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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

**PALMERSTON AND THE POLITICS OF  
FOREIGN POLICY, 1846-1855**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of History

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Master Copy

This thesis is the result of work done wholly whilst I was in registered postgraduate candidature.

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF ARTS  
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

Doctor of Philosophy

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By David Stuart Brown

This thesis considers the career of Lord Palmerston during the important, but hitherto rather neglected, period of his political career immediately preceding his accession to the premiership in 1855, in a broader context than has previously been attempted. By combining a high political, that is governmental, approach to the question with what might be termed a low one - essentially all non-governmental factors - the reasons for Palmerston's supposed political invincibility, or at least longevity, can be more clearly understood. Such a focus simultaneously reveals a great deal about the nature and working of the Victorian constitution and the political influence of parts of the population traditionally regarded as falling beyond its pale.

Through an examination of political manoeuvring in government, making extensive use of private papers, this thesis demonstrates the extent and ways in which Palmerston was able to exercise an influence over and manipulate his Cabinet colleagues, thereby securing their approbation for his foreign policy at a time when there were great pressures from the Crown and Parliament to remove him. The analysis is followed though to the history of the Aberdeen Coalition (1852-55) to explain why Palmerston came to be allied with many of his former adversaries in the first place and secondly how he managed, from his official post at the Home Office, to continue to wield great influence over the conduct of foreign policy - a question of special importance given that it was this government which was faced with the problem of managing the Crimean War.

It is clear, however, that personal and party political relationships are incomplete means by which to explain Palmerston's career and elucidate the general theme of the politics of foreign policy. Palmerston's political strength rested to a large extent on the rather nebulous perception that he was 'popular', carrying with him the support of the country and embodying the mood of the nation. Public opinion, generally conceived, had a profound and complicated impact on politics during this period, particularly on Palmerston, yet this is an aspect of Palmerston's political life rarely examined by historians. It is in this thesis' attempts to underpin an account of political life at the centre with an analysis of political forces and influences beyond that a great deal of the work's originality is to be found. Examination of the role of the press, various forms of extra-parliamentary opposition (and support) across all social classes, and parliamentary opposition, including not only on what grounds were attacks made but why and with what effect, add a unique contribution to our understanding of Palmerstonianism and demonstrate the success and considerable good fortune Palmerston enjoyed in manipulating political life to his own ends.

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

### i) Background to the problem

Lord Palmerston, variously regarded as a Tory, Liberal Tory, Canningite, Whig and Liberal; successively a Junior Lord of the Admiralty, Secretary at War, Foreign Secretary, Home Secretary and Prime Minister, left an indelible mark on the history of Victorian politics. From the 'last candle of the Eighteenth Century'<sup>1</sup> to the 'genius for adaptation' whose governments were a 'conscious introduction to the new era' of democratic politics,<sup>2</sup> Palmerston's career spans an important transitional period in British politics whilst in many ways also shaping that change. His career and interests, at least after about 1830, were concerned primarily with foreign policy yet through this specific and in certain senses peculiar and unique area of public business, he contributed to the evolution of a new style of government and gave the impression of some sort of re-casting of the political nation. Heretofore, however, studies of Palmerston have tended to focus almost exclusively on a 'high political' approach to his career, that is studying his ministerial and diplomatic involvements, or have covered only his life down to 1841.<sup>3</sup> The approach taken by Professor Bourne in his work, *Palmerston: The Early Years, 1784-1841* represents a break with this tradition in seeking to place Palmerston's career and political outlooks in a

<sup>1</sup> P. Guedalla, *Palmerston* (London, 1937 edn.), p.405

<sup>2</sup> E.D. Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism, 1855-1865* (Cambridge, 1991), p.367

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, H.C.F Bell, *Lord Palmerston* 2 vols. (London, 1936), Guedalla, *Palmerston*, J. Ridley, *Lord Palmerston* (London, 1970), M.E. Chamberlain, *Lord Palmerston* (Cardiff, 1987), D. Southgate, *'The Most English Minister...': The Policies and Politics of Palmerston* (London, 1966), C. Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston, 1830-1841* 2 vols. (London, 1969)

much broader personal and private context, which adds greatly to an understanding of political life in the period covered, yet unfortunately, this volume is concluded in 1841 with the end of Palmerston's second term as Foreign Secretary, and Bourne was unable to complete the projected second volume which would have taken the analysis down to 1865.<sup>4</sup> More recent writing on Palmerston has sought to develop an understanding of Palmerston's career as Prime Minister from 1855 until, with only a brief hiatus in 1858-1859, his death in 1865, focusing on the difficult problem of Palmerston's relationship with Liberalism and the Liberal party.<sup>5</sup> There remains, however, a noticeable lack of work for the 1840s and early 1850s. With the exception of those studies which treat of Palmerston's whole career generally, primarily in the work of Bell, Southgate, Ridley, and Chamberlain, attention to Palmerston or Palmerstonism for these years is scarce and monographs are few, perhaps the most important being Kingsley Martin's *The Triumph of Lord Palmerston*, which is concerned with the role and response of public opinion leading up to and during the Crimean War.<sup>6</sup>

Between the fall of Melbourne's government in 1841 and the creation of Lord John Russell's in 1846, Palmerston was not idle, although more so than at any other time in his career (at least since 1830) his energies were devoted to affairs of a non-political nature. He continued to contribute to debates on questions of foreign

<sup>4</sup> K. Bourne, *Palmerston: The Early Years, 1784-1841* (London, 1982)

<sup>5</sup> Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism*. J.R. Vincent, *The Formation of the British Liberal Party, 1857-68* (Harmondsworth, 1972) is still persuasive, despite Steele's attempts at revisionism. Specifically concerned with Palmerston's premierships, there is also D.F. Krein, *The Last Palmerston Government: Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics, and the Genesis of 'Splendid Isolation'* (Ames, Iowa, 1978), although Krein is concerned primarily with the formulation of foreign policy between 1861 and 1864. See also A. Hawkins, *Parliament, Party and the Art of Politics in Britain, 1855-59* (Stanford, California, 1987)

<sup>6</sup> K. Martin, *The Triumph of Lord Palmerston: A Study of Public Opinion in England before the Crimean War* (London, 1963 edn.)

policy, notably that relating to the Ashburton-Webster treaty,<sup>7</sup> but it was, as one biographer observes, 'Palmerston's longest "holiday"'.<sup>8</sup> During the decade between 1846 and the establishment of the first Palmerston government, however, Palmerston did much to place himself at the forefront of political life, forging a reputation which would allow him to face down opponents and install Palmerstonism as a distinct political creed.

From the bureaucrat of Bourne's *Early Years*, Palmerston emerged in the later 1850s and early 1860s as 'the defining political personality of his age'.<sup>9</sup> In large part this rested upon his achievements and conduct immediately prior to his accession to the premiership. This thesis seeks to elucidate the key features of that period, by examining the politics of foreign policy, in order to establish quite how Palmerston managed to carve out a specific role in politics and, against the odds, rise to the highest office in government at the age of seventy. In so doing, the thesis is concerned with questions of constitutional practice and theory, for in large part Palmerston's strength was derived from constituencies traditionally seen as operating beyond the pale of the constitution, in particular the unenfranchised and also, importantly, from among the middle classes whose political importance emerged clearly during this period. To some extent this was a condition of the particular area of politics with which Palmerston pre-occupied himself, namely foreign affairs; yet also it was grounded in a particular view of the potential for invigorating a new force in government and politics. Palmerston's mobilisation of popular support for political ends during this period does more than hint at a Canningite legacy, it

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<sup>7</sup> See Chamberlain, *Palmerston*, pp.59-61

<sup>8</sup> Bell, *Palmerston*, I, p.322

<sup>9</sup> J. Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain*, (New Haven and London, 1993), p.194

suggests an important element in the conception of the Victorian constitution - that is, the growing role and use of public opinion - with repercussions for not only ministers and the people, but also the monarchy.

### *The foundations of Palmerstonism*

Whig orthodoxy was suspicious of monarchical authority and trusted to the benevolence of a parliamentary government which included some measure of accountability. Palmerston, schooled in the Whig tradition of political economy at Edinburgh under Professor Dugald Stewart, had learned these principles to a certain degree, but ultimately his political outlook was conditioned by a diverse range of influences. Simultaneously radical and reactionary, Palmerston had adopted various philosophies which boiled down, ultimately, to a belief in pragmatism above abstract principle, or as has been observed of his later years as Prime Minister, that politics was 'largely a matter of getting from Monday to Friday without conspicuous damage'.<sup>10</sup>

Above all, however, Palmerston regarded foreign policy as operating beyond party: partisan contests had no role to play in issues concerned exclusively with the national interest, although differences could well still exist in terms of the execution of that policy. Thus, foreign policy was to be constructed with reference not only to parliament, party, cabinet and government, but also the 'nation'. In an age of growing national consciousness (and indeed coherence), Palmerston, not quite the disciple of Canning but at least the heir to Canning's legacy, drew upon his erstwhile mentor's approach and grounded the moral justification for his foreign policy in the

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<sup>10</sup> P. Smith, review of Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism*, in *English Historical Review*, 108 (1993), p.145

weight of popular approbation. In part this was a political tactic - to counter-balance Cabinet opposition, or at least disquiet, over his policy - but it was also indicative of a sincere perception of ministerial responsibility (and especially that of the Foreign Secretary) to conduct affairs of state in the interest of the nation as a whole, as he perceived it. If, as E.D. Steele suggests, it appeared to contemporary observers that Parliament in this period between the Reform Acts had become virtually the representative chamber of not only the enfranchised but also the unenfranchised, then it was the responsibility of the politicians, so they believed, to articulate such views as were thus representative.<sup>11</sup> To the Chartists this would have appeared a curious judgement, yet with regard to the particular area of foreign affairs, as David Urquhart's ultimately unsuccessful attempts to channel Chartist forces towards a credible and consistent critique of Palmerston's foreign policy illustrated,<sup>12</sup> the proposition carries some force. Even the unenfranchised and generally exploited members of society still seemed capable of feeling part of the nation when it came to dealing with the foreigner, as Dickens illustrated in his portrayal of the inhabitants of Bleeding Heart Yard in *Little Dorrit*.<sup>13</sup>

This argument assumes too readily, however, the existence of a uniform extra-parliamentary view of foreign policy, whereas such interest was, typically, much more sporadic, but it helps to explain not only Palmerston's courting of popular approval - playing up to the public gallery as some contemporaries observed scathingly - but his continued political potency: the People's Minister<sup>14</sup> had a vital role to play if this was to be the People's Parliament. Necessarily, however,

<sup>11</sup> Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism*, passim

<sup>12</sup> See below, pp.276-277

<sup>13</sup> See below, p.229

<sup>14</sup> See below p.249

Palmerston's conduct of policy and his so-called popular appeal were not in any meaningful sense inclusive of a comprehensive picture of the 'nation' and of all the elements which constituted the nation. Palmerston's popular appeal and indeed conduct of foreign policy reinforced certain specific characteristics of the 'national' character. He was 'the most English Minister' (as Lord John Russell dubbed him), and not, significantly, the most British. The ambiguities of this were little explored at the time. Certainly he was not the most Scottish Minister, neither Welsh nor Irish, but 'Englishness' in the nineteenth century was not confined exclusively by the boundaries of England. He represented strong, masculine qualities, he embodied Protestant godliness: the British Foreign Secretary was the true English patriot.<sup>15</sup> Palmerston's outlook was an informed one and his popular maverick reputation was not indicative of an absence of reason. The origins of his political philosophy, indeed of the phenomenon of Palmerstonism as a distinct political system, are to be found in Palmerston's undergraduate days at Edinburgh.

Dugald Stewart, a former student himself of Adam Smith, held the Chair in Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh from 1785 until 1810 and oversaw the education of many future prominent Whigs; indeed many of the writers for the *Edinburgh Review* are held to owe an intellectual debt to Stewart. Focusing on political economy during Palmerston's time as a lodger in Stewart's house in 1802 and 1803, Stewart lectured primarily on population, the theory of national wealth, free trade and the circulation of money, the poor law and education of the lower classes. According to Bourne, Stewart's lectures were not striking and were merely diluted versions of Smith.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, Palmerston's time was not wasted here. He learned about

<sup>15</sup> For a fuller consideration of these stereotypes and their particular relevance to Palmerston, see below, esp. ch.5

<sup>16</sup> Bourne, *Palmerston*, p.27

hard work and he was perhaps gratified to find in Stewart a tutor more concerned with rational convenience rather than intellectual challenge. Stewart himself observed on one occasion that he agreed with Hume in seeing 'the danger of dwelling too much on details and of rendering the mind incapable of those abstract and comprehensive views of human affairs, which can alone furnish the statesman with fixed and certain maxims for the regulation of his conduct'.<sup>17</sup> Palmerston was no philosopher and Stewart's approach seems to have suited him well.<sup>18</sup> Stewart's teaching did, however, concern itself with important questions regarding the nature of public opinion, the people, the legislature and the mutual responsibilities of each.

Stewart was certainly committed to the Whigs and clashed frequently with local Tories,<sup>19</sup> but he was not an extremist as some feared. Palmerston felt obliged to reassure his parents early on, for example, that Stewart and his other tutors were not 'at all inclined to be *Demo's*, but ...rather the contrary if anything'.<sup>20</sup> Much of what Stewart taught the young Palmerston provided an intellectual rationale for much of the latter's future career and conduct. Most important were Stewart's views on constitutional responsibilities. The stability of modern government, Stewart believed, depended 'on the coincidence between [government] measures and the tide of public opinion', yet significantly this was a tide thus not static; therefore the modern government should be prepared for 'gradual and prudent accommodation of established institutions to the varying opinions, manners, and circumstances of mankind'. This was a period of increased enlightenment, Stewart argued, and his

<sup>17</sup> Quoted D. Winch, 'The System of the North: Dugald Stewart and his pupils', in S. Collini, D. Winch and J. Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History* (Cambridge, 1983), p.33

<sup>18</sup> Bourne, *Palmerston*, pp.28-29

<sup>19</sup> Winch, 'The System of the North: Dugald Stewart and his pupils', pp.32-33

<sup>20</sup> Quoted Bourne, *Palmerston*, p.29

work demonstrated a belief in the 'possible attainments of mankind' fulfilling their potential through the 'general and infallible progress of human reason'.<sup>21</sup> This was not the prologue to a belief in democracy, however. Stewart, the Whig, advocated a kind of virtual representation: 'the happiness of mankind depends,' he argued, 'not on the share which the people possess, directly or indirectly, in the enactment of laws, but on the equity and expedience of the laws that are enacted'.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, and importantly, Stewart also spoke of 'patriotic exertion' on behalf of the common good.<sup>23</sup> If he took nothing else from Edinburgh, then, Palmerston had at least been exposed to notions of responsible government for (rather than of) the people and to some extent a sense of this responsible government combining with national or patriotic honour or duty. Palmerston adopted, at least rhetorically, Stewart's view of public opinion, or the people, as representative of and integral to an enlightened and advancing civilization but this was to be tempered in later life by a practical understanding and familiarity with the nature of mid-century public opinion. Once occupied with affairs of state, opportunities for academic treatment of such questions were limited, and philosophic reflection, as Michael Bentley has argued, was a luxury few statesmen could afford.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, public opinion, or more specifically, popular approval, supplied the moral weight to justify such courses as were settled upon, and this had particular resonance for questions relating to a national foreign policy. Later commentators such as Walter Bagehot and John Stuart Mill would ascribe to such support

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<sup>21</sup> See Winch, 'The System of the North: Dugald Stewart and his pupils', pp.34-35

<sup>22</sup> Quoted *ibid*, p.36

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p.43

<sup>24</sup> M. Bentley, 'Party, Doctrine and Thought', in M. Bentley and J. Stevenson (eds), *High and Low Politics in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 1983), 123-153

constrictive qualities,<sup>25</sup> yet Palmerston followed Canning in a belief that careful manipulation of public opinion would ensure that it fulfilled the political economists' prescription of advancing society, and that through an abdication of authority in favour of a governing class or elite, that responsible government would prevail. Good government for the people was, *ipso facto*, good government of the people. More importantly, establishing a control over that opinion and containing its excesses underpinned Palmerstonian notions of political stability.

During his 'political apprenticeship', however, in the Tory ministries of Spencer Perceval and Lord Liverpool, Palmerston displayed little inclination to put such principles into practice. He had become an early adherent to the teaching of Pitt to whom he had been introduced in 1799 by his father,<sup>26</sup> and Palmerston's political patrons, particularly the first Earl of Malmesbury, all sprang from the Tory ranks. Palmerston's own desire to spend time acquiring experience rather than glory combined with a growing alienation from his earlier patrons, however, hindered the development of a significant parliamentary career.<sup>27</sup> He was increasingly linked to no special Tory faction, he socialised with Whigs but was not one of them; until William IV ascended the throne he enjoyed little or no royal support and in short, therefore, Palmerston found no-one willing to take a leading part in the development of his parliamentary career.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> J. Burrow, 'Sense and circumstances: Bagehot and the nature of political understanding', in S. Collini, D. Winch and J. Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History* (Cambridge, 1983), p.173

<sup>26</sup> Within a year of leaving Stewart's house Palmerston was to be found criticising the decision of his friend, and later brother-in-law, Laurence Sullivan, who had refused to join Pitt on the grounds that Fox had been left out (Palmerston to L. Sullivan, 30 Sept. 1804, K. Bourne (ed.), *The Letters of the Third Viscount Palmerston to Laurence and Elizabeth Sullivan, 1804-1863* (Camden Fourth Series, Vol.23, 1979), pp.30-32).

<sup>27</sup> Bourne, *Palmerston*, pp.85-115

<sup>28</sup> H.L. Bulwer, *The Life of Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston*, 3 vols, (London, 1870-1874), I, p.150

Palmerston the bureaucrat, an efficient but uninspired Junior Lord of the Admiralty and later Secretary at War,<sup>29</sup> attended to public office more in the fashion of a manager than an innovator. He had, after all, as much interest in the charms of society as the draw of politics, and was content to remain in his relatively junior post - which in the years following the Napoleonic Wars was little more than a 'hack job' - gaining experience and biding his time, even if, by the time he turned 44 he still appeared destined for an undistinguished public career.<sup>30</sup> Work on his Irish estates occupied as much of Palmerston's time in the early 1820s as did his parliamentary duties and there seemed no obvious way out of the political rut in which he was mired.

Unlike his contemporary, Lord John Russell, Palmerston was not part of the Whig 'great grandmotherhood' and his Whig education was not consolidated at one of the great Whig salons of the day. Consequently, in these early years, political issues rarely inspired Palmerston - even over Catholic emancipation, for example, Bourne argues that political expediency probably played as great a part as any other consideration in determining Palmerston's course<sup>31</sup> - and he displayed none of the particular interest in foreign policy which characterised his later career. Only after 1827 when Cabinet meetings brought him into regular contact with such questions did diplomacy begin to fire his imagination.<sup>32</sup> Significantly, his interest in foreign

<sup>29</sup> Palmerston served as a junior Lord of the Admiralty 1807-1809. He refused Perceval's offer of the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1809, preferring instead the office of Secretary at War as being 'one better suited to a beginner'. He turned down the offer of an accompanying seat in the Cabinet and remained at the War Office until 1828. See Chamberlain, *Palmerston*, pp.20-32. However well disposed Perceval may have been towards Palmerston, after 1812, Palmerston enjoyed fewer demonstrations of faith in his ability.

<sup>30</sup> Chamberlain, *Palmerston*, p.28

<sup>31</sup> Bourne, *Palmerston*, p.230

<sup>32</sup> Palmerston accepted a Cabinet seat in April 1827 although he remained in his post at the War Office. Canning had offered Palmerston the position of Chancellor of the Exchequer along with this Cabinet post but it was commonly agreed that it would be dangerous for Palmerston to have to defend his seat at an election if he accepted a new appointment.

policy evolved just as George Canning's career was at its zenith. As Foreign Secretary between 1822 and 1827 and then serving a very short-lived premiership between April and August 1827, Canning succeeded in establishing certain principles or practices in foreign policy which Palmerston's own later handling of foreign policy was to mirror, or at least invoke. Not only did Canning's 'English' policy represent a positive alternative to the 'European', or supposedly unduly conciliatory approach of Castlereagh, but his view of the use and foundation of such policy arguably echoed in some respects Palmerston's Edinburgh schooling. Whilst serving in Tory ministries Canning belonged to the liberal faction within those governments (which ultimately saw his adherents break ranks and defect to an alliance with the Whigs in 1830) and indeed in many ways has been seen as establishing a distinct liberal strand in politics of this period.<sup>33</sup> Significantly, if Canningism meant anything it represented a contribution to the understanding of the political importance and indeed influence of the people. Through the employment of a deliberate foreign policy, Canningite policy was used as a means of establishing public confidence in the ministry as a whole. In more ways than one did he call the new world into existence to redress the balance of the old.<sup>34</sup>

Palmerston very quickly adopted a Canningite line and in his first parliamentary speech on foreign affairs of consequence he demonstrated clearly his belief in the strength and value of popular support. 'There is in nature no moving power but mind,' he argued, 'all else is passive and inert; in human affairs this power

<sup>33</sup> Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, p.39

<sup>34</sup> Canning had used the phrase in defence of his Spanish policy in 1826. Arguing that the European balance of power had changed and that Spain was no longer an empire of great significance, Canning defended his failure to resist French occupation of Spain on practical grounds. 'No, I looked another way - I sought materials of compensation in another hemisphere. Contemplating Spain, such as our ancestors had known her, I resolved that if France had Spain, it should not be Spain "with the Indies". I called the New World into existence to redress the balance of the old' (*Hansard*, 2nd ser., XVI, 397 (13 Dec. 1826))

is opinion; in political affairs it is public opinion; and he who can grasp this power, with it will subdue the fleshly arm of physical strength, and compel it to work out his purpose'. Thus, he continued, the statesmen who find the means by which to harness such passions and opinions exercise a 'sway over human affairs, far out of all proportion greater than belong to the power and resources of the state over which they preside'.<sup>35</sup>

Canningism did not entail subservience to a popular will at all costs, however. Public opinion and popular support were instruments of government or symbols of moral strength; the initiative for policy still lay within government, although good government would act in accord with such opinion blurring these distinctions. According to Jonathan Parry, Canning established three liberal principles: that the state was no longer oligarchical but rested on public opinion; that public opinion was Protestant, patriotic and liberty loving; and that open government which sought to liberate public energies would make great progress. Yet this popular role in government was in no sense substantial: operating under an unreformed electoral system, the best that Canning could do was to flatter public opinion by attributing to its influence the course of government policy.<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, Canning, though not a Whig, represented an important example of the political creed expounded in the Scottish universities; that a sense of movement in society was always prevalent and that good government would result from heeding such movement and trusting to the enlightened views of the people. Canningism did not invest public opinion with the authority to act as an enlightened guide but Palmerston's education found in Canningism a certain embodiment of

<sup>35</sup> *Hansard*, 2nd ser., XXI, 1668 (1 June 1829)

<sup>36</sup> Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, pp.43-44, 48-49

philosophic principles learned as a student. This held true if only as a counter-point to the scepticism displayed by the Duke of Wellington over the role of public opinion in such matters but on these grounds at least, then, there was reason enough for the Canningites to disassociate themselves from the Tory ranks and effect a marriage of convenience with the Whigs, although even here there was not complete accommodation of Palmerston's increasingly mature views on foreign policy.

