working classes is evident.[112]

It would have taken and indeed ultimately did take a great crisis to effect a paradigm shift of sufficient magnitude to sever the association between protective duties and high food prices.

THE CHOICE OF A LOAF. [See page 167

The power of the League's propaganda in forging that association in the public mind was evident, not least and perhaps especially, among its opponents. In the 1880s, the fair-trade campaign, in attempting to counter the "big loaf" arguments of free traders, tried to turn the tables by portraying "The Free Trade Loaf" as one-third home-grown, two-thirds foreign-grown, with factories running short time and men out of work. By contrast "The Fair Trade Loaf" was all grown within the Empire, with secure return markets for manufactures, and factories running full-time with plenty of work.[113] Interestingly enough, a placard featured in a drawing was inscribed, "independent of the world," thus indicating a concern with self-sufficiency, a vintage autarkic pro-Corn Law argument.[114] By contesting anti-corn law discourse and motifs, fair traders, although subverting the original message, perhaps did little more than propagate that message and bolster the association in the public mind between protective duties and high food prices.

Certainly, among the political classes, in a more democratic age, adopting food taxes was considered socially and politically dangerous. Even sympathizers like Lord Randolph Churchill held the view that:

> Low prices in the necessaries of life and political stability in a democratic Constitution are practically inseparable, and that high prices in the necessaries of life and political instability in a democratic Constitution are also practically inseparable.[115]

Fair trade struggled to create an identity clearly distinguishable from older forms of protectionism. As Platt has argued, while the movement sought to construct a "national" commercial policy based on protection for domestic industries and imperial preference, "its misfortune was that it became popularly identified with a return to the discredited Protectionism which had ended effectively with the Repeal of the Corn Laws."[116]

The imperial link was increasingly important in 19th-century politics and political discourse. Clearly Anthony Howe is correct to point to anti-imperialism as something not only submerged within this conversation but also perhaps an understated element in Cobdenite historiography. As well as opposing the protectionist regulatory framework of preferential tariffs, Cobden's anti-imperialism was closely linked to support for retrenchment in government expenditure, opposition to the growth of militarism, and the rapid and alarming acceleration in Britain's acquisition of colonial territories.

Anti-imperialism was a pervasive though often subordinate element of his political thought. Early in his career, in a letter of 29 April 1837, he informed William Tait of his thoughts on Britain's Mediterranean colonies:

> Upon Gibraltar I shall give my opinion that it would be best for the English nation to destroy the fortifications; & give up this barren rock to the Spaniards in consideration of a commercial treaty—Upon the subject of Malta I would also advocate the demolition of the fortifications, & the policy of making the island a free port governed by its own people—The Ionian Islands ought not, & must not be suffered, to cost the English a penny—what use are they to us"?[117]

By referencing national self-determination, representative democracy, financial retrenchment, and commercial cooperation, this critique neatly incorporated many important strands in Cobden's radical anti-imperialism. After Cobden's death in 1865, the empire assumed greater prominence in British politics. Disraeli was not alone in considering colonial territories as "millstones," but later in the 19th century Disraeli's brand of Toryism was increasingly superseded by a more aggressive and modern Conservatism which promoted tighter imperial institutional, political, and commercial links.

While fair trade promoted the linkages between tariffs, military power, and empire, these elements were more coherently bound together and displayed more overtly and vigorously in Joseph Chamberlain's tariff-reform movement. The struggle between "formal" empire, imperial expansion, territorial annexations, and Cobden's belief in commerce as a great civilizing force had of course a long lineage. The 1850s had been a particularly tumultuous decade, when Cobden's vision of a new, peaceful form of international relations based on commercial activity rather than diplomatic and military alliances and rivalries foundered and was continually undermined by colonial wars and territorial expansion in India and China, and war in the Crimea. For Cobden's consideration of retribution for "imperial crimes," see this passage from his 1853 pamphlet *How Wars are got up in India*:

> But it is not consistent with the supremacy of that moral law which mysteriously sways the fate of empires, as well as of individuals, that deeds of violence, fraud, and injustice, should be committed with permanent profit and advantage. If wrongs are perpetrated in the name, and by the authority, of this great country, by its proconsuls or naval commanders in distant quarters of the globe, it is not by throwing the flimsy veil of a "double government" over such transactions that we shall ultimately escape the penalty attaching to deeds for which we are really responsible. How, or when, the retribution will re-act upon us, I presume not to say. The rapine in Mexico and Peru was retaliated upon Spain in the ruin of her finances. In France, the razzias of Algeria were repaid by her own troops, in the massacres of the Boulevards, and the savage combats in the streets of Paris. Let us hope that the national conscience, which has before averted from England, by timely atonement and reparation, the punishment due for imperial crimes, will be roused ere it be too late from its lethargy, and put an end to the deeds of violence and injustice which have marked every step of our progress in India. [118]

Imperial and military rivalry meant maintaining a high level of military preparedness. How far Cobden was opposing "official" opinion on peace, international relations, and foreign policy can be seen by reference to the historical trajectory of the mindset of those responsible for British foreign policy. On 14 April 1749, Lord Barrington stated: "Sir, it is a maxim with all wise and well-governed nations, in time of peace, to provide for war."[119] Over one hundred years later, on 11 March 1861, Viscount Palmerston speaking amidst the threat of war with France stated:

> I am really sorry to be discussing the possibility of feelings of hostility between two countries that, I hope, will long remain friends; but it is with the object of impressing on the House and on the country that there is no possibility of peace and friendship between two wealthy and powerful nations unless each is on such a footing as to its defences that neither may invite attack by the other.[120]

This type of language was depressingly familiar to Cobden and reflected the war-like, defensive, and suspicious propensities of the political elite, fueled by aristocratic political control of the State. Despite his period of political isolation, Cobden's return to activity and in negotiating the 1860 Anglo-French treaty validated his belief in commerce as a force for international peace. While this process was diplomatic and political rather being based on purer notions of free exchange between peoples, it did offer a way forward. Cobden saw it mainly as a means of avoiding war, but in personal terms, perhaps his involvement represented a new realism based on the practicalities of working within the diplomatic parameters of the international state system.