Significantly, though, Palmerston had learned from Stewart not only an intellectual appreciation of the importance of the public opinion in politics, but he also knew how to speak the Whig language. There was in the Canningite attachment to the force of public opinion and the Whig orthodoxy to which Palmerston had been exposed at Edinburgh a rhetorical over-lap and this was not unimportant in the development of an alliance of convenience between the Whigs and Canningites in the late 1820s. His commitment to a popular foreign policy was driven more by a desire to secure the continued dominance of parliament and the traditional governing elite by acceding to the moral imperative of giving voice to the 'national' opinion - to allow those beyond the pale of the constitution to enjoy a vicarious interest in national politics. Simultaneously, however, this would ensure public opinion was contained within appropriate channels.

### *Palmerston and the Whigs*

The Whig world was, as Leslie Mitchell observes, 'as much a social organism as it was a political party' and references to family ties, both real and rhetorical, are common.<sup>37</sup> Palmerston was not directly descended from any of the great Whig

<sup>37</sup> L. Mitchell, *Lord Melbourne, 1779-1848* (Oxford, 1997), p.3. Melbourne himself once described Whigs as 'all cousins' whilst the higher echelons of Whiggery were often referred to as the 'great grandmotherhood'.

families, although by association and later by marriage to Emily Cowper (née Lamb) he did establish sound Whiggish credentials and, more importantly, through his wife, as hostess of one of the major Whig salons of the period, Panshanger, Palmerston came to occupy a central role in Whig circles of the period.<sup>38</sup> Whigs themselves were not an homogenous political party which perhaps made accommodation of Palmerston more acceptable, yet much of Palmerston's success in integrating himself within these circles was due to his penchant for foreign affairs above all other issues. His membership of Whig administrations in the 1830s and 1840s was beneficial both to minister and ministry, though ultimately Palmerston was to emerge from this period as an important contributor to the emergence of a Liberal party.

Central to the Whig governments of the 1830s and 1840s were the Foxites, the ideas of the eponymous erstwhile leader of that faction being perpetuated by his nephew, Lord Holland, through the Holland House salon. Traditionally Whigs and especially Foxites were suspicious of monarchical influence and authority, and George III's reign had done little to assuage such concerns, and thus parliamentary government, no longer simply the eighteenth century system of checks and balances, was held up as the means of resisting malignant monarchical power and enforcing the principle of government representative of the people. Democratic government, however, was envisaged in a very limited sense and in speaking of 'government' the Foxites meant for rather than of the people; and in speaking of the 'people', they alluded to propertied members of the population and not the masses. Holland himself, for example, cautioned an opponent for using 'the word democracy in a very fallacious sense when he applied it to the mass of the people. Though the opinion of

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, pp.9-10

the mass of the people was not to be followed in every case, yet every government was made for the benefit of the mass of the people'.<sup>39</sup> The people had an abstract right to representation for, as Fox himself had taught, they 'were the legitimate sovereign in every community'.<sup>40</sup>

The Reform Bill, then, was a Foxite measure in that it sought to extend the representation of the property owners, and thereby extended the virtual representation of the people, although its importance goes beyond this. Whilst the government now perceived itself as more accurately and legitimately representing the people, the people commensurately expected more in return. For not only did the Act redistribute the franchise, but also as a natural corollary of this, ministerial accountability was increased at both a local and national level.<sup>41</sup> Representation was still for many virtual, but government authority was now much more clearly grounded in popular acquiescence rather than in royal power. It was the necessary accommodation of social and economic change, an acknowledgement of movement.

Palmerston himself acquiesced in the measure, although he disapproved of the manner of its execution, for whilst he distrusted the integrity of many portions of the population, he had already learned the value of popular support for policy and had previously demonstrated a commitment to government for the people. Over his foreign policy, however, he found not all Whigs and members of the governments of Grey and Melbourne approved of his conduct. He could not afford not to be associated with them, nor they with him, however, since party was a necessary function of the protective responsibility of government. As Angus Hawkins has

<sup>39</sup> Quoted L. Mitchell, *Holland House* (London, 1980), pp.64-65

<sup>40</sup> Quoted P. Mandler, *Aristocratic Government in the Age of Reform: Whigs and Liberals, 1830-1852* (Oxford, 1990), p.19

<sup>41</sup> See Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, pp.113, 116

argued, the Whigs believed if parliament was to remain autonomous, and not become the instrument of either monarchy or the people, then 'political associations' of a certain kind were required. Only in this way, at least according to the Whig view, could royal prerogative be controlled, and the preoccupations of Westminster be properly defined as the 'demarcation of respectable politics', keeping down dangerous populism and preserving at the head of this an aristocratic leadership committed to civil and religious liberty.<sup>42</sup> Only through the maintenance of party could dangerous fracturing of politics into extremes be avoided, as Holland observed in a letter to his son in 1824: 'I therefore think that if you have any publick object for yourself or others you will, you ought, nay you infallibly must, under whatever name you disguise it, persue [sic] it by party means'.<sup>43</sup> For the Whigs, an increasingly popular and 'national' minister such as Palmerston represented an important asset and a force for cohesion within the party and between the government and people.

Throughout the 1830s and until his death in 1840, Lord Holland, believing himself entitled to a prominent role in foreign affairs yet excluded from such a role on the grounds of general distrust of his political integrity,<sup>44</sup> continued to involve himself in questions of foreign policy and indeed in the early 1830s, Holland House 'for a moment became the Foreign Office'.<sup>45</sup> A personal connection with Talleyrand of France and Holland's Foxite Francophilism served, in Mitchell's phrase, to provoke 'guerrilla warfare' between Holland House and Palmerston's Foreign Office, and threatened also to undermine the new Grey government. Despite the close political connection between Grey and Holland, the two standing at the centre of

<sup>42</sup> A. Hawkins, "'Parliamentary Government' and Victorian Political Parties, c.1830-c.1880", *English Historical Review*, CIV (July 1989), pp.642, 647

<sup>43</sup> Quoted Mitchell, *Holland House*, p.68

<sup>44</sup> See *ibid*, pp.11-38, 146-17, 269-301

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p.278

what Disraeli spoke of as 'pure Whiggery', it was Palmerston's handling of foreign affairs that won through, although Grey certainly believed that he exercised a degree of control over Palmerston which would compensate for his appointment and did continue to consult Holland (along with Lansdowne) in a sort of inner Cabinet. Under Melbourne's administration of the second half of the 1830s, however, Palmerston enjoyed a much freer hand. The Holland House set continued to interfere, but, significantly, Melbourne himself grew increasingly weary of this salon's vociferous meddling: 'the talking at Holland House is inconceivable' he complained to Lord John Russell in September 1840.<sup>46</sup> Whilst Melbourne's style was to allow his ministers some degree of independence in their own departments, he had notoriously little interest in foreign affairs and the Foreign Office became very much Palmerston's personal domain during these years.<sup>47</sup>

Palmerston's foreign policy was tolerated in many ways because it evoked images and impressions which the ministries to which he belonged wished to exploit. A foreign policy directed explicitly in the interests of liberal causes and patriotic interests and with the general approbation of the people (or at least the perception of it) gave the governments of the 1830s and 1840s grounds to be seen as the guardians of the national interest.<sup>48</sup> Palmerston had joined the Whigs in 1830 largely because he needed, along with his fellow Canningites, a party base which the Wellingtonian Tories were unlikely to provide and the Whigs appeared to share a common interest in extending the base of political strength. It was essentially a pragmatic response and did not indicate a move into the Whig family. Even Melbourne, with whom Palmerston enjoyed such family ties with the Whigs as he

<sup>46</sup> Melbourne to Russell, 19 Sept. 1840, quoted Mitchell, *Melbourne*, p.156

<sup>47</sup> Mitchell, *Melbourne*, p.162

<sup>48</sup> Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, p.153

was able to lay claim to, was not especially committed to partisan politics, at least for their own sake.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, he had entertained seriously the prospect of returning to a Wellington administration as late as October 1830 on condition that Earl Grey as leader of the Whigs and Huskisson, *de facto* leader of the Canningites, join him in the venture. As Leslie Mitchell points out, Melbourne wished to dissolve party distinctions and continued to seek an independent voice; party political connection, he felt, only heightened the risk of 'embarrassment and degradation'.<sup>50</sup>

A sense of national honour and service, or at least a pre-occupation with, in Palmerston's case especially, issues of a national significance, tended to a view of politics as serving a national interest and in many ways above party divisions. Palmerston and Melbourne were, in Peter Mandler's analysis, passive liberals, sharing other liberals' aversions, but not their dogmas; representing in short, lowest-common-denominator liberalism.<sup>51</sup> Ironically, however, such an approach resulted in something akin to a party nonetheless, that of a clique of Palmerstonians which included a range of parliamentarians,<sup>52</sup> but also a number of diplomats and junior public figures. Patronage certainly contributed to this group, yet it was more than this that defined it. Palmerston was associated with no particular domestic cause yet he stood clearly for a particular foreign policy, aggressive, liberal and patriotic which could unite Whigs, Liberals and even Conservatives.<sup>53</sup>

The rhetorical teaching of politicians such as Palmerston, as Parry observes, was directed towards rousing opinion against abuses of power and in defence of

<sup>49</sup> Mandler, *Aristocratic Government*, p.105

<sup>50</sup> Mitchell, *Melbourne*, p.117

<sup>51</sup> Mandler, *Aristocratic Government*, p.107

<sup>52</sup> John Vincent identifies Lord Overstone as a 'Palmerstonian' for example (Vincent, *Formation of the Liberal Party*, p.46).

<sup>53</sup> Mandler, *Aristocratic Government*, pp.109-110

local liberties. More than this, however, Palmerston had acquired a much more positive outlook and through participation in groups such as the Alfred Club in the first decade of the nineteenth century had developed a powerful sense of national destiny based on a sort of expansionist nationalist Protestantism, an enthusiasm as the Tory Robert Southey put it, for 'making the world English'.<sup>54</sup> By the time that Palmerston had reached the peak of his career, these sentiments had developed into something not only more distinctly Palmerstonian, but also more popular.

As this thesis demonstrates, Palmerston's constituency extended beyond the traditional boundaries of political support and in many ways this was the product of his broad based foreign policy. Able at different times and to different degrees to present his foreign policy as liberal, popular, patriotic, strong and godly, such by the 1850s was his reputation in the field of foreign affairs, that Palmerston was able, through his work at the Foreign Office, and indeed, later, at the Home Office, to do much to justify his image as 'the most English Minister' and even if he was not, in 1855, *l'inévitable*, he did at least enjoy a legitimate claim to be considered for the premiership.

Palmerston was fortunate that he had been able to avoid entangling himself in contentious domestic political wrangles. For, whilst his foreign policy might not always have been uncontroversial, he succeeded generally in presenting his policy as that best able to achieve results complementary to the national interest. Over Don Pacifico, for example, few sympathised with Pacifico himself, yet almost everyone applauded the evocation of the famous '*civis Romanus sum*' principle. Palmerston enjoyed the indulgence of Lord John Russell's fragile ministry of 1846-1852 largely

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<sup>54</sup> Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, p.16, 34-35

because his foreign policy supplied much of the adhesive that held the administration together. He maintained his alliance with that government (until December 1851) largely because he feared the alternatives represented by ministries driven by protectionism or worse still, unchecked constitutional reform.

However, by the early 1850s, Palmerston's own personal position was much stronger. He had the opportunity now, as Peter Mandler points out, to whip up domestic authoritarianism and patriotism against the Whigs.<sup>55</sup> Never truly a Whig cousin, Palmerston had struggled throughout the previous decade to establish an ascendancy over the 'natural' leader of the Whigs, Lord John Russell. With the emergence of a definite liberal identity within the administrations of Grey, Melbourne and Russell, which Mandler has sought to 'tease apart' from whiggery, Palmerston was able to forge a more liberal strand within the government and ultimately to lay some of the early foundations of a Liberal party. Clearly Palmerston was not the sole architect of such a scheme, indeed to suggest that there was in any sense a deliberate search for a Liberal party at this time is misleading, but his foreign policy embodied many principles associated with liberalism and his contribution to the emergence of a Liberal party should not be seen to originate in the Willis' Rooms in 1859.<sup>56</sup> As Parry claims, the Liberal party stood for British interests (as opposed to the English bias of the Conservatives), for open politics, political economy and religious diversity (though this serves to illustrate well the

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<sup>55</sup> Mandler, *Aristocratic Government*, p.273

<sup>56</sup> This view is corrected in M.E. Chamberlain, 'Who founded the Liberal Party', *Inaugural lecture delivered at the University College of Swansea, 26 November 1990* (University College of Swansea, 1991) in which attention is focused on the Aberdeen coalition of the 1850s. See also Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government* for some interesting observations on this theme.

ambiguity of Russell ascribing to Palmerston the mantle of most English minister). Above all, for national government ahead of class government.<sup>57</sup>

Palmerston, argues Parry, 'established his credentials with the mass of the provincial Liberal party from 1847', through his advocacy of intervention in support of liberal causes abroad, which he demonstrated particularly in 1848 and again in 1854 (however contrived the logic of that might have been in the latter case).<sup>58</sup> Whilst Parry is concerned to stress the centrality of religious issues in political life, he concedes that taxation and, at least as far as this thesis is concerned, more importantly, foreign policy questions were also, when 'inflamed', the only issues 'able to link the world with which the politically interested public was concerned to the high political world'.<sup>59</sup> Arguably, however, the politically interested public was more broadly defined for questions of foreign policy than for taxation questions, whilst foreign policy itself was frequently bound up with, or invoked considerations of, religion. In terms of defining the 'nation', and more particularly the ever-broadening political nation, foreign affairs offer a most important means of assessment. Palmerston's ready association with this particular area of business is thus central to the main considerations of this thesis.

According to John Vincent, Palmerston, whom he represents as something of a paternalist liberal, focused on middle class interests when he based his politics on 'crude belligerence abroad and class fear at home', and the lower classes, whom he distrusted as being 'under the control of a small clique of socialist agitators', received attention from Palmerston only from a sense of (party) duty.<sup>60</sup> Steele, with some

<sup>57</sup> Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, p.4

<sup>58</sup> J. Parry, *Democracy and Religion: Gladstone and the Liberal Party, 1867-1875* (Cambridge, 1986), p.25

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53

<sup>60</sup> Vincent, *Formation of the Liberal Party*, pp.174-183, esp. 180-181

justification, has challenged this view, regarding Palmerston as a 'demagogue', (as Cobden described him), and seeing in his premierships the revelation of a 'genius for adaptation'.<sup>61</sup> Whilst Steele rightly signals the importance of a broadly conceived public opinion, however, he pays little attention to the manner in which it was manipulated, and to the reasons for this manipulation, and offers only a very thin explanation of the transformation of Palmerston from 'Whig' Foreign Secretary into the first Liberal Prime Minister.

Steele sees Palmerston's inexorable rise to the premiership originating in the late 1820s, and culminating in the months leading immediately to the formation of his first government as Palmerston rode the tide of popular approval into office.<sup>62</sup> His account indeed of the years 1855-1865 seems to take for granted that Palmerston enjoyed popular support, yet there is no attempt to look for the foundations of this support nor, more importantly, is there any real effort made to investigate the ways in which Palmerston carefully cultivated the image of a popular minister. He certainly did not find popular approval bestowed upon him unsolicited; it had to be courted and if it was Russell (and not Palmerston) who was thought to be 'influenced by personal ambition rather than concern for the country', as Steele argues, it was not to suggest, as Steele does, that in the final analysis Palmerston did not share a similar desire for personal advancement. Palmerston had, to a large extent, learned how to use extra-parliamentary forces to influence politics at the centre.

Palmerston in 1852 had not been a suitable choice for Prime Minister yet within only three years he was installed in that office. His success in climbing the greasy pole owed a great deal to his ability to manipulate extra-parliamentary forces

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<sup>61</sup> Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism*, pp.15, 367

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, pp.16, 21-22

(and the fact that in this regard his contemporaries were less adept) and bring them to bear on Westminster politics in what, it must again be stressed, was still essentially a pre-democratic age.

The great advantage to Palmerston deriving from his popularity founded on a reputation in the field of foreign affairs was not so much that he actually instituted a new style of government which relied for its inspiration on the determination of a broadly defined public opinion, but that he was able to present himself as capable of keeping that opinion in hand. There is something to be said for Parry's argument that Palmerston used popular approval to 'consolidate respect for him in parliament',<sup>63</sup> but Parry's view, if taken without qualification, is too cynical. Palmerston did believe in the value of popular involvement in questions of foreign policy (however superficial) and whilst the chief benefit was that this allowed him to steal a march on less popular rivals, he did develop the Canningite belief in the force of public opinion. Steele presses his case too far, however, in seeing Palmerston as offering a *conscious* introduction to a new era of democratic politics. Palmerston had no desire to prepare the ground for a more democratic system of government: he simply saw the advantage both to himself and the country of investing his foreign policy with a sense of popular, national, support.

## ii) Outline and structure of the thesis

Clearly there are problems associated with the period 1846-1855 that demand attention. Palmerston, the Tory, or Canningite, having effected a marriage of convenience with the Whigs, emerged during this period as the chief rival to Russell

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<sup>63</sup> Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, p.192

to lead that group. Whilst Russell and other Whigs may have acknowledged the importance of public opinion, they failed to appreciate the importance of courting it and the techniques by which to work with that opinion. Palmerston was allowed a much freer reign than would have been expected for a minister who was not only not a true Whig but also within high political circles, was widely distrusted. His political longevity was frequently ascribed to his 'popularity' but this short-hand explanation was not, and has not, been properly explained. This thesis seeks to study Palmerston's political career and the political environment of the later 1840s and early 1850s in order to provide a fuller account of politics in this mid-century 'age of equipoise' and analyse the implications of Palmerston's popularity.

The theory of nineteenth century constitutional practice remained vague and the ambiguities of political rights and powers were a source of friction at the centre, particularly in the face of Palmerstonian politics. The blurring of constitutional boundaries, however, allowed Palmerston to dominate the Cabinet of Russell and, indeed, for that matter of Aberdeen, with regard to foreign policy and to use those debates and contests as the forging ground for his ultimate accession to the premiership. He was, indeed, able to outmanoeuvre many of his colleagues over key foreign policy issues, but a sense of inevitability about his appointment to the premiership in 1855 is lacking. He said himself, as is well known, that he was, by this point, *l'inévitable*, and some contemporaries agreed, but the Queen was certainly unhappy about having to accept him, Lord Derby only reluctantly turned down his own commission, and Russell, essentially Palmerston's chief rival for the lead of the Whigs and Liberals, was not convinced that, until his own abandonment of the

government in January 1855 damaged his credibility, Palmerston had successfully stolen a march on him.

Palmerston's rise to the premiership, then, is easily demonstrated but the story of the minister, the Cabinet and the Court does not represent the complete picture and the sense that he was the obvious choice carries little conviction. The impetus for his inevitable triumph came largely from a sense of his popularity beyond Westminster. The People's Minister (as the Mayor of Southampton described him) came to the premiership in the midst of a war which demanded a national leadership. However, Palmerston's extra-parliamentary reputation was not based on a spontaneous demonstration of popular approbation. Palmerston, who saw more clearly than Canning could have done the implications of an appeal to public opinion, set out to control that opinion.

To the increasingly important middle classes, Palmerston appealed through the newspapers and periodicals. He did not regard the press as having any role in informing his conduct, whatever grandiose claims journalists made for the power of the fourth estate. Newspapers existed, for Palmerston, largely as an effective medium for communication with the people. He carefully cultivated sympathetic titles as a counter-balance to more hostile journals and through the pages of these papers placed before the country what he wanted it to know. Such manipulation was particularly significant during the Aberdeen government as Palmerston sought to undermine the Aberdonian policy on the Eastern question without attracting to his own name unfavourable attention if or when the ship of state ran aground.

Palmerston's political skill, however, was to court a much broader constituency. Exploiting a reputation forged in an area of 'national' concern, foreign

policy, Palmerston was able to present himself as the guardian of the country's interest more effectively, in that ultimately it was rhetorically more simplistic, than could his main rivals. 'Liberal', 'English', 'Protestant'; however much these labels did or did not attach to his domestic politics, they were widely apprehended to define his foreign policy and they possessed a strong emotive capacity at a time when a sense of national identity and a concept of the nation were being constructed very much by reference to other countries, that is, in terms of what Britain was not as much as what Britain was. Palmerston went out and told the country he was the national minister and then returned to Westminster with echoes of this sentiment to augment his armoury.

Few other politicians had grasped the value or mastered the techniques of this form of demagoguery. Palmerston could therefore ride criticism of his policies as he played up to an increasingly vociferous popular support. This ultimately carried a good deal of political weight, especially when parliamentary opponents were unable to muster sufficient strength to overcome Palmerston at Westminster.

This thesis, then, sets out to explain mid-nineteenth century British politics on a number of levels. Palmerston emerges as an effective political operator and whilst this reveals a good deal about the nature and operation of the Victorian constitution, it also opens up and links a number of important questions and issues. Public opinion and popular politics are seen not merely as interesting side-shows but, even in this pre-democratic age, as integral to the conduct of politics at the centre, particularly when there appeared a statesman capable of understanding the dynamics of extra-parliamentary politics. The middle classes are accorded a

significant role but, in line with much recent work,<sup>64</sup> this thesis also seeks to explain the nature and uses of political influence among the unenfranchised. This influence, though ill-defined, possessed a curiously impelling force which a skilful politician such as Palmerston was able to harness and present to his colleagues as he wanted it to be interpreted.

This thesis breaks down into two parts but should not be read as two discrete studies. Discussion of the high politics of the years 1846-1855 reveals a great deal of *what* was happening in terms of the politics of foreign policy but, and particularly with regard to Palmerston, does not adequately explain *why*. Through an examination of newspapers as a means of communicating with the nation and as a barometer of the mood of a particular portion of it as well as an important battle-ground for political disputes by proxy, political issues were brought down to the level of those not only within but also without the traditionally conceived political nation. However, Palmerston, bereft of an obvious, or effective, party support, frequently alienated within the close political circles often defined by familial connection (despite Lady Palmerston's best efforts as a political hostess) needed support from a quarter largely untapped by his contemporaries. Without fully understanding and certainly without fully empathising with the 'people', Palmerston exploited a popular credibility and sense of national solidarity (however artificial it might have been) to underpin his position. He found a country widely disposed to adopt him. The significance of this connection is explored carefully through a variety of sources in order to illustrate the nature and impact of such popular support.

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<sup>64</sup> Such as, for example, J. Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, c.1815-1867* (Cambridge, 1993) and M.C. Finn, *After Chartism: Class and Nation in English Radical Politics, 1848-1874* (Cambridge, 1993)

The analysis is brought back to Westminster with a consideration of parliamentary opposition. Finding little effective opposition voiced out of doors, Palmerston's main threat, beyond that within the government itself, came from the opposition benches. However, disunity, inconsistency, eccentricity and a lack of general sympathy weakened such critiques and left Palmerston, popular, ineffectively opposed and capable of punching above his weight in government.

## CHAPTER 2. RISE AND FALL: PALMERSTON AND THE POLITICS OF FOREIGN POLICY, 1846-51

### i) Palmerston, Russell, the Queen and foreign policy before 1846

Whereas Evelyn Ashley's *Life of Palmerston*<sup>1</sup> gives the impression that, at least as far as foreign policy was concerned, there was no-one else at Westminster but Palmerston, he did not rule the Foreign Office unsupervised, he did not enjoy the luxury of Cabinet support on all issues, and he was definitely not the Crown's favourite. Palmerston's third, and final, occupancy of the Foreign Secretaryship between 1846 and 1851 during the government of Lord John Russell, was in essence a perpetual struggle to secure control of the Foreign Office, a struggle dominated though not completely defined by the curious triangular relationship of Crown, Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary. When, in 1848, Palmerston had to defend his record before the House of Commons and famously declared in answer to charges of inconsistency that Britain had no eternal allies and no perpetual enemies,<sup>2</sup> he was, perhaps, offering also a fitting epigram for himself. He certainly captured the essence of Palmerstonism: free from ties and above all pragmatic in its outlook.

Observers of this period have been apt to describe the role of Russell as something of a broker between the Court and the Foreign Office, perpetually striving to maintain some semblance of harmony and stability by which his rather fragile administration might be able to continue. Whilst not an unhelpful view, this is by no

<sup>1</sup> E. Ashley, *The Life and Correspondence of Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston* 2 vols (London, 1879)

<sup>2</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser., XCVII, 121-3 (1 March 1848)

means a wholly satisfactory one, and whilst there is indeed some value in seeing the Prime Minister as an intermediary between Crown and minister, there remains a great deal more to be said of this subject.

Lord John Russell and Viscount Palmerston were not thrown together in 1846 for the first time. They had both served in the Whig ministries of Lords Grey and Melbourne between 1830 and 1841, in both of which Palmerston had filled the role of Foreign Secretary whilst Russell had served as Paymaster-general until he was installed as Home Secretary in 1835, then taking the office of Secretary for War and Colonies in the autumn of 1839. Not only was Palmerston's office (unofficially) of a higher rank than those held by Russell, but so too were his reputation and influence the more imposing.<sup>3</sup> Whilst Russell did not necessarily become, in the course of these early ministerial associations, a proselyte to the Palmerstonian frame of mind, he tended frequently to concur with Palmerston and side with the Foreign Secretary within the Cabinet on foreign affairs. A letter written to Palmerston once Russell had been promoted to the Home Office displays a remarkably Palmerstonian attitude to such questions: 'I think the Cabinet would have done better to have agreed with you & me respecting our naval force on the coast of Spain', he wrote. 'To suffer our men to be shot from time to time, & remonstrate as if we were neutrals, while we are in fact allies, & belligerents, is unbecoming, & degrading to our flag.'<sup>4</sup>

This was an early and unconvincing flirtation with foreign policy, however. It was not indicative of a frequent and interested concern with the conduct of Britain's external relations and signals little more than a genuine sympathy with the

<sup>3</sup> Technically both ministers served on an equal footing as Secretaries of State, but in reality the Foreign Secretaryship carried more weight, particularly for Palmerston when he served at the Foreign Office under Melbourne and enjoyed there a relatively free hand (see above pp.16-17)

<sup>4</sup> Russell to Palmerston, 27 Sept. 1835, Broadlands Papers, Southampton University Library, GC/RU/13

line adopted by Palmerston over a particular issue. Not until the closing months of the Melbourne government did Russell become in any meaningful way interested in foreign politics.<sup>5</sup>

Initially Palmerston was able to carry Russell with him on most aspects of foreign policy. Over Afghanistan for instance Lord John made no objection to the invasion, and with regard to the opium question he was quite in agreement with Palmerston that now was the time to say 'we mean to knock the Chinese Emperor down for this impudence'.<sup>6</sup> However, Russell had not been at the Colonial Office long before he started to come into much more frequent contact and friction with Palmerston.<sup>7</sup>

Over the boundary question involving Canada and the United States of America Russell believed that the Foreign Office was dragging its feet in not signing a convention to settle the dispute, but it was over the Eastern question that Russell really fell out with Palmerston, or at least the Palmerstonian approach. Following the abortive attempts in the early 1830s to break free from the shackles of the Ottoman Empire, Mehemet Ali, Pasha of Egypt, facing a vengeful suzerain in Sultan Mahmoud II, sought once more in 1838 to declare independence. Although the declaration was withdrawn, the attention of the Great Powers was again drawn to the potential for collapse within the Ottoman Empire, for as one historian points out, it was clear that Mehemet Ali was merely postponing and not abandoning his plan.<sup>8</sup> The Ottoman Empire represented a vital counter-balance, helping to preserve some

<sup>5</sup> As Russell's latest biographer has observed, only in 1840 did Russell show any signs of commitment to foreign affairs, and from this point on 'we can see how his adolescent attitudes to the outside world developed in practice' (J. Prest, *Lord John Russell* (London, 1972) p.165).

<sup>6</sup> Russell to Melbourne, 6 Nov. 1839, quoted *ibid.*, p.165

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.165

<sup>8</sup> M.S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question* (London, 1966), p.94

sort of great power equilibrium by simultaneously obstructing Russian expansionist tendencies and preserving French and British lines of communication with areas of imperial and commercial interest.

At the close of 1838 and the beginning of 1839, the Sultan's desire to settle what was rapidly developing into the second Mehemet Ali crisis led to hostile confrontations between the Turks and Egyptians which in April escalated into war. Now the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, long predicted, often averted, seemed close by, and matters only worsened when Mahmoud died at the end of June and was succeeded by the 'weak and stupid' sixteen year old Abdul Medjid.<sup>9</sup> Little wonder, then, that the Turkish forces collapsed, with the Turkish fleet going over to Mehemet Ali. With the Porte thus undermined, the Great Powers - primarily in this instance Russia, France and Britain - finally intervened and the Mehemet Ali question became above all one of European diplomacy, although this did not usher in a speedy settlement and a period of harmony. Anglo-Russian relations, always sensitive in the Near East, were tense and a breach was developing between Britain and France. Though the French did not declare openly for Mehemet Ali, neither would they adopt an anti-Egyptian line: important commercial interests in Egypt and a desire to construct a viable counter-poise to British influence in the Mediterranean area weighed heavily with the French government. A certain Anglo-Russian rapprochement emerged as Palmerston became increasingly Francophobic and receptive to Russian overtures whilst the Russians were keen to seize an opportunity to conciliate a Near Eastern rival and also upset the Anglo-French *entente*.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.95

Over this question Palmerston came into direct conflict with his own Cabinet which contained a sizeable Francophile element, not least amongst the Holland House Foxites. But still Palmerston pursued his chosen line to the detriment of Anglo-French relations which took another turn for the worse when Thiers took charge in March 1840 offering an even more uncompromising attitude to the Ottoman business. Meanwhile Mehemet Ali proffered a negotiated settlement. The European Powers resented the humiliation implicit in a Turco-Egyptian settlement which would have been constructed without their help, and, worse still perhaps, with French backing. It was largely due to Ponsonby, the British minister at Constantinople, that the Porte rejected the Egyptian overtures.

At this point Russell and Palmerston began to diverge. Russell declared that he did not regard the difference between British and French proposals as a reasonable cause of war, and told the Foreign Secretary that he 'must therefore propose at the Cabinet on Monday that some step should be taken to demonstrate our willingness to settle the question by negotiation'.<sup>10</sup> Following this Cabinet meeting, Russell wrote once again to Palmerston, saying he would resign thereby 'leaving to you the whole credit of the success of your policy,' which, he said, it 'seems to me that I have no right to share in any claim to foresight, when my predictions are anything but sanguine'.<sup>11</sup>

Russell was dissuaded from this course and although he did shift closer to the Palmerstonian stand-point once Palmerston had secured the support of Russia, Austria and Prussia, it was Palmerston's policy that had won the day and Russell who had suffered a political defeat. In seeking some sort of reconciliation, Russell

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<sup>10</sup> Russell to Palmerston, 24 Sept. 1840, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/41

<sup>11</sup> Russell to Palmerston, 29 Sept. 1840, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/42

wrote to Palmerston early in November tacitly acknowledging Palmerston's approach to have been workable and proposing possible instructions to be issued forthwith to advance the situation.<sup>12</sup> On the letter containing Lord John's proposals, however, Palmerston has minuted rather caustically that they were 'Not adopted by me'.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, whilst Palmerston had lost much favour with Cabinet by the end of the negotiation, Russell was once more sympathetic to the Palmerstonian line. This may well have been a pragmatic decision since Russell was acutely aware of the importance of party in fashioning an effective anti-Conservative group at this time. When the Melbourne government fell in 1841 Russell fully appreciated that he must keep Palmerston with him if the Whigs were to stand as a viable opposition to the Tories under Peel. 'Before we meet again,' he wrote to Palmerston in October 1841, 'we must not only be organized, but it must be considered for what purposes we are organized. There is sufficient matter, as I think, both in the principles of free trade, and in the maintenance of the general policy we have maintained in Poland, to give us a distinct ground for party union'.<sup>14</sup> Not only had Palmerston's handling of foreign policy been a triumph of liberalism and self-determination - despite his stand over Egypt - but he was also widely recognised as an able and capable statesman.

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<sup>12</sup> Russell to Palmerston, 7 Nov. 1840, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/50. One of Russell's chief concerns had been the role of Lord Ponsonby, the British ambassador to the Porte. On 1 November he had written to the Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne, to warn that he could not remain a member of the government for much longer. 'The measures taken by Lord Ponsonby', he wrote, 'for extending the blockade of Alexandria to ships of War, & employing our squadron in enforcing it, has, I see, been opposed by Lord Palmerston. This appears to me, for reasons which are obvious, a very dangerous step. You tell me in a note I have this moment received "We have now a prospect, and as it appears to me a very good one, of settling this matter amicably." I confess I see no such prospect. The very first preliminary to any arrangement must be, in my view, the removal of Lord Ponsonby from his post' (Russell to Melbourne, 1 Nov. 1840, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/48).

In his letter to Palmerston of 7 November, however, Russell tacitly admitted defeat and conceded that 'it would be unjust & discouraging to all engaged to recall him, or send a special Embassy to the Porte'.

<sup>13</sup> Minute in Palmerston's hand on letter from Russell to Palmerston, 7 Nov. 1840, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/51

<sup>14</sup> Russell to Palmerston, 4 Oct. 1841, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/60/1-2

Indeed Russell could hardly afford not to appease Palmerston when even Aberdeen, Peel's Foreign Secretary, was forced to admit that Palmerston's management of the Eastern question during the 1830s had, as Palmerston gleefully reported to Melbourne, 'made him forgive me many things of former years, which he had thought he never should have forgiven'.<sup>15</sup>

Thus Palmerston had established himself as an able manager of foreign policy. His pugnacious and self-willed manner was offensive to many at Westminster but none could deny that he was now vital to any resurrection of Whig and Liberal fortunes. As Sir Robert Peel brought his party towards a wreck on the rocks of the Corn Law question towards the end of 1845, attempts were made to bring into office a new government, a Whig ministry which would be headed by Lord John Russell, and when in December 1845 Peel resigned the Queen sent for Lord John. Whilst a new government would still uphold the Peelite insistence on the need for repeal of the Corn Laws, it was felt, or at least hoped, that such a ministry could pass this legislation without destroying itself. Outwardly, there was no reason to doubt the sincerity of such aspirations, but in reality it was to prove impossible for Russell to pull together the various factions with whom he sat on the opposition benches in order to supplant Peel. Upon consideration of the immediate political programme to be pursued, Russell was able to secure widespread concurrence among his allies, as Prince Albert recorded in a memorandum:

He [Russell] had written to all his former colleagues to join him in his attempt, amongst others to Lord Grey, who answered, 'that he could only belong to a Government which pledged itself to the principle of absolute free trade and abolition of all protection; that he had his own views upon the sugar question (as to which he advocated the admission of slave labour) and upon the Irish

<sup>15</sup> Palmerston to Melbourne, 26 Dec. 1845, A.C. Benson and Viscount Esher (eds.), *The Letters of Queen Victoria: a selection from Her Majesty's correspondence between the years 1837 and 1861*, 3 vols. (London, 1907) [hereafter *LQV*], II, pp.79-82

question (as to which his principle was to establish entire religious equality); that he hoped that in the formation of a new Government no personal considerations should stand in the way of a full attention to public Duty.'

Lord John replied that he advocated free trade, but as the immediate question before them was the *Corn Laws*, he thought it wiser not to complicate this by other declarations which would produce a good deal of animosity; that the sugar question and Ireland might be discussed in Cabinet when circumstances required it; that he agreed entirely in the last sentence.

After this Lord Grey declared himself quite satisfied....<sup>16</sup>

Palmerston remained an intractable problem, however. Despite his conservative reputation in domestic affairs, Palmerston was not as vehement in his objections to the repeal movement which drove on his colleagues such as Russell as was widely suspected and he proclaimed himself to be happy to serve in a ministry committed to such measures. Charles Greville thought, somewhat cynically but not unreasonably that:

as Palmerston's objection was grounded on the assumption that it [the Edinburgh Letter in which Russell expressed his conversion to the principle of free trade] would *strengthen* Peel, now that Peel is out of office, and the doors of the F.O. are open to him, he will no doubt be reconciled to it; for I don't imagine he cares about corn, fixed duty, sliding scales, or anything else except so far as they may bear upon his return to that abode of his bliss.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, whilst Palmerston was quite genuinely prepared to serve in a Russell government, some of his colleagues were unwilling to accommodate him. An influential minority, led by the third Earl Grey but including also Labouchere, George Grey and Macaulay, could not tolerate the idea of working in harmony with Palmerston.<sup>18</sup> F.A. Dreyer has suggested that Lord Grey along with Sir Charles Wood had long sought to establish some sort of Conservative-Liberal coalition and

<sup>16</sup> Memorandum by Prince Albert, 20 Dec. 1845, *LQV*, II, pp.69-71

<sup>17</sup> C.C.F. Greville, *The Greville Memoirs (second part): A Journal of the Reign of Queen Victoria, from 1837 to 1852* (ed. H. Reeve), 3 vols. (London, 1885), II, p. 318 (12 Dec. 1845)

<sup>18</sup> Third Earl Grey, Journal, 18 Dec. 1845, Grey Papers, 3rd Earl, Durham University Library C3/12

they were exploiting opposition to Palmerston as a means of furthering this end.<sup>19</sup> Palmerston was not the only member of the proposed Cabinet to whom Grey objected but he was a politically useful target.<sup>20</sup> Having failed to establish an alliance with Peel, despite sharing common views on financial policy, Grey and Wood joined the Russell government in July 1846 preferring that to remaining in opposition with few immediate prospects of government. Russell's offer of the Chancellorship of the Exchequer to Wood certainly made the decision easier, but as Minto's journal reveals, the Grey faction continued to look to a future as a separate political body.<sup>21</sup> Opposition to Palmerston was founded on more than the personal ambition of his antagonists and rested to a large extent on fears about Palmerston's ability to avoid costly foreign entanglements.

Russell stood little or no chance of forming a ministry without Palmerston which would be sturdy enough to weather the coming parliamentary storms; yet he faced similarly bleak prospects of forming a ministry with him at the Foreign Office, and Palmerston would take no other post. On a party level he could not allow Russell to gain too great an ascendancy over him and since there was no chance of Palmerston being offered the premiership himself, that served to emphasise the need for him to be in a position to check Lord John. Not only did Palmerston have personal political reasons for wanting to curb Russell; doubts were being expressed in Whig circles at this time about Lord John's ability to execute the duties of the Prime Minister. Palmerston felt he had a national responsibility to monitor Russell's

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<sup>19</sup> F.A. Dreyer, 'The Russell Administration, 1846-52', (unpublished D.Phil thesis, University of St. Andrews, 1962), p.31. Dreyer claims to be able to trace this scheme of Grey's back to 1841 when Melbourne's government fell.

<sup>20</sup> Shaftesbury diary, 22 Dec. 1845, Broadlands Papers, SHA/PD/4

<sup>21</sup> Second Earl of Minto, Journal, 2 Feb. 1850, Minto Papers, National Library of Scotland, MS 11996

conduct and he was not necessarily voicing sentiments peculiar to himself when he said to Shaftesbury a few months later of Russell: 'Oh, he's a very foolish fellow, but we shall go on very well now'.<sup>22</sup> Even Russell's brother, the Duke of Bedford, was struck by a sense of unease when confronted with the possibility of Lord John assuming the position of First Lord of the Treasury.<sup>23</sup>

Palmerston therefore insisted on taking the Foreign Office and in the face of various objections to such an arrangement, Russell could not fulfil his commission. Peel might have adverted to the 'want of deference shown to the Queen' and the 'new and unconstitutional' nature of Russell's failure to follow through his promise to form a new administration;<sup>24</sup> but Russell could do nothing else, acknowledging that fissures among his colleagues meant that, 'I cannot form a government which can have a chance of success, even in the first measure they would have to propose'.<sup>25</sup> Russell was relieved to be able to resign his task, recognising that it would have been far from easy to perform the duties of Prime Minister, but he reserved still a certain obloquy for Grey's conduct. 'I write to you with a great sense of relief on public affairs', he told his wife the day after his audience with the Queen. 'The Queen, as usual, was very gracious and was angry with Lord Grey for his determination; she was, in short, convinced that I was right in wishing to retain Palmerston at the Foreign Office', adding the following day: 'Howick [Grey] is so much to blame that I am resolved never to act with him in public again. Only think

<sup>22</sup> Palmerston to Shaftesbury, nd [c.July 1846?], A. Wyatt-Tilby, *Lord John Russell* (London, 1930), p.106

<sup>23</sup> Prest, *Lord John Russell*, p.219

<sup>24</sup> Memorandum by Prince Albert, 20 Dec. 1845, *LQV*, II, pp.72-3

<sup>25</sup> Russell to Palmerston, 19 Dec. 1845, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/99

of his advising us to accept office on Tuesday and Thursday, and making his objection on Friday'.<sup>26</sup>

It is significant that the Queen concurred in the necessity of retaining Palmerston at the Foreign Office and this was one of the last royal endorsements of Palmerston's abilities and claims to the control of foreign policy. When Victoria first acceded to the throne in 1837, aged only eighteen, she had been inexperienced in the arts of government and diplomacy and her letters to Palmerston at this time reflect this. Primarily they are concerned with seeking advice about diplomatic protocol: on the correct form for communications; on the suitability of gifts for different sovereigns; on invitations to functions at Windsor (who to invite, where they should sit at dinner, whether or not they should be invited to spend the night at the Castle) and so on, whilst the rest simply acknowledge and approve suggestions made by the Foreign Secretary.<sup>27</sup> Palmerston must have been delighted with the new state of affairs, and when in August 1837, for example, the Queen wrote to ask him 'not to send any more [despatches] until she has done with those which she already has with her', he surely believed that here indeed was a sovereign with whom he could deal happily.<sup>28</sup>

For the next few months the Queen continued to trust Palmerston, confining the majority of her communications with her Foreign Secretary to simple questions about diplomatic practice and conventions. The first letter from the Queen which survives in the Broadlands collection to deal with a specific question of policy is dated 11 November 1840 and in it the Queen is keen to point out that in raising

<sup>26</sup> Russell to Lady John Russell, 20, 21 Dec. 1845, S. Walpole, *The Life of Lord John Russell*, 2 vols. (London, 1889), I, pp.416, 417

<sup>27</sup> See the letters from the Queen to Palmerston, 1837, Broadlands Papers, RC/F/1-14

<sup>28</sup> Queen to Palmerston, 12 Aug. 1837, Broadlands Papers, RC/F/15/1

points about Palmerston's drafts she 'does so with strict impartiality having had ample opportunity of hearing both sides of this intricate and highly important question'.<sup>29</sup> The experienced and self-assured manner of Palmerston had instilled in the Queen a genuine feeling of confidence in his abilities. In May 1839 she wrote to her Foreign Secretary, taking 'this opportunity to express to Lord Palmerston how much she laments losing his valuable services, wh. he has performed in so admirable a manner, & which have so greatly promoted the honour & welfare of this country in its relations with Foreign Powers, wh. will ever be gratefully remembered as also Lord Palmerston's readiness at all times to serve the Queen'.<sup>30</sup> These sentiments were voiced again in 1841 when the Queen really did lose Palmerston's services adding as evidence of the cordiality of their relations her wish 'for his and Lady Palmerston's welfare and happiness'.<sup>31</sup>