We have seen how Cobden's political ideas remain influential, albeit operating in a very different political context from that of mid-Victorian Britain. Moreover, Cobden's influence is likely to endure for some time yet. The complexities of global trade, and the struggle for open markets against regulatory restrictions like quotas and subsidies, as well as the continually contested area of ethical foreign policies mean there is much scope for further exploration of Cobdenite ideas. Elements of Cobden's thought are likely to remain within the policy space and may well inform or at least be a point of reference for policymakers in the future.

Endnotes

[112.] *Daily Mail*, 29 August 1903.

[113.] *Fair Trade: A Weekly Journal Devoted to Industry and Commerce*, 30 October 1885; 6 November 1885.

[114.] *Fair Trade: A Weekly Journal Devoted to Industry and Commerce*, 6 November 1885.

[115.] Brown, B.H. 1943. *The Tariff Reform Movement in Great Britain 1881-1895*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 68.

[116.] Platt, D.C.M. 1968. *Finance, Trade, and Politics in British Foreign Policy 1815-1914*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 84.

[117.] Howe, Anthony. ed. 2007. *The Letters of Richard Cobden, vol. 1, 1815-1847*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 103.

[118.] Richard Cobden, *The Political Writings of Richard Cobden, with a Preface by Lord Welby, Introductions by Sir Louis Mallet, C.B., and William Cullen Bryant, Notes by F.W. Chesson and a Bibliography*, vol. 2, (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903). "How Wars are got up in India" </titles/231#Cobden_0424-02_365>.

[119.] Hansard. 1747-53. "Debate on a Plan for Speedily Manning the Navy." *Parliamentary History*. XIV, 538.

[120.] Hansard. 1861. "Supply—Navy Estimates." *HC Debates*. CLXI, 1789. <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1861/mar/11/supply-navt-estimates#column_1789>

COBDEN AND COMMUNICATION?

by Sarah Richardson

Reading the exchanges among Stephen Davies, Anthony Howe, Gordon Bannerman, and me over the past weeks, I have been struck at how *modern* Cobden's ideas and campaigning strategies appear.

A fine example of this is his connections with the revolutionary campaign to reform the postal system in the 1830s, led by Rowland Hill and supported by reformers such as Henry Cole, Francis Place, and Robert Wallace. Cobden read Hill's detailed analysis of the deficiencies of the existing postal system and his utilitarian solutions: *Post Office Reform: Its Importance and*

Practicability (1837).[121] He gave evidence to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Postage as a representative of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce. In his evidence he stressed the ineffectiveness of the current system, stating that when he traveled between Manchester and Liverpool he carried pocketfuls of correspondence with him because of the expense and cumbersome nature of the post. He also argued the existing rate of postage was a tax on the poor, effectively excluding them from an essential means of communication and impeding the spread of education. Finally, he emphasized the moral benefits of cheap and simple mass communication. Whilst we should not doubt Cobden's commitment for post reform on the grounds of moral, intellectual, and commercial improvement, there is no doubt that he also realized the political benefits. In a letter to his ally Charles Pelham Villiers in 1840 he wrote:

> We shall radicalise the country in the process of carrying the repeal of the Corn Law, and we are effecting such an organisation by means of the penny-postage (that destined scourge of the aristocracy) that we shall, by and by, be able to carry any measure of a popular nature by a coup de *billet*.[122]

The Anti-Corn Law League harnessed the power of the new penny post, sending out millions of pamphlets, newspapers, and magazines and even designing their own prepaid stamped envelopes. Cobden estimated that the Corn Laws were repealed two years early because of the introduction of the penny post.

In 1846, after repeal, he wrote to Francis Place:

> Bless yourself that you lived in times when reform bills, steamboats, railroads, penny postage, and free trade, to say nothing of ratification of civil and religious liberties, have been possible facts.[123]

There is no doubt that Cobden embraced the revolutionary new technologies of his time, identifying their potential for democratization and mass education. I like to think he would have been equally excited by the opportunities offered by tweets, text messages, and Tumblr blogs.

Endnotes

[121.] Hill, Rowland (1837). *Post Office Reform: Its Importance and Practicability*. Privately Printed. [https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=PJQIAAAAQAAJ&pg=PP5#v=onepage&q&f=false]

[122.] Cited in Donaldson Jordan, H. (1965). "Richard Cobden and Penny Postage: A Note on the Processes of Reform," *Victorian Studies*, 8:4, p. 360.

[123.] Wallas, Graham (1898). *Life of Francis Place*. London: Longmans, Green & Co., p. 396. [https://archive.org/stream/lifeoffrancispla00walliala/lifeoffrancispla00walliala_djvu.txt]

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