However well disposed the Queen was towards Palmerston, this did not compensate for the antagonism towards Palmerston among the disaffected Whigs and Russell was unable to form a government in December 1845 and Peel was obliged to resume the premiership. The political death of Peel and the destruction of the Conservative party were now, in a sense, inevitable. With the passing of the repeal of the Corn Laws, Peel could not hold a ministry together any longer and Russell was required to construct an administration somehow. Overtures made to Cobden and to the Peelites were unproductive and Russell himself ruled out the only other possible alliance,<sup>32</sup> one with the Protectionists.<sup>33</sup> Thus the ministry was to be

<sup>29</sup> Queen to Palmerston, 11 Nov. 1840, Broadlands Papers, RC/F/212/1-4. Brian Connell discerns in this letter the beginning of Prince Albert's influence over the Queen in such questions, B. Connell (ed.), *Regina v. Palmerston* (London, 1962), p.27

<sup>30</sup> Queen to Palmerston, 9 May 1839, Broadlands Papers, RC/F/103

<sup>31</sup> Queen to Palmerston, 30 Aug. 1841, Broadlands Papers, RC/F/259

<sup>32</sup> Walpole, *The Life of Lord John Russell*, I, pp.423-6

<sup>33</sup> Russell to Duncannon [Bessborough], 11 April 1846, quoted *ibid*, I, pp.423-4, n.1

constructed from amongst Russell's friends, but this raised for a second time the troublesome Grey-Palmerston dilemma. However, affairs had altered since the previous winter and Grey was now far more amenable. He recognised that it was inappropriate and unprofitable to obstruct the formation of a government the establishment of which necessity demanded, whilst, furthermore, Palmerston had done much in the intervening period to repair his reputation abroad: a visit to Paris over Easter 1846, for example, had ensured that there at least, *ce terrible Lord Palmerston* had become *ce cher Lord Palmerston*,<sup>34</sup> however short-lived that might have been.<sup>35</sup> Thus Charles Wood was able to report to Russell at the end of June that Lord Grey 'was quite prepared to waive any objection on the score of Palmerston ... and that he felt the necessity of making the machine work easily if he came in. He felt the separation from all his friends very much if he was not included'.<sup>36</sup>

On 6 July 1846 Russell finally accepted the Queen's commission and the new ministers assumed their seals of office at Osborne. Yet Russell's government was not a particularly strong and united one and the divisions which had hampered Lord John in December 1845 were to plague him still. Even to Prince Albert the factional nature of the new ministry was obvious:

There is the *Grey Party*, consisting of Lord Grey, Lord Clarendon, Sir George Grey, and Mr Wood; they are against Lord Lansdowne, Lord Minto, Lord Auckland, and Sir John Hobhouse, stigmatising them as old women. Lord John leans entirely to the last-named gentlemen. There is no cordiality between Lord John and Lord Palmerston, who, if he had to make a choice, would even forget what passed in December last, and join the Grey Party in

<sup>34</sup> Ashley, *The Life and Correspondence of Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston*, I, p.499. See also below pp.170-171

<sup>35</sup> Cobden, touring Europe at this time, met Louis Philippe, King of France, in August and noted in his diary: 'He [Louis Philippe] was not very complimentary to Lord Palmerston, applying to him a French maxim which may be turned into the English phrase "if you bray a fool in a mortar he will remain a fool still"' (M. Taylor (ed.), *The European Diaries of Richard Cobden, 1846-1849* (Aldershot, 1994), p.44 [6 Aug. 1846])

<sup>36</sup> C. Wood to Russell, 1 July 1846 [?], quoted Walpole, *The Life of Lord John Russell*, I, pp.427-8

preference to Lord John personally. The curious part of all this is that they cannot keep a secret, and speak of all their differences.<sup>37</sup>

Modern analyses of whig-liberal politics have agreed with the Prince in viewing this as a period of factions, yet in such work the distinctions between groups are treated with greater sophistication.<sup>38</sup> Clearly the ministry was susceptible to internal division but more than this, within Parliament, too, support for the new government was weak. Whilst acknowledging the difficulties in assessing party strength at Westminster between the time of Peel's fall and the dissolution of 1847, Dreyer, taking the division lists for the third reading of the corn bill and the second reading of the coercion bill in *Hansard*, has estimated that the 'nominal supporters of the Government were in a minority and probably numbered altogether something like 270 to 280 members. The Protectionist party represented about 270 and the Peelites about 110'.<sup>39</sup> It was an inauspicious beginning, something which the Queen recognised. With Peel and Aberdeen at the helm, she told her uncle, the King of the Belgians, in July, she had felt safe: 'Never ... did they *ever* recommend a *person* or thing which was not for my or the Country's best, and never for the Party's advantage

<sup>37</sup> Memorandum by Prince Albert, 6 July 1846, *LQV*, II, pp.101-3

<sup>38</sup> Peter Mandler has differentiated whig-liberals into either 'Foxites' or 'Moderates', yet more recent work, such as that of Peter Gray, takes this 'taxonomy of British whig-liberals' further and argues for the existence of a 'moralist liberal' tendency. Interestingly, there is a significant correlation between Prince Albert's groupings of ministers in 1846 into 'Greys' or 'old women' and Gray's own classifications. Lansdowne, Auckland and Hobhouse, three of Albert's 'old women' are viewed as Moderates whilst Earl Grey, Sir George Grey and Sir Charles Wood all appear as Moralists. Importantly, Russell joins the ranks of the Foxites whilst Palmerston is located within the Moderate camp. See P.H. Gray, 'British Politics and the Irish Land Question, 1843-1850', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1992), pp. 13-19; P. Mandler, *Aristocratic Government in the Age of Reform: Whigs and Liberals, 1830-1852* (Oxford, 1990), pp.13-120. Prince Albert's inclusion of Clarendon within the Grey party is curious. Once he had taken up the post of Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in 1847 Clarendon's letters back to London became increasingly critical of Palmerston's foreign policy, yet were certainly not so vehement in their criticism of Palmerston as were Grey and his supporters and once his career brought him back into regular Cabinet connection with Palmerston in the Aberdeen government, Clarendon displayed a relatively warm disposition towards Palmerston. Significantly, however, in Ireland, Clarendon was reliant on reports in the *Times* for his foreign intelligence (see Clarendon's letters to Henry Reeve for this period, Clarendon Deposit, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS.Clar.dep.c.534 (1) (2)).

<sup>39</sup> F.A. Dreyer 'The Russell Administration, 1846-1852', p.80; for more detail on voting patterns and party allegiance see pp.80-82

only; and the contrast now is very striking; there is much less respect and much less high and pure feeling...', adding a week later: 'The present Government is weak, and I think Lord J. does not possess the talent of keeping his people together'.<sup>40</sup> These weaknesses were to have important ramifications for Palmerston and the conduct of foreign policy during the subsequent five and a half years.

ii) 'Exchanging power for influence?': The monarchy and the control of foreign policy, 1846-51<sup>41</sup>

*The Crown, the constitution and foreign policy*

Crucially, one of the government's main problems during this period was the confused state of constitutional practice, particularly in the arena of foreign policy. Here the role of the monarchy emerges as the most curious and ill-defined and it is the ambiguous nature of the Crown's constitutional role and the differing interpretations of that role offered primarily by Melbourne and Prince Albert that lay at the heart of many of Palmerston's struggles. Queen Victoria was not only in need

<sup>40</sup> Queen to the King of the Belgians, 7 July 1846, 14 July 1846, *LQV*, II, pp.103-105 The Queen's faith in Aberdeen and Peel was not shared by Palmerston, however, who returned to the Foreign Office with a rather gloomy view of the way in which Britain's external relations had been managed over the previous 5 years. As he wrote to Russell in October 1846: 'If you or I had been at [the helm over Spanish affairs] much if not all of this might have been prevented. But the fact is that the evil has arisen not only from Royal Interviews, but from the Foreign Relations of the Country having been conducted by two men like Peel and Aberdeen, who whatever may be their merits in other respects proceed in these matters upon an essentially faulty Principle. Do not you remember that one day last year or the year before when Peel was taunted in the He. of Cms. either by you or by me with having allowed France to establish a paramount Influence in Spain, he said in Reply, "well and what have they gained by it? Nothing but Embarrassment; If they have established this Influence all I can say is, *I wish them Joy of it!*" and then he gazed about & looked triumphant as if he had said a wise & vastly clever Thing' (Palmerston to Russell, 6 Oct. 1846, Russell Papers, Public Record Office, PRO 30/22/5D, fols 114-115).

Palmerston went further a couple of months later, criticising Aberdeen for having damaged British interests by 'making himself under secretary to Guizot' (Palmerston to Russell, 8 Dec. 1846, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/5F, fols 96-97).

<sup>41</sup> The phrase is Harold Laski's, quoted F. Hardie, *The Political Influence of Queen Victoria, 1861-1901*, 2nd Edn. (Oxford, 1938), p.237

of instruction in the specific etiquette of diplomacy, but in the arts of government generally. The task of educating the young Queen fell largely to the incumbent Prime Minister at the time of her accession, Lord Melbourne, and he schooled the Queen in what he conceived to be Whig political theory. The weight of Melbourne's responsibility was acknowledged throughout the political world, and as Lord Aberdeen observed, not since the days of 'Protector Somerset' had a minister been so placed. 'He has a young and inexperienced infant in his hands,' he noted in a letter to Princess Lieven, 'whose whole conduct and opinions must necessarily be in complete subservience to his views. I do him the justice to believe that he has some feeling for his situation ...but in the nature of things, this power must be absolute, at least at court'.<sup>42</sup> During these early years of Victoria's reign, Melbourne was able to exercise a considerable influence over the political role of the Court. Whilst the Queen became during these early years of her reign both politically and personally committed to Melbourne, the closeness of this relationship combined with political scandals in the later 1830s over Lady Flora Hastings and the Bedchamber Crisis eventually brought the integrity of the Court into question.<sup>43</sup>

When Prince Albert married the Queen in 1840 the image of the monarchy was already severely tarnished and whilst the Queen's marriage represented a caesura

<sup>42</sup> Aberdeen to Princess Lieven, 16 Sept. 1838, quoted P. Ziegler, *Melbourne* (London, 1976), pp.263-264

<sup>43</sup> Lady Flora Hastings, one of the Queen's ladies-in-waiting died in July 1839 as a result of a tumor mis-diagnosed as a pregnancy. The Queen, under the impression that Lady Flora was pregnant, had accepted the inconclusive assessment made by her doctor, yet Lady Flora's family, staunchly Tory, broadcast allegations that Lady Flora had been the victim of a conspiracy to destroy her reputation, making a personal tragedy a political incident. Melbourne dismissed the episode as 'all Politicks', but the affair served only as a fore-runner of another controversy centred on the Queen's household when in the same year the Queen refused to change her (Whig) ladies-in-waiting in favour of Tories in conjunction with Peel's attempt to replace the ailing Melbourne government. It seemed to many contemporaries that Victoria's close connection with Melbourne had resulted in a highly politicised monarchy and as such to controvert the very essence of a constitutional monarchy, making the Queen herself deeply unpopular. See Mitchell, *Melbourne*, pp.240-243

in her relations with Melbourne, it simultaneously introduced an important new element into British political life, and more specifically, to the political outlook of the Queen, which was to have important ramifications for the future of the British monarchy.

Albert's position as consort to the Queen was constitutionally ambiguous, yet his own background - deliberately educated in political theory in Coburg and later in Bonn as a student of the 'Historical Law School', an increasingly fashionable branch of scholarship investigating the historical roots of representative institutions - made his union with the Queen in 1840, at an important transitional period for the monarchy in Britain, of vital importance to the course of British politics. Very early on Victoria's uncle, King Leopold, urged that Albert 'ought in business as in everything to be necessary to the Queen', and that there 'should be no concealment from him on any subject',<sup>44</sup> envisaging him clearly as some sort of personal secretary. Very soon, however, the Prince started to offer advice to the Queen. He was concerned, for instance, about the extent to which the monarchy had become embroiled in questions of party under Melbourne's influence, and within a year of becoming Prince Consort was positively encouraging the Queen to recover her monarchical rights he believed had been sacrificed to whiggish interests. As Albert's private secretary, George Anson, recorded in a memorandum: 'The Prince ...urged that her Majesty should by degrees regain possession of the privileges which through youth and inexperience she had been induced to yield up ...The Prince said he could never feel satisfied till he saw her in the same position as when she ascended the throne'.<sup>45</sup> As the ministry of Lord Melbourne foundered in 1841, the Prince was able

<sup>44</sup> Memorandum by Anson, Aug. 1840, quoted F. Eyck, *The Prince Consort: a Political Biography* (Boston, USA, and Cambridge, 1959), p.22

<sup>45</sup> Memorandum by Anson, 2 Jan. 1841, quoted F. Eyck, *The Prince Consort*, p.24

to establish himself as more than just the Queen's private secretary, and became effectively her chief political adviser, guiding her through the troubled months surrounding the end of the government.

For the next twenty years, the British monarchy was, if not totally, then at least largely, moulded by Albert and represented by him, and it is significant that Frank Hardie was able to discern Victoria's own voice in politics only once the Prince was dead.<sup>46</sup> With the advent of a second Peel administration, Albert was fortunate to find a Prime Minister now who, unlike Melbourne, was less a rival for the ear of the Queen and more an advocate for the kind of government that Albert himself admired.<sup>47</sup> Albert had no desire to fashion the British monarch into an apolitical functionary of the state, in fact quite the reverse, as his explicit demonstrations of support for Peel's attempts to repeal the Corn Laws bears testimony,<sup>48</sup> and in the field of foreign affairs he clearly believed that the Court had a positive contribution to make.

Albert was, like the Queen herself, related to many heads of state and enjoyed an intimacy with them that could be of potential benefit to the interests of the nation. However, ministerial interests, or interpretations of events, and those of the Court were not always identical, and whilst during Aberdeen's tenure of the Foreign Office this had not created any great problems, there was nevertheless evidence of indiscretions in Court correspondence undermining the integrity of the government.<sup>49</sup> Albert's connections, particularly with central European states, were in many ways a great asset to British governments, but he had not yet learned enough

<sup>46</sup> F. Hardie, *The Political Influence of Queen Victoria*, pp.19-20

<sup>47</sup> A. Hawkins, "'Parliamentary Government' and Victorian Political Parties, c.1830-c.1880", *English Historical Review*, CIV (July 1989), p.655

<sup>48</sup> See F. Eyck, *The Prince Consort*, p.36

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p.33

about the British system of government, or was perhaps pressing revisions too rapidly, not to avoid clashes with ministers on occasion, and particularly so once Palmerston had returned to the Foreign Office in 1846. Albert's influence on the Queen and directly on British politics as half of the royal 'we' contributed expressly to a contemporary concern with understanding the nature of British constitutional practice.

Such a debate about the constitution was not carried on solely at a high political level regarding the role of the Crown. There was also a flourishing contemporary debate among many members of the journalistic and educated classes concerned with the wider questions of British constitutional practice. Palmerston's own conduct at this time tested many assumptions about the constitution and thereby offered an implicit contribution to this debate.

In 1867 Walter Bagehot published *The English Constitution* which challenged many of the mainstream orthodoxies of mid-Victorian constitutional theory. Central to Bagehot's thesis was an appreciation of the distinction between the 'dignified' and the 'efficient' parts of the constitution, the dignified parts being those which 'excite and preserve the reverence of the population' whilst the efficient parts were 'those by which ...[the constitution], in fact, works and rules'.<sup>50</sup> Neither had any value without the other, thus:

There are two great objects which every constitution must attain to be successful, which every old and celebrated one must have wonderfully achieved: every constitution must first *gain* authority, and then *use* authority; it must first win the loyalty and confidence of mankind, and then employ that homage in the work of government. ...The dignified parts of Government are those which bring it force - which attract its motive power. The efficient parts only employ that power. The comely parts of a Government *have* need, for they are those upon which its vital strength depends.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> W. Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (1867; London, 1993 edn.), p.63

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, pp.63-64

The Queen, Bagehot concluded, was only at the head of the dignified part of the constitution whilst the Prime Minister headed the efficient part. 'The Crown is, according to the saying, the 'fountain of honour'; but the Treasury is the spring of business', he reasoned.<sup>52</sup> Power rested within Parliament in the Bagehotian model and whilst the Prime Minister could choose in what capacity ministers would serve, he could only select from amongst those whom parliament offered. Implicit in this view was also an undermining of the monarchy and thus Bagehot contended that to see Ministers as in any sense the Queen's servants was 'fictional'. Only once an administration had been constructed, did the balances shift and then the Cabinet became the key to government: 'A Cabinet is a combining committee - a *hyphen* which joins, a *buckle* which fastens, the legislative part of the State to the executive part of the State. In its origin it belongs to the one, in its functions it belongs to the other.'<sup>53</sup>

However, whilst seeking to draw attention to what he perceived as the ultimate subjugation of the monarch's governing power, Bagehot was nonetheless keen to illustrate the valuable, indeed indispensable, role the Crown still had to play in the government of the country. The monarchy offered distractions, represented religious strength, continuity, national morality and all along provided a façade of stability in a period of change and upheaval.<sup>54</sup> The Bagehotian monarchy therefore had no legislative power, nor did it form the executive; it had ultimately only three rights: 'the right to be consulted, the right to encourage, the right to warn'.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p.68

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p.70

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, pp.88-99.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p.113. Bagehot's thesis finds credence in a letter such as the one the Queen wrote to Palmerston on 11 November 1840 (see above, pp.39-40) in which she implicitly acknowledged that her role was essentially a consultative one. Certainly the Queen did not always see her role in this light, but it is significant, however, that in the first week of January 1848, Prince Albert wrote to Palmerston about the Greek question to say: 'I fancy that a Historian, wishing hereafter to write a true

During the Russell government, however, Victoria clearly sought to be more than a source of counsel over foreign policy. Inspired no doubt by Albert, the Court was to complain frequently of Palmerston's handling of foreign affairs and notes were often exchanged between the Queen and Russell and Russell and Palmerston in which Victoria's complaints about her Foreign Minister's conduct were aired. The Queen had learned during the life of the Peel ministry that certain of her prerogative rights (or what she came to regard as her prerogative rights) had previously been eroded and had found in Aberdeen a minister keen to fulfil his obligations to the Queen. Over the practice of sending despatches to the Queen before they were sent abroad, for example, Peel's Foreign Secretary had advised her that ordinarily these diplomatic communications were sent to the Court at the same time as being sent from the Foreign Office. 'Should Your Majesty then be pleased to make any remark or objection,' he told her, 'it would be immediately attended to by Lord Aberdeen, who would forthwith either make any necessary alterations, by additional instructions, or he would humbly represent to Your Majesty the reasons which induce him to think that the interest of Your Majesty's service require an adherence to what had already been done'.<sup>56</sup>

The Queen clearly expected a similar treatment from Palmerston when he returned to the Foreign Office under Russell. Thus when in the autumn of 1848 Palmerston wrote to Russell expressing his fears for his sovereign's independence of

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& impartial History of Greece would, if he got Sir E. Lyon's Dispatches before him say: "we have got most interesting documents before us, but we must take care not exclusively to trust to the statements contained therein, without comparing them with the evidence of the writer's contemporaries, as they are evidently written under great personal excitement & in a violent party spirit." *It is in the place of such an impartial judge that I strive to place myself* in order to come to a satisfactory conclusion about a state of things which is of the greatest European importance' (Prince Albert to Palmerston, 4 Jan. 1848, Broadlands Papers, RC/H/26 [my italics]).

<sup>56</sup> Aberdeen to Queen, Jan. 1844, quoted M. Charlot, *Victoria: The Young Queen* (Oxford, 1991), p.302

will, claiming that, 'Unfortunately The Queen gives Ear too readily to Persons who are hostile to her Government, and who wish to poison her mind with Distrust of her Ministers; and in this way, she is constantly suffering under groundless uneasiness',<sup>57</sup>

Russell agreed that all was not well with the Queen; though the irony of Palmerston's letter was not lost on him:

That the Queen is constantly suffering under uneasiness is too true, [he replied] but I own I cannot say it is always groundless. It is surely right that a person speaking in the name of Her Majesty's Government should in important affairs submit his dispatches to the Queen & obtain the opinion of her Prime Minister before he commits the Queen & her Government.

This necessary preliminary you too often neglect, & the Queen naturally, as I think, dreads that upon some occasion you may give her name to sanction proceedings which she may afterwards be compelled to disavow.

I confess that I feel some of the same uneasiness, but as I agree with you very constantly in opinion, my only wish is that in future you will save the Queen anxiety, & me some trouble by giving your reasons before, & not after an important dispatch is sent.<sup>58</sup>

Clearly the influence of the monarch extended beyond that of an adviser and Russell himself, though a committed Foxite Whig, was keen to uphold and enforce the monarchy's position as a figurehead and symbol of continuity.

Russell certainly had one eye on his rivals at Westminster, for if the opposition should ever be able to pose a serious threat to the continuance of his ministry, then the Queen's position would become more important. In an age of unsettled politics and fluid political relationships, few governments of the mid-nineteenth century were anything other than a coalition and in this sense the monarchy did then have a central role to play for the Queen must under such circumstances actually rather than just theoretically choose her prime ministers.

Often, there was no choice as in 1845 and 1846 when arguably Russell was the only

<sup>57</sup> Palmerston to Russell, 25 Sept. 1848, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/7D, fols 115-117

<sup>58</sup> Russell to Palmerston, 1 Oct. 1848, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/225/1-2

candidate capable of replacing Peel. Then the choice had been straightforward: at any given time, only one of the two alternatives was a viable one, but had a new potential leader emerged during the later 1840s, the issue might not have been so clear cut. Russell's relatively weak ministry would not have fared well against a strong challenge, and against a weak one he would probably have needed the Queen's sponsorship. It was important that the Queen remain favourably disposed towards Russell and his colleagues for as long as possible.

In many ways therefore, Bagehot was too hasty in dismissing the Queen's role as largely decorative. Brougham in his book *The British Constitution* adhered to the view that the sovereign had the right to dismiss ministers at will and Baron Stockmar, the Crown's own adviser brought to Britain by the Prince Consort, counselled the Queen during one of her spats with Palmerston that 'having once given her sanction to a measure, the Minister who, in the execution of such measures alters or modifies it arbitrarily commits an act of dishonesty towards the Crown which the Queen has an undoubted constitutional right to visit with the dismissal of that minister'.<sup>59</sup> G.H.L. Le May has argued that in fact the Queen never relinquished this perceived prerogative right and would have exercised it in 1851 to remove Palmerston had Russell not been obliged to pre-empt her.<sup>60</sup> In the event, the Queen's strength would probably not have extended that far, but constitutionally it would have been problematic ever to test such power. Ultimately, what prevented the Queen exercising this right of dismissal was another ministerial responsibility: that to Parliament, though it was this responsibility to Parliament that provided the means by which the Queen could still play an active role in government. Based on

<sup>59</sup> Memorandum by Baron Stockmar, 12 March 1850, *LQV*, II, 282

<sup>60</sup> G.H.L. Le May, *The Victorian Constitution: Conventions, Usages and Contingencies* (London, 1979), p.34

the ancient legal fiction that 'the king can do no wrong', Brougham argued that: 'For every act done by the Crown there must be a responsible adviser and responsible agents; so that all Ministers, from the highest officers of State down to the most humble instrument of Government, are liable to be both sued at law by any one whom they oppress, and impeached by Parliament for their evil deeds'.<sup>61</sup> Thus, as

D.A. Smith reasons:

To hold that every act of the Crown must be considered the act of an adviser responsible to Parliament and to the law does not necessitate the quite distinct proposition that the king must act only upon the advice of such an adviser. The latter proposition may represent a further development of the former principle, but it is not an ineluctable one. The former allows the king freedom of independent action; the latter does not. The former allows the king the right to dismiss ministers; the latter does not. The former and not the latter, represents the view of ministerial responsibility which prevailed in the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>62</sup>

The principle was, arguably, established by the case of Melbourne's 'dismissal' by William IV in 1834. Sir Robert Peel's speech in the House in the wake of this upheaval acknowledged the share he must take for what had passed. 'God forbid', he said, 'that I should endeavour to transfer any responsibility which ought properly to devolve upon me to that high and sacred authority which the constitution of this country recognizes as incapable of error, and every act of which it imputes to the advice of responsible counsellors'.<sup>63</sup> In accepting responsibility for what the King had done, Peel simultaneously accepted the power of the King to dismiss his ministers. In securing the approval for his actions from those who succeeded the dismissed ministers, the King's actions acquired a certain stamp of constitutionality, but such conduct remained contested and not accepted constitutional practice.

<sup>61</sup> Brougham, *The British Constitution*, (London, 1861), p.277, quoted D.A. Smith, 'Cabinet and Constitution in the Age of Peel and Palmerston.', (unpublished PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1966), p.72

<sup>62</sup> Smith, 'Cabinet and Constitution in the Age of Peel and Palmerston', p.73

<sup>63</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd Series, XXVI, 216 ( 24 Feb. 1835)

Simultaneously, however, this perceived royal *coup d'état* served as a warning to Whigs that the King posed a serious threat to parliamentary life and was grist to the Foxite mill.<sup>64</sup>

Yet Queen Victoria was not to enforce her 'rights' quite so assuredly and whilst she regularly became frustrated with Palmerston and even with Russell, she could not bring herself to push them from office. Relations between the Palace and Palmerston were never warm and Albert was to become one of Palmerston's sternest critics from the outset in 1846. Relations between the Court and Foreign Office became increasingly strained by late 1847 as Albert continued his practice of maintaining a regular correspondence with foreign sovereigns,<sup>65</sup> and by 1848 Russell was receiving summons to attend the Queen to hear her complaints against Palmerston. Russell stood by his Foreign Secretary in the face of royal pressure to replace him with Clarendon, yet by 1850 the Prime Minister too was tired of the Palmerstonian approach. In February the Queen wrote to Palmerston complaining that a draft despatch which she had wished to be altered according to the recommendations proposed by Lord John Russell, had been sent off without modification. 'The Queen must remark upon this sort of proceeding,' she wrote, 'of which this is not the first instance & plainly tell Lord Palmerston that this must not happen again. Lord Palmerston has a perfect right to state to the Queen his reasons for disagreeing with her views & will always have found her ready to listen to his reasons, but she cannot allow a servant of the Crown, & her Minister to act contrary to her orders & this without her knowledge'.<sup>66</sup> Palmerston denied the validity of

<sup>64</sup> See Mitchell, *Melbourne*, p.147

<sup>65</sup> Eyck, *The Prince Consort*, pp.58-59

<sup>66</sup> Queen to Palmerston, 17 Feb. 1850, Broadlands Papers, RC/F/438

these complaints,<sup>67</sup> but clearly the Queen had adopted the opinions of Stockmar and believed it her constitutional prerogative to command obedience from 'a servant of the crown & her Minister'.

The year 1850 was to become a difficult one for Palmerston. After the contretemps of February plans were hatched to remove him and in May Russell wrote to his Foreign Secretary a letter reporting his doubts about the continuance of the ministry as he had expressed them to the Queen. If the government did survive the oncoming parliamentary challenges, he said, 'without imputing blame to you, I thought it must be confessed that looking at the position of England, her readiness to acknowledge all forms of Government despotic and democratic, & her wish to respect the rights of all foreign nations, she was encountered by more hostile feelings in her course than was natural, or necessary. That I thought if you were to take some other department, we might continue the same line of foreign policy, without giving the same offence'.<sup>68</sup>

Had not the Don Pacifico affair and his '*civis Romanus sum*' speech rescued Palmerston's ailing fortunes he could well have found himself out of office there and then.<sup>69</sup> The Prince Consort recognised Palmerston's abilities but doubted his integrity:

Lord Palmerston is an able politician with large views and an energetic mind, an indefatigable man of business, a good speaker; but a man of expediency, of easy temper, no very high standard of honour and not a grain of moral feeling. He is consequently quite unscrupulous as to any line of policy that he is to follow, or any means he is to use as long as they lead to his ends. Whilst he is a

<sup>67</sup> Palmerston to Russell, 18 Feb. 1850, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/8C, fol 358. Palmerston here denies that he had sent the draft off 'unaltered', arguing that he had in fact modified the draft according to one of the two options Lord John had presented him with. Palmerston declares that it is now for Russell to explain how the Queen has come to be so misinformed and concludes by noting that: 'I think however that you will see from what I have stated that you have according to a Colloquial Phrase "picked me up before I was down"'.  
<sup>68</sup> Russell to Palmerston, 22 May 1850, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/343/1-2

<sup>69</sup> See below pp.198-201, 242-248, 271-273, 298-302, 310-312

most easy colleague and minister with regard to other departments, never making any difficulty, he is self-willed and impatient of any control of his own. His obstinacy arises from personal conceit, which makes him almost pity those who differ from him in opinion. He carries his own points with the greatest boldness, by what is commonly called bullying, but if this fails he is equally ready to resort to any trick which may serve his purpose and is perfectly at his ease if it has succeeded. He has generally great luck, but requires success to carry him through his policy; success failing, he steers without a compass and makes one almost doubt his sagacity.<sup>70</sup>

It was only Palmerston's renewed importance, indeed indispensability, that served to defend him against the royal onslaught. As Palmerston remembered:

Towards the End of the Session Ld John again brought the subject [of Palmerston's removal from office] forward & proposed to me a change of office. I replied that after what had passed in the House of Commons on Roebuck's Motion, and after the general and decided approbation of my Policy & Conduct which had been Expressed from one End of the Country to the other by all the Liberal Party it was quite impossible for me to consent to any such arrangement. To do so would be to pass Condemnation on myself after I had received a public approval, and to say that I thought the Hs of Lords which had blamed me was in the Right, and the House of Commons which had approved me was in the wrong. I said that ...if it was any Convenience to the Government I was ready now as I had been after the Vote in the Lords, to relieve my Colleagues of all Difficulty by retiring altogether, but that if I remained in the Govt I could not give up the Foreign Office.

Ld John said that he wished me to remain a Member of the Govt, and he afterwards said that The Queen had consented thereto.<sup>71</sup>

Whatever constitutional conventions were on the side of the Queen, it appeared in this case and for now, that personality transcended convention; that age, experience, vitality, audacity and sureness of aim counted for more than theoretical and supposedly even established tradition.

In the wake of the Don Pacifico debate the Prince Consort penned a note to Lord John in which he conceded that: 'When overruled by the Cabinet, or convinced

<sup>70</sup> Albert to Russell, 2 April 1850, quoted B. Connell, *Regina v. Palmerston*, (London, 1962), p.115

<sup>71</sup> From a minute, in Palmerston's hand, on a the letter from Russell, 22 May 1850, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/343/enc.1

that it would from political reasons be more prudent to waive her objections, she [the Queen] knew her constitutional position too well not to give her full support to whatever was done on the part of the Government'.<sup>72</sup> The Don Pacifico affair, whilst it revealed much about British attitudes to nationality and British national interest, also exposed a great deal about domestic politics, for the Pacifico debate in the House of Commons was not so much concerned with the issues and problems raised by the affair, as with Palmerston's conduct of this policy. Palmerston successfully represented the attack on his foreign policy as an attack upon himself personally. In his lengthy contribution to the debate, he made full use of his unlimited access to Foreign Office files, and argued persuasively that to have engaged in any policy different from that which he had pursued would have been un-English.<sup>73</sup> The reaction was overwhelmingly favourable to Palmerston and even his erstwhile rivals had to concede that Palmerston's stock now stood higher than ever before: Earl Grey himself testified to Palmerston's newly acquired popularity telling Greville that there could be no doubt that the debate had left Palmerston 'the most popular man in the country'.<sup>74</sup>

However, all government functions are not to be regarded equally. In order to judge more accurately the theoretical foundations of mid-Victorian government it is necessary to define these foundations. In the field of foreign policy, these functions divide broadly into two spheres: policy and diplomacy.

<sup>72</sup> Prince Albert to Russell, 17 Aug. 1850, quoted Smith, 'Cabinet and Constitution in the Age of Peel and Palmerston', p.82

<sup>73</sup> See R.M. Keeling, 'Palmerston and the Pacifico Debate', (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Missouri, Columbia, 1968), pp.62-66; Ch.IV.

<sup>74</sup> C.C.F. Greville, *The Greville Memoirs (second part)*, III, p.347 (1 July 1850)

*Royal interventions in foreign policy*

Whatever might be judged about the role of the Crown in the conduct of everyday governmental and parliamentary business, it cannot be doubted that where foreign affairs are concerned the environment is quite different. As Evelyn Ashley observed in 1879:

Foreign policy is that policy in which Sovereigns, who are thus brought into competition with their equals, take the most interest. The Prince Consort, with whom Her Majesty lived on such terms of confidence as rendered her application to him on questions of importance a matter of course, was not only a Prince of considerable ability, but one who gave a minute and scrupulous attention to any business on which he was consulted. ...[But] he had for adviser [Baron Stockmar] a man who, though well qualified to have taken a place amongst the first statesmen in Europe, was clearly no admirer of popular or Parliamentary control over foreign affairs, which he regarded as the special concerns of royal and imperial minds.<sup>75</sup>

Not only did Stockmar's view of the royal position encourage the Queen to see in foreign policy an important role for herself, but by virtue of the fact that foreign policy brought her face to face with her fellow sovereigns, Victoria's impression of her role was exaggerated by these 'equals' with whom she was now in competition. Letters from foreign royalty, founded on the assumption that Victoria's constitutional position mirrored their own, which was scarcely the case, engendered in the Queen a feeling that she could really control her country's foreign affairs. It was from such a premise that Victoria came to believe that one of her duties was to monitor all diplomatic communications and insist that they acquired her approval before being sent off.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Ashley, *The Life and Correspondence of Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston*, II, pp.194-5

<sup>76</sup> D. Southgate, *'The Most English Minister...': The Policies and Politics of Palmerston* (London, 1966), pp.192-3

The sheer volume of material with which a Foreign Secretary had to deal meant that it was often impractical for the Queen to see everything.<sup>77</sup> During the Peel ministry, when Aberdeen had held the Foreign Office, this had not been too much of a problem since Aberdeen was, like his Prime Minister, well-liked and respected at the Palace. Because of this, although the Queen had been troubled by the failure to submit to her all drafts of despatches, she had accepted that it was not always possible.<sup>78</sup> Conversely, Palmerston was not well-liked and the Queen and Prince took literally Aberdeen's parting injunction 'you must try to keep him straight'.<sup>79</sup> Palmerston did not find that he enjoyed the confidence of the Crown as he had when he had served at the Foreign Office during the reign of William IV, nor indeed as he had when Queen Victoria had first ascended the throne.<sup>80</sup> The Queen now was concerned with what was said by her government to others, and indeed by whom, for, clearly, the Foreign Secretary could not meet personally everyone with whom he dealt and she therefore took a keen interest in both the content of despatches and the selection and appointment of diplomats.

The appointment of diplomatic representatives was the responsibility of the Foreign Secretary, in that these were effectively extensions of the government in which the Foreign Secretary served, and thus in effect, instruments of his own work. Palmerston argued, however, that candidates for postings overseas should be assessed solely on the basis of merit and not as functionaries of party interests.

Depend upon it [he told Russell] you will find the greatest advantage to the public Service & to the Credit of your

<sup>77</sup> See below pp.65-66

<sup>78</sup> M.E. Chamberlain, *Lord Palmerston* (Cardiff, 1987), p.70

<sup>79</sup> Southgate, *The Most English Minister...*, p.181

<sup>80</sup> William IV made relatively little trouble about foreign policy, perhaps because he placed great faith in the abilities of Palmerston. 'I believe I am the only one of the Ministers whom the King likes personally', the Foreign Secretary wrote to his brother, William Temple, in 1836. Quoted C. Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston, 1830-41*, 2 vols. (London, 1969 edn.), I, p.26

Government in Selecting Men for Foreign Missions of Importance from a Regard for their Fitness; The advantage of so acting is permanent and felt in Times of Difficulty which may arise when least foreseen. The Advantage of acting upon other Considerations is Temporary, & when Evil arises from it, even those who may have pressed it upon you at the First will be the last to stand up and justify the Selection on the Grounds which it was made.<sup>81</sup>

Russell acknowledged the need to appoint men of ability to Britain's overseas postings, but unlike his Foreign Secretary he was also keen to pay attention to the political tendencies of candidates. As he said in reply to Palmerston's letter: 'I quite agree with you that in making diplomatic appointments the merit and fitness of the candidates are the chief points to be considered. But at the same time in this representative govt. the general means of carrying on a govt. are to be likewise taken into account'.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, although no letter seems actually to suggest that Palmerston decided appointments alone, there are several examples of Russell praising the Foreign Secretary's choice of diplomatist. Constitutionally certain appointments were exclusively in the gift of the Foreign Secretary,<sup>83</sup> and in general it would have been too time consuming for any Prime Minister to usurp this role, and Palmerston created a diplomatic staff with which Russell was generally satisfied.

The Queen, however, did take a close interest in the selection of diplomats. If she could not choose her Foreign Minister unfettered, she would at least try to influence the choice of diplomats through whom he would have to work. Thus on one occasion, for example, she seized 'this opportunity of mentioning two very deserving people in whom she takes interest & whom she wishes shld not be

<sup>81</sup> Palmerston to Russell, 14 July 1846, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/5B, fols 190-193

<sup>82</sup> Russell to Palmerston, 15 July 1846, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/101

<sup>83</sup> Since 1825 for example it had been established that only the Foreign Secretary could nominate an attaché. See S.T. Bindoff, 'The Unreformed Diplomatic Service, 1812-1860', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th ser., XVIII (1935), pp.160-165 for some useful observations on the use of patronage in diplomatic appointments and the free hand Palmerston (along with other Foreign Secretaries of this period) enjoyed in the distribution of many diplomatic posts.

over-looked in any change wh. may take place - viz: Mr Clarke, the son of Sir J. Clarke, & Mr Lonsdale. They would both be found very useful, & we are not rich in promising Diplomatsists'.<sup>84</sup> Whilst the Court was not necessarily pursuing a policy designed deliberately to undermine Palmerston, there was clearly some concern lest the Foreign Secretary be granted too much of a free rein in this quarter. The Queen agreed that merit and fitness must be the governing factors in making appointments, as Palmerston himself had said to Russell, but she did not believe that Palmerston always abided by his own rules and felt compelled on one occasion to spell out to her Foreign Secretary the grounds upon which selections must be made. Having made suggestions for a set of appointments, and having then almost immediately changed them, Palmerston prompted Victoria to write: 'The principle wh. the Queen wld. wish to see acted upon in her diplomatic appointments in general is, that the *good of the service* should preclude every other consideration & that the selection of an Agent should depend more on his personal qualifications for the particular post for which he is to be selected, than on the mere pleasure & convenience of the person to be employed, or of the Minister recommending him'.<sup>85</sup>

Palmerston, however, regarded royal interventions in this field as a nuisance. When Prince Albert forwarded to the Foreign Secretary through Russell some suggestions for diplomatic appointments, Palmerston could not help venting his anger: 'H.R.H. seems also to have forgot that there is a responsible Secy of State for Foreign Affairs which however I am not likely to forget', he scribbled on this letter, returning at a later date to add the acerbic note: 'I did not take any steps in

<sup>84</sup> Queen to Palmerston, 5 Feb. 1848, Broadlands Papers, RC/F/345

<sup>85</sup> Queen to Palmerston, 31 Jan. 1851, Broadlands Papers, RC/F/477/1-2

furtherance of this Extraordinary attempt to Interfere with the arrangts of my Department'.<sup>86</sup>

However contentious were diplomatic appointments, ultimately the character of the policies those diplomats were charged with pursuing lay at the heart of foreign policy questions. Donald Southgate has observed that in seeking to keep Palmerston straight the royal couple concentrated much of their efforts in trying to alter the 'slant' of the drafts which Palmerston wrote. However, 'in foreign affairs "slant" is, if not everything, nearly everything' and the Crown's behaviour did little to incline Palmerston towards the Queen.<sup>87</sup> However well-meaning their interjections may have been, there was no escaping the view that they were to become a hindrance. If only because Palmerston represented the country when discussing affairs with foreign powers, it was important that he be seen to be voicing a firm opinion and not the aspirations of a particular faction.

In the early days of the ministry, the Court's surveillance of drafts bore the appearance of advice rather than dictation. On a draft written very soon after the Russell government came into being, Victoria wrote: 'The Queen has read very attentively Lord Palmerston's Draft to Mr Bulwer wh. came down to her this morn. - she cannot conceal from Lord Palmerston that its perusal has raised some apprehensions in her mind, which she thinks it right to state to Lord John Russell, whom she will desire to communicate them to Lord Palmerston...'<sup>88</sup> Palmerston conceded in a letter concerning another draft a few days later that he had happily amended it according to Russell's suggestions which caused the draft to be now 'much better'. To some extent a wary eye cast over diplomatic drafts helped guard

<sup>86</sup> Russell to Palmerston, 10 Aug. 1848, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/214

<sup>87</sup> D. Southgate, *The Most English Minister...*, p.193

<sup>88</sup> Queen to Palmerston, 17 Aug. 1846, Broadlands Papers, RC/F/268

against error, as Palmerston admitted on one occasion, having written the draft 'late last night & in a Hurry,' he had 'relied upon your correcting what might require it'.<sup>89</sup> Not only was pressure of business prone to cause Palmerston himself to miss flaws in documents, but his staff too were susceptible to lapses now and then. A draft of January 1847 had troubled the Court, but as Palmerston explained, this was nothing more than a simple mistake: 'The obscurity, a delicate word for nonsense, observed upon by The Queen, was occasioned by a Blunder of my Clerks who had put in a 'not' where it had no Business to be. I have struck out that word & made sense of the Passage'.<sup>90</sup> In monitoring Palmerston's correspondence there was a clear and valuable service to be performed by the Court (if only as proof-readers), but generally Palmerston did not like receiving royal corrections through Russell, which he viewed as an implicit undermining of his authority in foreign affairs.

So long as royal interference went no further than raising queries about drafts where there was indeed something to question, Palmerston had little cause to complain. It was only when the Queen's interest went beyond that of the style of the drafts and started to involve also the substance that Palmerston began to raise serious objections. Palmerston's pride was certainly at stake, but so too was the integrity of the country's foreign policy. Minto became increasingly concerned about the likely ramifications of the constant royal attacks on Palmerston, believing that 'the violent prejudice which the Queen has conceived against him ...has encouraged the factions abroad & at home to combine in a vast conspiracy for his overthrow'.<sup>91</sup>

Once the Queen started to bring into question Palmerston's ability satisfactorily to frame a despatch, and to demand regular and indeed full accounts of

<sup>89</sup> Palmerston to Russell, 23 Aug. 1846, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/985

<sup>90</sup> Palmerston to Russell, 6 Jan. 1847, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/6A, fols 56-58

<sup>91</sup> Minto, Journal, 22 May 1850, Minto Papers, MS.11996

proceedings, the Foreign Secretary, therefore, began to resist royal intervention ever more strenuously. In August 1846 Prince Albert had written to Palmerston to thank him for sending to the Queen a private letter received from Lord Howard de Walden. The Prince hoped such would become a standard practice 'as our chief wish and aim is, by hearing all parties, to arrive at a just, dispassionate, and correct opinion upon the various political questions. This, however, entails a strict scrutiny of what is brought before us'.<sup>92</sup> In this Palmerston can have found little to which to object, yet in fulfilling this need he was also giving the Crown much ammunition to use against him. By 1848, as royal tolerance of Palmerston diminished, the Queen and Prince paid ever closer attention to Palmerston's drafts, even going so far as to compile a dossier on his diplomatic misdemeanours.<sup>93</sup> Spain, for example, became a point of contention between the Palace and Foreign Office at this time, with the Queen arguing that the country was suffering 'under the evil consequence of that system of diplomacy, which makes the taking up of party politics in foreign countries its principal object' which Palmerston was bent on pursuing.<sup>94</sup> More than seeking simply to restrain a Foreign Secretary who behaved 'like a naughty child',<sup>95</sup> the Queen wished to see a policy of non-intervention directed towards the preservation of established authority: reflecting a sort of Hanoverian reactionary spirit, the chief author of which it was not difficult to identify.<sup>96</sup>

Palmerston himself did little to appease the Queen and appears to have paid little attention to his wife's admonition that 'you contradict her notions too boldly';<sup>97</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Prince Albert to Palmerston, 9 Aug. 1846, *LQV*, II, p.113

<sup>93</sup> B. Connell, *Regina v. Palmerston*, p.78

<sup>94</sup> Queen to Russell, 17 June 1848, quoted B. Connell, *Regina v. Palmerston*, p.80

<sup>95</sup> Queen to Russell, 18 June 1848, quoted *ibid*, p.80

<sup>96</sup> See also below, pp.70-71

<sup>97</sup> Lady Palmerston to Palmerston, 1848, quoted E. Longford, *Victoria, R.I.* (London, 1967 edn.), p.260

Palmerston believed he could disarm the Court simply by restricting the flow of information to the Palace. Early attempts to forestall royal criticisms by dispatching documents before they had been reviewed were met with relative good humour,<sup>98</sup> yet within a year of returning to the Foreign Office the Queen's reprimands were becoming much sterner. 'The Queen has several times asked Lord Palmerston through Lord John Russell, & *personally*, to see that the Drafts to our Foreign Ministers are not dispatched *previous* to their being submitted to the Queen; notwithstanding, this is still done, as for instance *today* with regard to the Drafts for Lisbon' she wrote. 'The Queen therefore once more repeats her desire that Lord Palmerston shld prevent a recurrence of this practice'.<sup>99</sup> Palmerston made a poor job of preventing a recurrence of this practice, however, and as late as December 1849, Victoria still felt compelled to write acidly: 'The Queen sends these 2 Dispatches to Lord Palmerston in order to draw his attention to the *date* of their *reception* at the *Foreign Office*; viz: *Nov 26*; & they were only sent to the Queen on *22d of Dec*. The Queen wishes that similar delays in sending her the Dispatches shld not again take place'.<sup>100</sup>

Palmerston was not always guilty of holding up drafts for lengthy periods and was on occasion the victim of his own poor reputation at the Palace leading the Queen to make erroneous assumptions about his conduct,<sup>101</sup> but he could be a pedant, and was not averse to fulfilling the letter whilst subverting the spirit of his constitutional obligations. Thus was Russell forced to complain in February 1849:

The Queen spoke to me the other day about the drafts sent to her for her approval - that they were sometimes sent at the bottom of a

<sup>98</sup> Queen to Palmerston, 28 Nov. 1846, *LQV*, II, p.132

<sup>99</sup> Queen to Palmerston, 17 April 1847, Broadlands Papers, RC/F/316

<sup>100</sup> Queen to Palmerston, 25 Dec. 1849, Broadlands Papers, RC/F/432

<sup>101</sup> Palmerston to Lansdowne, 27 March 1850, Lansdowne Papers, British Library, Lans. 3/42, fol 30

box, which she did not conceive required immediate attention: That sometimes they were sent as immediate & the messenger ordered to wait when there was no reason for hurry; but above all that they were sent to her for approval before I had seen them, & while they were still liable to alterations suggested by me, or by the Cabinet.

She desired these irregularities to be corrected, & that in future the drafts should be sent in a separate box, & after they have been returned by me to the office, or settled by the Cabinet.<sup>102</sup>

Whether this was simply an example of forgetfulness or inattentiveness on Palmerston's part or indeed an underhand ploy to scuttle the Queen, he had succeeded in his aim, which was undoubtedly to prevent the Crown's troublesome meddling in the affairs of his department. The Queen was not the only one whose interventions were unwelcome, however, and he resented intrusions from any quarter equally. Russell was drawn to complain early in February 1850 for example about a communication to Wise at Athens which according to the Prime Minister's and Cabinet's will should have conveyed an important notice about a discretionary power to be granted to Wise and Admiral Parker. 'How then is a dispatch gone on an important subject which is not in conformity with the Queen's opinion, or mine, or that of the Cabinet', enquired Russell. 'This is a serious deviation from the usual and right course on such subjects'.<sup>103</sup>

Palmerston had a whole battery of reasons to explain his conduct which he deployed at intervals to appease his adversaries, favourite amongst these being that of pressure of business which by the middle of the nineteenth century was truly great. He told Lord Normanby in 1848: 'As to your not always getting letters from me by every messenger who passes through Paris, never wonder at that nor think it extraordinary. Wonder rather when I am able to find time to write at all; I am sure you would if you saw the avalanche of despatches from every part of the world

<sup>102</sup> Russell to Palmerston, 3 Feb. 1849, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/253

<sup>103</sup> Russell to Palmerston, 18 Feb. 1850, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/319

which come down upon me daily, and which must be read, and if you witnessed the number of interviews which I cannot avoid giving every day of the week'.<sup>104</sup> It was not necessarily obstructionism then that limited Palmerston's supply of correspondence to the Queen; as Palmerston stated to Russell eloquently in January 1849, he really had no option but to act alone at times:

You are very Expeditious & regular, but She often keeps Drafts a long Time, and as Despatches cannot be sent off Every Day, like Letters by the Post, it often happens that the Delay of Two or Three Days by preventing a Despatch from going by one periodical opportunity involves a Delay of several Days further; and when Events are going on at a Hard Gallop, ones Instructions become rather stale before they reach their Destination,... But if you & The Queen wish it I can alter the present Arrangement & order all drafts to go first to you, & not to the Queen till after you have returned them but this will reduce my Flint Gun to a Matchlock. The number of Despatches received & sent out in 1848 was upwards of 29,000. The number in 1828 was a little above 10,000.<sup>105</sup>

Palmerston, aware that his own position was dangerously threatened with isolation, was also determined that Britain's external relations could not be managed effectively if all foreign business was not channelled through the Foreign Office. Hence his censure of Russell when he found the latter guilty of passing over the Foreign Office in communicating with the Admiralty: such communications were, he told the Prime Minister, embarrassing:

First of all because they throw apparently a Responsibility upon the Secy of State for Foreign Affairs, in regard to orders as to which he has not been consulted, & of which he has been kept in Ignorance till after they have been given; & secondly because it is impossible that the First Lord of the Treasury can know what may have passed at former Periods upon similar matters, & he may therefore give Directions which he would not have given if he had been more fully informed.... & Thirdly this course of proceeding renders the Records of the F.O. imperfect & misguiding for succeeding Govts inasmuch as important acts bearing upon our Foreign Relations will have been done, without the Records of the

<sup>104</sup> Palmerston to Normanby, 31 March 1848, quoted Ashley, *The Life and Correspondence of Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston*, II, p.78

<sup>105</sup> Palmerston to Russell, 18 Jan. 1849, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/7F, fols 343-345

F.O. having any Trace of an Explanation as to why or wherefore such acts were ordered...<sup>106</sup>

The irony of this complaint appears to have been lost on Palmerston, yet he had already warned Russell of this danger, advising him that if business concerning his department was to be conducted without his knowledge, 'it is impossible that I can continue a Member of your Government. No man who has any Regard or respect for himself would serve upon such terms'.<sup>107</sup> He could legitimately appeal to pressure of business, to the transient and volatile nature of foreign affairs and to his uniquely advantageous position to justify his perceived want of respect towards the Crown and his colleagues, but Palmerston could not appease the Queen. She was offended by his conduct and genuinely concerned about the damage she believed he was doing to Britain's external relations. So strained did relations between the Palace and Palmerston become that the Queen was eventually prompted to write a letter to Russell, 'in order to *prevent any mistake for the future*', in which she laid down precisely what she expected of her Foreign Secretary:

She requires 1st That he will distinctly state what he proposes in a given case, in order that the Queen may know as distinctly, to what she is giving her Royal Sanction.

2ndly Having *once given* her Sanction to a measure, that it be not arbitrarily altered or modified by the Minister: Such an Act she must consider as failing in sincerity towards the Crown, & justly to be visited by the exercise of her Constitutional Right of dismissing that Minister.

She expects to be kept informed of what passes between him & the foreign ministers, before important decisions are taken based upon that intercourse - to receive the foreign dispatches in good time, & to have the drafts for her Approval sent to Her in sufficient time to make Herself acquainted with their contents before they must be sent off.<sup>108</sup>

Palmerston took these criticisms on board and pledged himself to remedy the situation. He appealed to the 'great Pressure of business, & ... the many Interruptions

<sup>106</sup> Palmerston to Russell, 8 Nov. 1849, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/1058

<sup>107</sup> Palmerston to Russell, 5 Jan. 1849 (Copy), Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/241/enc.1

<sup>108</sup> Queen to Russell (Copy), 12 Aug. 1850, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/9E, fols 78-79\*

and Interviews &c to which I am liable' as the reason for the delays of which the Queen complained, and said that in order to revert to the old practice of making immediate copies of despatches as they were received as a way of resolving the problem, he would 'require an Additional Clerk or Two. You must be liberal & allow me that assistance'.<sup>109</sup>

Thus the Queen concerned herself with diplomatic practice as this was where her honour was at stake and where questions of prestige were paramount since this was where her peers seemed to have more independence and encouraged her to believe that she, too, could exercise similar power. However, when the Queen sought to influence policy, her comments were often over-ridden and the Queen's constitutional position was such that she could do nothing but accept this. Even if she were to have dismissed her Ministers for failing to enact her wishes, as William IV had with Melbourne, she would have required another Peel to accept responsibility for her actions and there were no obvious candidates to form a ministry to succeed Russell's.<sup>110</sup> With no-one to replace Russell, the Queen could not dismiss him, and thus her views on policy became, ultimately, meaningless. But this is not to suggest that Victoria was ignored: frequently she would be able to offer wise counsel,<sup>111</sup> but in the final analysis, responsibility for policy rested with the

<sup>109</sup> Palmerston to Russell, 13 Aug. 1850, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/9E, fols 80-81\*

\* These letters are filed at the PRO in a file for August 1851, but the date on the letterheads looks like 1850 and they are so dated in *LQV*, II, pp.315-6

<sup>110</sup> Palmerston wrote to his brother on the occasion of Peel's death the following: 'Perhaps Sidney Herbert, or Aberdeen, or Gladstone may set up for leader of the Conservative Free Traders, or the Free Trade Conservatives; and perhaps Stanley may invite a junction with him by some compromise about putting off Protection. I have been told by a person who had it from Stanley himself, that during the time when a change of Government was expected, Aberdeen said to Stanley that in that case he, Aberdeen, would be commissioned by the Queen to form a Government! This would have been a curious dish to set before a Queen! On the whole, I rather am inclined to think that the Government is made stronger by the events of last session, and that we may look forward to getting successfully through the session of next year' (Palmerston to his brother, 1 Sept. 1850, quoted Ashley, *The Life and Correspondence of Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston*, II, pp.164-5).

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Disraeli's regard for royal experience in the 1870s, arguably intended to flatter but nevertheless emphasising the importance of the Queen's experience above any other perceived royal

Cabinet, which collectively endorsed and therefore took responsibility for the construction of that policy. This was no mere phenomenon of the Russell government either. A few years later, when Palmerston's and Russell's roles of 1846-51 were reversed, the Queen found herself again running up against the same wall. 'What is the use', she asked Russell, 'of the Queens open & she fears at times wearisome Correspondence with her Ministers, what [is] the use of long Deliberations of the Cabinet if the very Policy can be carried out by indirect means which is set aside officially, & what Protection has the Queen against this Practise'.<sup>112</sup> In fact the parallels with 1846-51 are striking, and Russell in seeking to control the business of his department at the Foreign Office under Palmerston offered defences very like those employed by Palmerston during the Russell government, even reserving the right to resign if his policy was over-ruled.<sup>113</sup>

The Queen's early input into discussion of foreign policy was really as that of adviser: she was almost satisfying Bagehot's criteria for monarchical influence; namely to be consulted, to encourage and to warn. Early in the Russell administration's term the Iberian Peninsula threw up fresh problems for the statesmen of Europe. The Spanish Marriages question exercised a great many European minds, not least that of Queen Victoria, for it had undeniably significant ramifications for the royal houses of Britain and France in particular. The matrimonial intrigues which brought the Duc de Montpensier to the side of Luisa, younger sister of the Queen of Spain, Isabella, provoked consternation at Osborne.

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qualities: 'It may be unconstitutional for a Minister to seek advice from his Sovereign, instead of proffering it; but ...Your Majesty cannot but be aware how highly Mr Disraeli appreciates your Majesty's judgement and almost unrivalled experience in public life'. Disraeli to Queen, 17 April 1874, quoted Hardie, *The Political Influence of Queen Victoria*, pp.37-38

<sup>112</sup> Queen to Russell, 5 Sept. 1859 (Copy), Broadlands Papers, RC/G/34

<sup>113</sup> H. Hearder, 'Queen Victoria and Foreign Policy. Royal Intervention in the Italian Question, 1859-60', in K. Bourne and D.C. Watt (eds), *Studies in International History* (London, 1967), pp.185-186

Victoria complained bitterly of the turn events had taken. 'If our dear Aberdeen was still at his post,' she wrote to her uncle the King of the Belgians, 'the whole thing would not have happened; for he would *not* have forced Enriquito (which enraged Christine),<sup>114</sup> and secondly, Guizot would not have *escamoté* Aberdeen with the wish of triumphing over him as he has done over Palmerston, who has behaved most openly and fairly towards France, I must say, in this affair. But say what one will, it is he again who indirectly gets us into a squabble with France!'. Yet, Victoria concluded, Palmerston's want of tact and sense of propriety could be easily overcome: 'Lord Palmerston', she declared, 'is quite ready to be guided by us'.<sup>115</sup> Since she and Lord John Russell, she believed, were generally in accord over foreign policy, her role was, then, to be that of adviser, primarily to Palmerston.<sup>116</sup> In July 1848, for instance, in a letter to Palmerston, Victoria could not help but notice contradictions in Britain's policy:

She cannot conceal from him that she is ashamed of the policy we are pursuing in the Italian Controversy, in abetting wrong, & this for the object of gaining *influence* in Italy. The Queen does not consider influence so gained as an advantage & though this influence is acquired to do good, she is afraid that the fear of losing it again will always stand in the way of this. At least in the Countries where the greatest stress has been laid on that influence, & the greatest exertions made for it, the *least good* has been done; the Queen means in Spain, Portugal and Greece. Neither is there any kind of consistency in the line we take about Italy & that we follow with regard to Schleswick; both cases are perfectly alike (with the difference perhaps that there is a question of right mixed up in that of Schleswick); whilst we upbraid *Prussia*, caution her

<sup>114</sup> Enrique (Enriquito), Duke of Seville, had been Palmerston's choice for suitor to Isabella, largely because of his connections with the English Liberal Party, Connell, *Regina v. Palmerston*, pp.35-37. Christine was the Queen Mother.

<sup>115</sup> Queen to the King of the Belgians, 14 Sept. 1846, *LQV*, II, pp.121-3

<sup>116</sup> For example, Victoria wrote to Russell on one occasion: 'The Queen returns to Lord John Russell his letter to Lord Palmerston [concerning Portugal], which is excellent, and shows that the Queen's and Lord John's views upon the important question of our foreign policy *entirely coincide*. The Queen is sorry that the trouble of such an altercation should be added to the many anxieties which already press upon Lord John, but she feels sure that his insisting upon a *sound* line of policy will save him and the country from *far greater* troubles...' (Queen to Russell, 18 June 1848, *LQV*, II, pp.214-5).

&c., we say *nothing to Charles Albert* except that if he did not wish to take all the Emperor of Austria's Italian Dominions, we would not lay *any obstacles* in the way of his moderation.<sup>117</sup>

Similarly, a few months later, she remarked upon the manner in which Britain was seeking to force Austria to give up her 'lawful possessions', when the parallels with Ireland and even with Canada and Malta and other British territories seemed so obvious. British actions ought really in all instances, she suggested, to be governed by a simple principle which she outlined in a note to her uncle: 'Was du nicht willst, dass dir geschieht, das thu' auch einem andern nicht'.<sup>118</sup>

Had the Court offered little more than advice, Palmerston would in all probability have found little of which to complain. After all, Prince Albert, through whom much business was actually transacted, especially during the 1840s when the Queen was frequently confined through pregnancies, was regarded by Palmerston as a generally well-informed and able statesman. Prince Albert himself was keen to help Palmerston whenever he could, even after relations between the Palace and the Foreign Office had become decidedly cool. In May 1849 for instance, he sent a note to Palmerston about German affairs. 'As you say you would like to converse with me on the affairs of Germany,' he wrote, 'I shall be ready to see you to day after Ld. Ponsonby's audience'. And as evidence of a desire to promote open government and fair dealing with the Foreign Secretary, or at least to coerce rather than dictate to him in favour of 'legitimate' interests, the Prince added: 'I got a letter from my brother yesterday of which I enclose a translation (I have had made for you) just to show you an example of how difficult the situation of these poor smaller Sovereigns is'.<sup>119</sup>

This was not the first private letter from his brother which the Prince so shared with

<sup>117</sup> Queen to Palmerston, 1 July 1848, Broadlands Papers, RC/F/371/1-2

<sup>118</sup> Queen to King of the Belgians, 10 Oct. 1848, *LQV*, II, pp.237-8

<sup>119</sup> Prince Albert to Palmerston, 9 May 1849, Broadlands Papers, RC/H/38

Palmerston. Yet whilst Palmerston had a high regard for the Prince's knowledge, he could not escape the view that the Prince was just a little too German for the British government at that time. Thus whilst the Prince's desire for the reorganisation of Germany under the suzerainty of Prussia would indeed be 'advantageous for the peace and general interests of Europe', and 'conducive to the Interests of England', the Foreign Secretary argued that 'the British Government would, I think, be stepping beyond its legitimate or its safe ground, if it were to become the Partisan or the advocate of any particular scheme or of the views of any particular German Power'.<sup>120</sup>

Palmerston feared that Albert's influence at Court threatened to undermine the integrity of his foreign policy. Too easily, he believed, the Queen, not understanding German affairs, adopted the Prince's views on them and this served only to make Palmerston's position at the Foreign Office increasingly untenable. On one such occasion, for example, he complained that the Queen's 'real objections are so much at variance with our settled Policy on this important Question that I cannot undertake to frame a Despatch which shall remove these objections, or be in Conformity with the German & Prussian views of the Prince'.<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, Albert was establishing contacts with members of the Cabinet other than Palmerston with whom he could discuss foreign affairs. Lansdowne enjoyed an occasional correspondence with the Prince, primarily with regard to France, in which he discussed policy openly and exchanged diplomatic documents with the Palace.<sup>122</sup> More ominously from Palmerston's perspective, Lord Grey, still apprehensive lest Palmerston's foreign policy led the country into expensive overseas adventures and

<sup>120</sup> Palmerston to Prince Albert, 19 June 1849 (Copy), Broadlands Papers, RC/HH/4/1

<sup>121</sup> Palmerston to Russell, 4 Sept. 1851, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/9, fols 9-10

<sup>122</sup> Albert to Lansdowne, 26 Nov. 1849, 29 Nov. 1850, Lansdowne Papers, Lans. 3/46

compromised trade, met with the Prince to discuss public business and just at the time that Albert was ever more sceptical about Palmerston's policies in 1848, Grey found himself 'much inclined to believe him [Albert] to be right' in his disapprobation of Palmerston's course over Germany and Italy.<sup>123</sup>

Increasingly, the royal antagonism towards the Foreign Secretary became a more personal issue and by 1850 Minto was complaining that the Queen's growing dislike of Palmerston 'prejudices her judgement of whatever proceeds from him to such a degree as to be a constant source of difficulty and embarrassment'.<sup>124</sup> Tacitly acknowledging that her own position was indeed subordinate to that of the Cabinet with regard to policy, the Queen, having heard little of foreign affairs recently, wrote to Palmerston 'to urge ...[him] to keep her informed of what he hears, & of the views of the Government on the various important questions before us'.<sup>125</sup> Yet still she was keen to uphold the façade of monarchical control, a manifestation of her concern with presenting an image of control to other sovereigns, and is to be found in June 1848 complaining of a Draft about Austrian policy that 'Lord Palmerston speaks in the beginning of the letter only of the *Cabinet* & adverts nowhere to the proposition having been submitted to *her*'.<sup>126</sup>

The revolutions which swept across the continent in 1848 did little to soothe the strained relations between Palmerston and the Court. The Queen became increasingly disturbed about the rise and spread of republicanism, whilst her Foreign Minister, already the popular champion of constitutionalism, now became in Guedalla's words, 'more than ever, ...a European figure. Perhaps there were no

<sup>123</sup> Grey, Journal, 16 Aug. 1848, Grey Papers, 3rd Earl, C3/14

<sup>124</sup> Minto, Journal, 26 June 1850, Minto Papers, MS.11997

<sup>125</sup> Queen to Palmerston, 17 April 1848, Broadlands Papers, RC/F/350

<sup>126</sup> Queen to Palmerston, 4 June 1848, Broadlands Papers, RC/F/362

others left. The waters of 1848 had submerged so many of his equals'.<sup>127</sup> To the Court such an ascendancy boded ill for the country, as the Queen recorded, she had told Russell how, 'I had no confidence in him [Palmerston], and that it made me seriously anxious and uneasy for the welfare of the country and for the peace of Europe in general, and that I felt very uneasy from one day to another as to what might happen'.<sup>128</sup> The Foreign Secretary, despite working theoretically under the jurisdiction of his ministerial colleagues, seemed not to be controllable by them. Denying that royal opposition to Palmerston was founded on policy differences only but rested rather on personal grounds,<sup>129</sup> the Queen admitted, in effect, that not only was monarchical ability to control a minister brought into question, but so too was the notion that the Cabinet could control Palmerston.

Russell, however, keen that such an exposure should not be allowed to scuttle his ministry, clung to the impression of a united government. He had, he stressed, 'always approved in the main of the foreign policy of Lord Palmerston', and maintained therefore, 'I am quite ready to resign my office, but I could not make Lord Palmerston the scapegoat for the sins which will be imputed to the Government in the late negotiations'.<sup>130</sup> Whatever else might be at issue, questions of policy were the Cabinet's preserve and, like Palmerston, Russell knew this. The conflict with the Crown, then, obscured the real arena of political struggles: within the Cabinet.

<sup>127</sup> P. Guedalla, *Palmerston* (London, 1937 edn.), p.253

<sup>128</sup> Memorandum by the Queen, 19 Sept. 1848, *LQV*, II, pp.231-3

<sup>129</sup> Memorandum by Prince Albert, 17 Feb. 1850, *LQV*, II, pp.277-9

<sup>130</sup> Russell to the Queen, 22 Jan. 1849, *LQV*, II, pp.250-1; Russell to Prince Albert, 18 May 1850, *LQV*, II, p.288

iii) The Cabinet and Foreign Policy, 1846-51

Given that the Cabinet was, according to Bagehot at least, the central focus of the legislature, it remained important, theoretically at least, that there should appear to be concurrence among its members in the line of policy to be pursued about any particular issue. Whatever factors determined the course of foreign policy, all policy needed the backing of the Cabinet, without which, as in the Bulwer case for instance,<sup>131</sup> or later over the Crimean War,<sup>132</sup> such policies became confused, weak and potentially damaging. When, in the early months of Russell's government, Austria annexed the free state of Cracow and effectively signalled the extinction of this last remnant of an independent Poland, causing a breach of the Treaty of Vienna as well as affronting western liberal opinion,<sup>133</sup> the Prime Minister thought it was 'so grave a proceeding, [that] while the Cabinet is ready to assemble, ought to be placed before them'. Even though he was determined to support Palmerston's proposed course and expected little opposition, he would not allow such an important question to pass without consulting the Cabinet.<sup>134</sup>

Essentially Palmerston, and to a slightly lesser degree Russell, had to be the spring of business concerning foreign affairs if only because he was, and never tired of telling people, the one best qualified to pronounce on such questions. 'On matters where he fully believed that he was master of the subject his conclusions were very decided and positively unchangeable,' remembered the Earl of Shaftesbury, who had

<sup>131</sup> See below, pp.78-80

<sup>132</sup> See below, ch.3

<sup>133</sup> See M.E. Chamberlain, *'Pax Britannica'?: British Foreign Policy 1789-1914* (London, 1988), pp.92-3

<sup>134</sup> Russell to Palmerston, 13 Nov. 1846, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/123

good claims to know Palmerston's mind.<sup>135</sup> Why should the Foreign Secretary subordinate himself to the Cabinet when he had made no secret of the fact that he believed there were 'very few public men in England who follow up foreign affairs sufficiently to foresee the consequences of events which have not happened'?<sup>136</sup> It was essential that Palmerston enjoyed the confidence of his colleagues and initially it appeared, outwardly at least, that he did. 'I have the greatest reliance on his sagacious perception of the true interests of his Country and I have the truest satisfaction in constant cooperation with him upon all our foreign relations', Russell told Count Jarnac, the French envoy, in October 1846.<sup>137</sup>

Palmerston's foreign policy did not unite a Cabinet prone to division, however. From the outset Lord Grey had had his reservations about Palmerston, and his fears were echoed in a pamphlet written anonymously by a 'Free Trader' and published in December 1845:

...You may think to control tendencies - but not intentions ...You may expect new things from caprice, but not from determined will. ...You may check what you know, but you may be fatally committed by acts concealed and purposes unavowed. Such *has* been before, the case between us and this colleague - between him and Parliament. ...[He] is not to be trusted. Be it from arrogance - be it from inveterate, unacknowledged, yet not deliberately culpable predilections if you will:- still, the fact remains, he has undershafts and galleries in which he labours at his solitary tasks ...which are only disclosed to us when some mine is to be sprung, when the match is already lighted, and we have nothing to do but retire behind the screens he provides. ...[He] *cannot* be controlled, and ...we have oft-times been puppets in his hands. ...Lord

<sup>135</sup> Shaftesbury to Evelyn Ashley, 6 Jan. 1876, quoted Southgate, *The Most English Minister...*, p.243

<sup>136</sup> Palmerston to Granville, 5 June 1838, quoted *ibid*, p.243

<sup>137</sup> Russell to Jarnac, 26 Oct. 1846, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/5D, fols 302-305. This was written as a rejoinder to French insinuations about Palmerston's conduct. A letter from Guizot, Palmerston had explained to Lord John, implied 'that I am actuated by personal Feeling in the Performance of my public Duties in regard to the Foreign Relations of the Country. Upon which I stopped him [Jarnac, who was passing on the French view] short, and said that was a line of assertion to which I would not listen' (Palmerston to Russell, 25 Oct. 1846, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/5D, fols 289-290).

Palmerston cannot act secretly, and at the same time enjoy the benefits of frankness and candour....<sup>138</sup>

With the control of foreign policy in his hands, Palmerston's conduct raised fears among his colleagues which went beyond the domestic political implications of his actions. As Sir Charles Wood, who was concerned about Palmerston's Francophobic obsession with British defences, observed, whilst the difference between the two of them was 'of a very small amount, & arises a good deal from my being *paymaster*', he could not help but remark that he was 'sure that the character we have to acquire & maintain, as a Government, is that of being prudent steady people, & thus re-assuring the great bulk of the world who have been taught to look upon us as likely to set everything in a blaze, at home & abroad. We have quite enough upon our hands at present'.<sup>139</sup>

That national defence should have been such a live issue in the late 1840s was not surprising, according to Wood for, as he told Hobhouse, 'all the foolish alarm about [a French] invasion was caused by Palmerston's correspondence & perpetual broils'.<sup>140</sup> Palmerston might have aroused fears within the Cabinet, but concern about the state of national defence was a problem bequeathed to the Russell Cabinet by Peel's government and Palmerston's pre-occupation with a potential French invasion originated in the earlier 1840s. A conversation between Russell and the King of the French in 1845, suggestive of a threat to Britain in its current defenceless state, had highlighted the issue and convinced not only Palmerston, but also Shaftesbury to whom Palmerston reported the exchange, of the need for action.<sup>141</sup> Indeed, although Palmerston was the only consistent and pro-active

<sup>138</sup> *Lord Grey and Lord Palmerston - A Letter Addressed to Macaulay on the occasion of His Letter to M'Farlane, from a Free Trader* (London, 1846), pp.18-19

<sup>139</sup> C. Wood to Palmerston, 26 Dec. 1846, Broadlands Papers, GC/WO/20

<sup>140</sup> Broughton Diaries, 28 Jan. 1848, British Library, Add.Mss.43751

<sup>141</sup> Shaftesbury Diaries, 31 March 1845, Broadlands Papers, SHA/PD/3

advocate of greater defence provisions, the issue was clearly not without resonance for other ministers and the opposition within the government to expansion in the arrangements for national defence was based on questions of economic and political (domestic rather than foreign) considerations, especially as the issue became tied up with questions of a national militia.<sup>142</sup> Even members of the government who sympathised with Palmerston's concern, such as Minto, eventually began to feel 'beaten & disheartened, seeing the low views that prevailed in all great questions of external policy' amongst the majority of the Cabinet.<sup>143</sup>

Palmerston's management of foreign policy became increasingly disagreeable to many of his colleagues. As he emerged as the European figure of 1848, it was not only the royal couple whose concerns about the Foreign Secretary became more pronounced. 'His dispatches are ...couched in a language that ought never to be addressed to an independent state', wrote Hobhouse, the President of the Board of Control, at the beginning of that year, '...and I think that his diplomatists - Bulwer and Normanby and Lyons mix themselves up a good deal too much with the internal politics of the country to which they are sent'.<sup>144</sup>

Sir Henry Lytton Bulwer, the British Minister at Madrid, had been implicated in designs to re-introduce Leopold of Saxe-Coburg's name to the list of possible suitors to Queen Isabella, allegedly with Palmerston's approval, and his conduct caused particular consternation at home. In the autumn of 1847 Clarendon had confided in Lansdowne that he felt that although Bulwer 'writes very able dispatches & honestly thinks himself the pivot upon wch all things turn I fear he is usé & now

<sup>142</sup> M.S. Partridge, 'The Russell Cabinet and National Defence, 1846-1852', *History*, 72 (1987), 231-250

<sup>143</sup> Minto, Journal, 9 Feb. 1850, Minto Papers, MS.11996

<sup>144</sup> Broughton Diaries, 28 Jan. 1848, Add.Mss. 43751

not much made [?more] apt for business than the King is for matrimony'.<sup>145</sup> The Cabinet's doubts about Bulwer were not assuaged as Palmerston continued to work with him without bringing before the Cabinet details of what was transacted between them. When Bulwer was expelled from Spain on account of his meddling in the internal affairs of that country, Palmerston successfully kept his colleagues in the dark and as Hobhouse recorded in his diary, 'we knew nothing of the Bulwer correspondence until it was over - nor did the Cabinet know that Bulwer's conduct had received the approbation of the Government until we saw the fact in the papers laid before Parliament'.<sup>146</sup> It may have been, as Palmerston maintained on one occasion, that it 'is of course for the Secy of State to judge what Papers in his office shall be laid before Parliament to Explain the Grounds on which the Government may have acted',<sup>147</sup> but it was dangerous for him to act without Cabinet support in this manner.

Only the Prime Minister's ineffectiveness preserved his position. Russell had demonstrated to the Cabinet that he was not able to exercise a dominating influence over the Foreign Secretary, having begged Lansdowne to interfere in the matter in March 1848, 'before I say all I think' in an implicit acknowledgement of the political hold Palmerston had over the ministry.<sup>148</sup> As Lord Grey observed, this represented a 'very lamentable weakness' on Russell's part. 'Had P[almerston] played such a prank in my father's administrat'n', he continued, 'he wd have been dismissed without ceremony, nor can I conceive any prime minister submitting to such conduct without requiring it to be so punished'.<sup>149</sup>

<sup>145</sup> Clarendon to Lansdowne, 26 Oct. 1847, Lansdowne Papers, Lans. 3/31, fol 18

<sup>146</sup> Broughton Diaries, 3 June 1848, Add.Mss. 43752

<sup>147</sup> Palmerston to Russell, 25 Jan. 1851, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/9A, fols 226-227

<sup>148</sup> Russell to Lansdowne, 2 March 1848, Lansdowne Papers, Lans. 3/43, fol 42

<sup>149</sup> Grey, Journal, 5 May 1848, Grey Papers, 3rd Earl, C3/14

Grey believed that finally Palmerston would have to go. The Bulwer incident was merely the latest of many 'offences' and now Grey 'thought that it must have led either to Palmerston's retirement or the break up of the Govt. - the former wd. have given me infinite satisfact'n'.<sup>150</sup> Palmerston was not likely to go quietly, however: too many concessions had been made to him over the years in order to keep him on board and now this deferential attitude was returned to plague the Cabinet. Thus the Peelite Sir James Graham noted when Russell sought to bring him into the Cabinet in January 1849, there were two main objections to joining the ministry. One was finance, the second the Foreign Secretary: 'Palmerston', he wrote to Peel, 'has had too much and too long his own way to yield either to the influence of his colleagues or to the control of public opinion'.<sup>151</sup> Such fears were not motivated simply by a determination to prevent Palmerston gaining too much in personal stature. There were real political and parliamentary considerations to take into account. Increasingly, the opposition members were able to summon considerable resources to mount challenges to the government and by about 1850 it seemed almost every aspect of the ministry's business was under attack.<sup>152</sup>

Heretofore, much of the government's strength had derived from the fact that its opponents, still reeling from the rupture caused by Peel in 1846, could not present a viable alternative to the government. Indeed, opposition members had good reason to desire the preservation of the government, as Minto discovered when he shared a train ride with a group of 'ultra-tories' in late 1848. They had been 'amusingly complimentary to Lord J. Russell & anxious for his continuance in power; this being

<sup>150</sup> Grey, Journal, 7 May 1848, Grey Papers, 3rd Earl, C3/14

<sup>151</sup> Graham to Peel, 16 Jan. 1849, quoted Dreyer 'The Russell Administration, 1846-1852', p.148

<sup>152</sup> Dreyer 'The Russell Administration, 1846-1852', pp.171-2

the expression of their fear and hatred of Peel their old idol', he noted in his journal afterwards.<sup>153</sup> Now this was no longer the case, due in no small part to the fact that Peel had died in 1850 and this had removed one of the greatest obstacles to unity amongst those sitting on the opposition benches. This was particularly significant given that Palmerston was being accused in some quarters of being no longer up to his task, particularly in the light of his 'failed' Italian policy. Palmerston's position seemed ever more vulnerable and though something which he would never have conceded, and succeeded in disguising quite well, nevertheless illustrated that he needed the Cabinet on his side. And as even Grey admitted in a letter to Russell, any policy sanctioned by the Cabinet would of necessity be consistently defended by that Cabinet. 'But', he added,

when the fact is, that the subject never was brought before the Cabinet, when I & most of the members of it first saw the objectionable despatches in the newspapers, & when it is notorious that if the questn. had been submitted to us, we shd most of us (I believe including yourself) have entirely disapproved of the adoptn. of such a tone towards an independent Govt, the case is entirely altered, & I can recognize no obligatn. to support a policy which none of our opponents can condemn more than I do.<sup>154</sup>

For practical reasons and because the Cabinet had to endorse policy in this way, there emerged something of an inner Cabinet on foreign affairs, not in itself a novelty in nineteenth century governments. It was not a terribly large clique, comprising primarily Palmerston, Russell and Lansdowne. Lansdowne was the government's spokesman in the Lords on foreign policy and thus would be expected to be intimately acquainted with the details of Foreign Office business, but he was not expected, by Russell at least, simply to peddle the Palmerstonian line. On a point about a draft written by Palmerston in June 1848, Russell declared that he was

<sup>153</sup> Minto, Journal, 4 Dec. 1848, Minto Papers, MS.11995. 'We were all very good friends notwithstanding my Whiggism', he concluded.

<sup>154</sup> Grey (3rd Earl) to Russell, 28 May 1848, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/7C, fols 101-105

'willing to guided by Lansdowne's opinion & shall send this note to him'.<sup>155</sup> Lansdowne himself assumed the function of adviser happily, recognising Palmerston's field of expertise and responsibility, but answered Russell's injunctions, for example, to 'write anything that occurs to me with the papers enclosed in this box', and offered Palmerston advice without issuing orders.<sup>156</sup> In reciprocation, Lansdowne did expect similar fair dealing from Palmerston, which was not always forthcoming. 'Palmerston is very obliging in sending me a good deal of private information which he receives,' wrote Lansdowne, 'but very seldom the private instructions which he sends.'<sup>157</sup>

Palmerston however, had little patience with Cabinet interference in the details of his policy. Once the general principles had been established he expected a large degree of independence and established very early on in the life of the government that if he could not count on that, then his position within the ministry would have to be reconsidered.<sup>158</sup> Nevertheless, given that Lansdowne had to defend the government's course in the upper House, Palmerston's stubbornness was a great nuisance.

<sup>155</sup> Russell to Palmerston, 5 June, 1848, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/202

<sup>156</sup> Lansdowne to Palmerston, 30 [?] March 1848, Broadlands Papers, GC/LA/66

<sup>157</sup> Lansdowne to Russell, nd, [c.May/June 1848?], Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/7C

<sup>158</sup> For example, in November 1846, Palmerston reacted against what he felt was over-bearing supervision from Russell by telling the Prime Minister that his objections to a draft about Cracow were unnecessary, even unwelcome: 'The only political Question involved in the Dispatch, is whether we should make Representations to the Three Courts against their supposed Intention of destroying Cracow as an independent State, or at all Events of essentially Changing its Condition, from that which it was placed in by the Treaty of Vienna; and I confess that if that is the Question on which the Cabinet is now to deliberate, I should almost as soon have thought of submitting to them whether we should vote in the House of Cms. against a motion for repealing the Reform Bill. I had imagined that such a Question had long since been settled by the Line which has been taken by our Party for many years on Polish Questions, both officially & in Parliament, by Ld Greys Govt, by Melbournes, by yours; It never entered into my Mind to suppose that it was a Question to be determined whether we should silently acquiesce in such a violation of the Treaty of Vienna. If that is still an undecided Question, I was under an Error when I joined your Government, I was under an Error when I spoke on this Question towards the End of the Session in Reply to Hume; and I only regret that I was not sooner informed of my mistake' (Palmerston to Russell, 14 Nov. 1846, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/1006).

Other ministers, such as Clarendon, Sir Charles Wood, Minto, Grey and Labouchere, did make observations about policy but they were apparently infrequent and inconsistent. The voicing of unease about specific questions, or the tone of the occasional draft, did not constitute profound and influential counsel, or even intimacy with the conduct of foreign affairs. Yet this in itself is not surprising. Perhaps more than ever before, foreign politics was becoming a field of special expertise which demanded a serious commitment, not a trifling interest. Russell for one acknowledged this, telling Palmerston on one occasion when German affairs were pressing that: 'You who are constantly treating in these matters are alone able to judge what is the real meaning'.<sup>159</sup> Even Earl Grey, arguably one of Palmerston's sternest critics, found little time to write to Palmerston to discuss foreign policy, confining his correspondence to a relatively innocuous commentary on colonial affairs.<sup>160</sup> Charles Wood and Clarendon both sought to offer advice, but stopped short of trying to exercise control: they both acknowledged that they had neither the time nor the grounding in foreign affairs for such a task. Few other Cabinet members apparently concerned themselves with foreign policy outside the Cabinet meetings at all.

Within the Cabinet, however, debates over foreign policy were often the scene of bitter encounters. Significantly though, such conflicts were generally dictated more by partisan interests amongst the Cabinet's factions than by disagreements about the policy itself. Minto identified a 'Grey faction' within the Cabinet on foreign questions, comprising primarily Lord Grey, Sir George Grey and Sir Charles Wood, but also including Sir Francis Baring, Lord Carlisle (who had

<sup>159</sup> Russell to Palmerston, 11 May 1850, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/339

<sup>160</sup> See the letters from Grey to Palmerston, Broadlands Papers, GC/GR/2381-2408

been, until 1848, Lord Morpeth) and possibly Henry Labouchere which offered a regular line of opposition to Palmerston's foreign policy and which stood as a counter-point to the pro-Palmerston lobby of Russell, Lansdowne, Lord Campbell and Minto himself.<sup>161</sup> Earl Grey became something of a *de facto* leader of this body of dissent and frequently urged Russell to 'interfere more regularly' in Palmerston's handling of foreign affairs.<sup>162</sup> Ideally, Grey would have welcomed Palmerston's removal from office completely and in 1849 when the supply of arms to Sicily exposed Palmerston to censure, it seemed to Grey and his allies that an opportunity to effect such a result had arisen. In collaboration with Sir George Grey and Wood, Grey impressed upon the Prime Minister the desirability of dismissing the Foreign Secretary.<sup>163</sup> In a Cabinet meeting to discuss the issue, however, such hopes were soon dashed, much to Grey's disappointment:

There was then some vague discuss'n in wh I was to the last degree disgusted by the apparent insensibility of the Cabinet to the gravity of the case & to the disgraceful figure the Govt will make in pleading 'inadvertance' as the excuse for such a proceeding. I endeavoured to treat the matter somewhat more seriously & to show how bad a posit'n we shd be placed in but nobody backed me...<sup>164</sup>

Despite considerable Cabinet reservations about the course the Foreign Secretary was pursuing, it seemed that there was little to be done to alter that course and even Grey was forced, reluctantly, to acquiesce in the policy rather than take responsibility for an action which would almost certainly end in the break up of the government.<sup>165</sup> Meanwhile, Palmerston, perhaps guilty, as Minto once observed, of trusting too much to fortune,<sup>166</sup> turned an attack into a source of strength. 'The

<sup>161</sup> Minto, Journal, 25 Oct. 1848, 7 Dec. 1848, 21 April 1849, Minto Papers, MS.11995

<sup>162</sup> Grey, Journal, 15 Jan. 1849, Grey Papers, 3rd Earl, C3/14

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 16 and 18 Jan. 1849, Grey Papers, 3rd Earl, C3/14

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 23 Jan. 1849, Grey Papers, 3rd Earl, C3/14

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 25 Jan. 1849, Grey Papers, 3rd Earl, C3/14

<sup>166</sup> Minto, Journal, 5 Dec. 1848, Minto Papers, MS.11995

foolish and ignorant manner in wh he has been attacked has almost set on its legs a policy for which I fear the case is not really so good as it has appeared', complained Grey in defeat.<sup>167</sup>

Russell was in many ways susceptible to strong members of the government taking policy hostage. Minto, whilst recognising Russell's sympathy for the Sicilian cause, had expressed concern in October 1848, fearing that the Prime Minister might be forced 'to yield to the opinions of some whose resignation must break up his government'.<sup>168</sup> This supposed threat from the Grey party eventually came to nothing, but Palmerston was able to exercise a similar influence over Russell. More than most other areas of business, foreign policy remained an area in which it was possible for a strong minister to dominate the Prime Minister, although the fragile foundations of this government were also exposed over other contentious issues such as Ireland. Over electoral reform, though it remained a controversial question throughout this period, however, when the issue came before the Cabinet in late 1850, according to Minto at least, as 'Lord John will not consent to abandon his intention, there is no doubt that the rest will give way to his determination'.<sup>169</sup> To some extent, by 1850, the political atmosphere was different, but foreign policy remained a unique area of business.

Nevertheless, accounts of Cabinet meetings sent to the Queen displayed no sign of discord and presented all decisions as collective ones.<sup>170</sup> In discussion of foreign questions, only on the question of Palmerston's proposed reception of

<sup>167</sup> Grey, Journal, 1 Feb. 1849, Grey Papers, 3rd Earl, C3/14

<sup>168</sup> Minto, Journal, 27 Oct. 1848, Minto Papers, MS.11995

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 12 Nov. 1850, Minto Papers, MS.11997

<sup>170</sup> For example, Russell to Queen, 19 Dec. 1846, 13, 16 Feb., 21 May 1847, 22 Feb. 8 Dec. 1848, 2 Oct., 27, 28 Nov. 1849, 24 May 1850, 4 Dec. 1851, *Cabinet Reports by Prime Ministers to the Crown: A reproduction of the series of manuscript letters preserved at Windsor Castle* (Harvester Press, 1978, microfilm)

Kossuth in December 1851 did Russell inform the members of the Cabinet that he 'would not ask for any collective resolution', but he did stress in his report to the Queen that there had been general agreement that Palmerston should not receive him.<sup>171</sup> Palmerston, when deputising for Russell, used these official communications with the Queen as an opportunity to expound the principles of his policy at length, but here too there is little evidence of the Cabinet discord that did occur.<sup>172</sup> The Queen, however, clearly suspicious about this degree of supposed accord, and perhaps disappointed that Palmerston was not being more severely checked by his colleagues, asked on one occasion to see the Cabinet minutes discussing the Sicilian guns question. Minto thought this 'strange ignorance on her part, as she ought to have known that there are no minutes of matters treated of in the Cabinet', but it also left the field open to intrigue and he expected 'some mischief' to occur during the forthcoming visit to Windsor of George Grey and Charles Wood.<sup>173</sup>

Thus it was on two broad counts that Palmerston needed the backing of the Cabinet; both constitutionally and in order indeed to underwrite his own political survival. As Russell put it to Palmerston as the latter drew close to his last days at the Foreign Office:

Seeing the persevering enmity which the foreign policy of the Government excites, & the displeasure with which it is viewed in high quarters, I think it behoves you to guard most carefully against misapprehensions as well as misrepresentations. I think you owe this to me, & to your other colleagues who have stood by you in defence of the course which has been pursued in regard to our foreign relations. I think you owe it to the country, which in these difficult times ought not to be exposed in case of a rupture, to encounter unnecessary odium from the governments that be. I trust therefore without swerving an inch from our policy, you will

<sup>171</sup> Russell to Queen, 3 Nov. 1851, *Cabinet Reports by Prime Ministers to the Crown*

<sup>172</sup> Palmerston to Queen, 30 March 1847, 23 Oct. 1850, *ibid*

<sup>173</sup> Minto, Journal, 23 Jan. 1849, Minto Papers, MS.11995

avoid as much as possible, giving cause for irritation and hostility.<sup>174</sup>

Furthermore, there was a genuine sense in which the Cabinet could fulfil a useful advisory and consultative role. As Palmerston admitted, some questions stretched his capabilities to their limit and beyond. Italy in 1848, for instance, he described as 'a chaotic Labyrinth through which I can not see my way'.<sup>175</sup> More than this, some members of the Cabinet could bring to the Foreign Secretary's attention important information and sidelights on events which were to be gained from no other source. Clarendon, in particular, was valuable in this respect. From the Board of Trade he wrote to Palmerston with news from his clandestine 'Paris informant', probably the Paris correspondent of the *Times*, M. Reilly,<sup>176</sup> who was able to supply Clarendon with inside information about the French Government. Clarendon willingly shared this information 'not because it is of much consequence but because you may think it worth while to watch the unscrupulous lies that the late entente cordiale may tell'.<sup>177</sup> Certainly Palmerston can only have received gratefully the news that a foreign prince visiting London had told the King of the French, Louis Philippe, 'qu'il prie le gou[vernem]ent français de ne pas faire de concession à L[ord] P[almerston] parceque nous pouvons par lui correspondre avec la Reine et le Prince Albert'.<sup>178</sup>

Still, whatever the benefits, there were, for Palmerston, limits. However politically costly, he would not sacrifice what he believed were *his* duties and

<sup>174</sup> Russell to Palmerston, 29 Nov. 1851, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/441

<sup>175</sup> Palmerston to Russell, 6 Oct. 1848, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/7D, fols 149-155

<sup>176</sup> Clarendon to Aberdeen, 26 July 1853, Aberdeen Papers, Add.Mss.43188. In this letter Clarendon identifies Reilly as his source, but concedes that Reilly's information had been 'sometimes true & sometimes absurd'. Aberdeen was not prepared to trust Reilly's intelligence regarding the views of Russia on the Eastern question which Clarendon had just received in July 1853 (Aberdeen to Clarendon, 27 July 1853, Aberdeen Papers, Add.Mss.43188).

<sup>177</sup> Clarendon to Palmerston, 4 Oct. 1846, Broadlands Papers, GC/GL/462

<sup>178</sup> This was from a copied letter from Louis Philippe to Guizot, 28 Sept. 1847, which Clarendon had received from his Parisian source and which Clarendon had felt was 'extremely disagreeable but wh it is very necessary you shd be aware of' (Clarendon to Palmerston, 8 Oct. 1847, Broadlands Papers, GC/CL/477, and GC/CL/477/enc.2).

responsibilities. So long as he was at the Foreign Office, he would do the job of Foreign Secretary, and not until he was replaced would he relinquish this role. His attitude towards the Cabinet and its role in foreign policy did not mellow with age. As Clarendon recalled to Sir George Cornwall Lewis, when Clarendon had served as Foreign Secretary in Palmerston's first ministry: 'I remember once [Palmerston] agreeing with me that Vera Cruz ought to be blockaded, and desiring me to write accordingly to the Admiralty. I said - "Surely not without bringing it before the Cabinet?" - "Oh ah: the Cabinet," was his answer, "very well; call one then, if you think it necessary"'.<sup>179</sup>

Since this cavalier approach antagonised some members of the government just as it did the Queen and Prince, Lord John's role as arbitrator was vital. Sir Charles Wood recognised this at a very early stage and hoped Russell would satisfy this need. He warned that a state of hostile feeling had been produced over relations with France and concluded: 'I press upon you to look to these things yourself. I see no other remedy. The Cabinet cannot interfere, for the mischief is done before we hear of anything. It is no easy matter, I am well aware, even for you. ...Forgive me venturing to intrude all this advice, but I am not a little alarmed'.<sup>180</sup> The Queen equally placed much faith in Russell's ability to rein in Palmerston. He had, she believed, 'the power of exercising that control over Lord Palmerston, the careful exercise of which he owes to the Queen, his colleagues, and the country, if he will take the necessary pains to remain firm'.<sup>181</sup>

<sup>179</sup> Quoted Smith, 'Cabinet and Constitution in the Age of Peel and Palmerston', p.203

<sup>180</sup> Wood to Russell, 18 Sept. 1846, G.P. Gooch (ed.), *The Later Correspondence of Lord John Russell, 1840-1878*, 2 vols. (London, 1925), I, p.121

<sup>181</sup> Queen to Russell, 19 Oct. 1850, *LQV*, II, pp.324-5

Russell recognised his position as umpire within the government, not only between the Court and Foreign Office, but also between Palmerston and his other colleagues, and felt confident that, in the final analysis, his decision was binding.<sup>182</sup> To some extent Russell did succeed in keeping Palmerston in check, indeed the Foreign Secretary was, according to Minto, 'more hampered than I shd like to be in the conduct of his department by Lord John's controul',<sup>183</sup> but there were political exigencies which demanded this. By 1850, however, with Peel dead and opposition members increasingly able to offer an alternative ministry, and with internal Cabinet divisions bespeaking ever more of fracture and defection rather than consideration of broader interests,<sup>184</sup> Palmerston's position became proportionately stronger. There were fewer interests for which he might reasonably be sacrificed and more reasons for retaining him for his own sake. This situation did not last, however.

iv) 'Give a rogue a rope and he will hang himself...': Palmerston's fall, November - December 1851<sup>185</sup>

The Russell government was a fragile one, particularly by 1850, and whilst Palmerston's fall might herald that of the ministry also, it came to be seen by those

<sup>182</sup> This is implicit in a letter to Palmerston written when a problem was deemed to impinge on the interests of both the Foreign and Colonial Offices. If Palmerston and Wood were unable to resolve the issue between them, Russell said, he would take it upon himself to 'weigh the reasons' upon which any disagreement was founded (Russell to Palmerston, 14 June 1851, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/416).

<sup>183</sup> Minto, Journal, 20 March 1849, Minto Papers, MS.11995. Similarly, on 4 April 1839, Minto observed that it was the Treasury and Charles Wood 'who has assumed the controul of our foreign policy to which Palmerston submits more patiently than I shd do' (Minto Papers, MS.11995).

<sup>184</sup> 'It is however most painful to see many of our colleagues [Lord Grey, Labouchere, Baring, Wood and George Grey] on every question looking only to Parliamentary convenience and tactics, without regard to national honour or interests', wrote Minto at this time (Minto, Journal, 2 Feb. 1850, Minto Papers, MS.11996).

<sup>185</sup> The phrase is the Prince Consort's: Albert to Duke Ernst II, Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, 29 Dec. 1851, H. Bolitho (ed.), *The Prince Consort to his Brother: Two Hundred New Letters* (London, 1933), p.126

members of the Cabinet growing weary of Palmerston's conduct, increasingly as a worthwhile risk. Two events in the closing weeks of 1851 sealed his fate. Despite much opposition from various quarters, Palmerston intended to receive Louis Kossuth, the Hungarian nationalist leader, and was only just dissuaded from this course by his Cabinet colleagues and Russell. He dismissed suggestions that receiving Kossuth would represent a slight upon the Queen's government, arguing: 'It is not as chief Enemy of Austria that Kossuth has hitherto been looked upon, nor is it in that Capacity that he is about to be received by the British nation. He has been regarded as a Man who among others has stood up for the Rights of his Country'.<sup>186</sup> Palmerston was determined to have his own way, and once more resorted to a hitherto efficacious tactic when Russell wrote a stern instruction not to receive Kossuth and threatened to resign.<sup>187</sup> The Queen was 'deeply wounded' by Palmerston's conduct and she only desisted from pressing Russell to remove Palmerston on the grounds that this would inevitably lead to a breaking up of the Cabinet.<sup>188</sup> When a few weeks later Palmerston approved the President's *coup d'etat* in France he finally pushed his colleagues too far.

As Palmerston failed to contradict reports of his alleged communication with Walewski concerning the coup, Russell's hand was forced. On 17 December he wrote 'with great reluctance' to Palmerston to ask for his resignation. The 'complaints are too frequent, & too well founded', he argued, and whilst professing to 'concur in the foreign policy of which you have been the adviser', he could not 'but observe that mis-understandings perpetually renewed, violations of prudence & decorum too frequently repeated have marred the effects which ought to have

<sup>186</sup> Palmerston to Russell, 24 Oct. 1851, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/430/enc.2

<sup>187</sup> Palmerston to Russell, 30 Oct. 1851, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/9G(2), fols 143-144

<sup>188</sup> Queen to Russell, (Copy), 20 Nov. 1851, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/440/enc.1(1)(2)

followed from a sound policy and able administration'.<sup>189</sup> Palmerston conceded defeat graciously. He wrote to offer to give up the seals of office whenever Russell may choose to appoint a time, adding that he had 'the satisfaction of thinking that the Interests, the Honor, the Character, and the Dignity of the Country have not suffered' during his term of office.<sup>190</sup> Russell lowered his guard and agreed wholeheartedly with Palmerston on this point.<sup>191</sup> Palmerston's fall had become unavoidable; he might have liked to claim that his removal from office was not universally popular within the Cabinet,<sup>192</sup> but Lord Truro was not the only member of the government who felt that 'Palmerston's retirement is good'.<sup>193</sup> Even Lord Minto, one of Palmerston's most consistent supporters in the government, had to tell the outgoing Minister: 'In bringing my mind to the painful conviction, to which I must not expect your assent, that under all the circumstances of the case your retirement had become inevitable, I do not regard it less as a public calamity, than as a subject of private regret'.<sup>194</sup>

Yet Palmerston's dismissal is not so easily explained. Over Kossuth there had been agreement between Russell, Lansdowne and Minto that whilst receiving Kossuth would be liable to mis-representation and it would therefore be better that he did not see him at all, he did have a right to receive him in a private capacity.<sup>195</sup> They certainly feared the prospect of a Palmerston-led opposition,<sup>196</sup> but as Lord Grey conceded, the Cabinet did not appear strong or determined enough at this time

<sup>189</sup> Russell to Palmerston, 17 Dec. 1851, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/449, GC/RU/450/1-2

<sup>190</sup> Palmerston to Russell, 18 Dec. 1851, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/1098

<sup>191</sup> Russell to Palmerston, 19 Dec. 1851, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/453

<sup>192</sup> Note by Palmerston on letter from Russell to Palmerston, 22 Dec. 1851, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/454

<sup>193</sup> Lord Truro to Russell, Jan. 1852, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/10A(1), fol 80

<sup>194</sup> Minto to Palmerston, 13 Jan. 1852, Broadlands Papers, GC/MI/501

<sup>195</sup> Minto, Journal, 1, 3 Nov. 1851, Minto Papers, MS.11998

<sup>196</sup> Ibid, 27 Nov. 1851, Minto Papers, MS.11998

to press his removal anyway.<sup>197</sup> Russell claimed that he had stood by his Foreign Secretary for as long as possible,<sup>198</sup> but eventually he could no longer sustain Palmerston, even though the policies he enacted were still acceptable.<sup>199</sup> Yet, as both Clarendon and Lord Grey observed, it seemed surprising that Palmerston should be removed now when so many opportunities of a similar nature had presented themselves over the previous five and a half years.<sup>200</sup>

The Queen believed that affronts to the Court had made Palmerston's position untenable,<sup>201</sup> but the 'deviations from the principles laid down by the Cabinet for his conduct,' and the 'personal and arbitrary perversion of the very nature and essence of those principles',<sup>202</sup> of which the Queen complained were, again, not new. She also recognised that insisting on Palmerston's dismissal, as a royal demand, would not only have been 'a most disagreeable task' but also one 'not unattended with a small amount of danger, inasmuch as it would have put me too prominently forward'.<sup>203</sup> There was another catalyst in this particular reaction. Neither the Crown nor the Cabinet, whilst the executors of that dismissal, could offer any substantially new cause of complaint to justify the change. Public opinion was still largely pro-Palmerston and dissenting voices here were scarcely sufficient

<sup>197</sup> 'When the subject was brought before us I thought the cabinet showed great weakness for though I believe every member of it disapproved exceedingly of what had been done this feeling was scarcely expressed except by Labouchere and myself', Grey, Journal, 'Retrospect written 6 March 1852', Grey Papers, 3rd Earl, C3/15

<sup>198</sup> Minto, Journal, 19 Dec. 1851, Minto Papers, MS.11998

<sup>199</sup> Ibid, 24 Dec. 1851, Minto Papers, MS.11998

<sup>200</sup> Clarendon to Lansdowne, 25 Dec. 1851, Lansdowne Papers, Lans. 3/32, fol 103; Grey to Wood, Hickleton Papers, Brotherton Library, Leeds University (microfilm), A4.55.1; Grey, Journal, 'Retrospect written 6 March 1852', Grey Papers, 3rd Earl, C3/15

<sup>201</sup> Queen to Russell, 31 Oct. 1851, *LQV*, II, pp.393-4

<sup>202</sup> Queen to Russell, 28 Dec. 1851, *LQV*, II, pp.425-7

<sup>203</sup> Queen's journal, 20 Dec. 1851, Connell (ed.), *Regina v. Palmerston*, p.132

to dislodge him.<sup>204</sup> The press, too, largely regretted his fall and saw the potential dangers of his removal.<sup>205</sup>

In February 1852, on the occasion of the fall of the Russell government *in toto*, Minto recorded that the causes for this had been three-fold: the increasing number and voracity of Protectionist attacks; Palmerston's dismissal; and the unpopularity of Lord Grey.<sup>206</sup> In a sense, then, Palmerston had fallen in December 1851 because there was no longer a good reason to keep him on board. Cabinet unity was clearly fictional and the position of Grey simply underlined this. Simultaneously, opposition forces were gathering and threatened to undermine the government from outside. Palmerston's position under Russell had been secured largely on the grounds that he supplied the government with political weight; as Russell himself conceded late in 1851, he 'was in fact the weakness and Lord Palmerston the strength of the Government *from his popularity with the Radicals*'.<sup>207</sup> When the ministry seemed fundamentally weakened by other factors, however, there was less obvious reason to continue to accommodate Palmerston. He could even be made the scapegoat for ministerial and royal conflict, an expendable and perhaps apparently exhausted political force sacrificed in the greater interest of Whig unity.

<sup>204</sup> See below, pp.248-251

<sup>205</sup> See below, pp.202-203

<sup>206</sup> Minto, Journal, 22 Feb. 1852, Minto Papers, MS.11998

<sup>207</sup> Quoted, Southgate, *The Most English Minister...*, p.xxi

### CHAPTER 3. RISING AGAIN: PALMERSTON AND THE POLITICS OF FOREIGN POLICY, 1852-1855

#### i) Palmerston, the Derby Government, and the search for office, February to December 1852

Though the weaknesses of Palmerston's position within the Whig party had been exposed in December 1851, Palmerston did not share Lord Dufferin's opinion that Palmerston 'is completely floored, and people seem to think he is not likely to rise again'.<sup>1</sup> He successfully carried his amendment to the militia bill in February 1852 by a majority of 13 - not a huge margin - relying in large part upon a curious alliance of Protectionists and some Peelites. Russell, perhaps, had reason to welcome the vote: his government was unquestionably tottering to its fall, and had it not been the militia question, it might have been something bigger - electoral reform for example - which might have had more damaging ramifications for the future careers of the ministers. As Palmerston himself acknowledged in a letter to Clarendon, 'the cabinet were glad to make use of the militia question as a convenient parachute to avoid a ruder descent and a more dangerous one in Table Bay'.<sup>2</sup> Palmerston reflected, with evident satisfaction, that he had now had his 'tit for tat' with Lord John, which not only undermined Russell personally, but also reinforced Palmerston's commitment to

<sup>1</sup> An observation made after the debate of 3 Feb. 1852 quoted A. Lyall, *The Life of the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava* (London 1905), p.77

<sup>2</sup> Palmerston to Clarendon, 23 Feb. 1852, quoted H.C.F Bell, *Lord Palmerston* 2 vols. (London, 1936), II, p.58

the question of national defence and helped satisfy a growing demand for a change of government.

Palmerston was not yet in a position to claim the premiership for himself - he had no obvious and coherent party backing for one thing - but he had reaffirmed his political vitality. During the succeeding months he was able to play factions and individuals off against each other at Westminster. He was fortunate, however, that foreign affairs became inflamed during this period as this allowed him to add to his political arsenal the weight of popular support. Possessing little real command of an efficient political party, Palmerston had to exploit a reputation of being the national minister. What follows explains how he manipulated the parliamentary environment to his ends whilst succeeding chapters examine the grounds which explain how and why he was able to achieve this.

The Derby government of 1852 which succeeded that of Russell in February remained throughout a minority one. Even on the back of the election held during the summer of that year in which the Derbyites enlarged their representation in the House of Commons from 280 to 310, there was still no clear majority in that chamber, and throughout its life Derby's first ministry was subject to an almost constant battering. Not only was the position of the government vulnerable within the palace of Westminster, but, according to the Duke of Argyll at least, the Prime Minister was not well suited to the task now before him:

...Lord Derby, though a splendid speaker, was not very well fitted to enforce the authority of his opinions on others, or to keep his Cabinet in subordination. He was too rollicking, too apt to treat everything as a joke; the result was a Government obviously provisional. It commanded no sure majority in the House, and until it was seen what a Protectionist Government was going to do

about Protection, nobody of the Free Trade sections of the House would support them, or do anything but watch and wait.<sup>3</sup>

Those not sitting on the Treasury benches in fact were not quite so passive and in the face of this new government, they set about establishing a coherent and effective opposition. Within days of the establishment of the Derby government Russell wrote to Palmerston, perhaps surprisingly, seeking a common understanding in order more effectually to counter the position adopted by Disraeli over foreign affairs on behalf of the new ministry. 'At present I have no very settled opinion as to what should be done,' he wrote, 'but it is desirable that all who are for free intercourse with foreign countries should know each other's course before we confront Disraeli'.<sup>4</sup> Palmerston, however, replied that it appeared to him scarcely consistent with the position in which he had been placed in December last to attend such a meeting as Russell proposed,<sup>5</sup> and Russell was obliged to concede Palmerston had 'a perfect right' to adopt such an attitude.<sup>6</sup>

Palmerston's political force was clearly still not spent, something which was recognised on both sides of the House. Disraeli had been quick to impress upon Lord Derby that 'it is everything for your Government that P. should be a member of

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<sup>3</sup> George Douglas Campbell, Eighth Duke of Argyll, *Autobiography and Memoirs* edited by Dowager Duchess of Argyll, 2 vols. (London, 1906), I, p.361. It is interesting to contrast this contemporary view with the more recent interpretation of Derby's leadership qualities offered in A. Hawkins, 'Lord Derby and Victorian Conservatism: A Reappraisal', *Parliamentary History*, 6 (1987). Hawkins challenges the view that Derby's relaxed approach deserved to be criticised in the context of the mid-Victorian, post-Peel Conservative party - for example: 'A surfeit of leadership brought increasing pressure upon Peelite, Whig, Liberal and radical party connexion. Furthermore, many of those issues which had formerly differentiated parties were no longer questions of practical concern by the 1850s. It was within these circumstances that Derby adopted an opposition strategy of 'masterly inactivity': a patient policy that would emphasize non-Conservative differences in a void created by Conservative passivity. ...He was "well aware of what is said of the necessity of having some 'watchword' or 'party cry', but while I admit the convenience to a party of having such, that convenience is more than counter-balanced if the watchword be not one which will command universal sympathy, or ...stand the severest test of criticism"' (p.286).

<sup>4</sup> Russell to Palmerston, 4 March 1852, Broadlands Papers, Southampton University Library, GC/RU/464

<sup>5</sup> Palmerston to Russell, 5 March 1852, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/464/enc.1

<sup>6</sup> Russell to Palmerston, 6 March 1852, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/465

it. His prestige in the House is very great; in the country considerable', assuming a little too hastily that this would be readily achieved provided that it was borne in mind that he 'will not give you trouble about principles, but he may about *position*'.<sup>7</sup> No longer was anti-Palmerstonism or even anti-Palmerstonianism a 'possible common cause for fragmented Conservative opinion'.<sup>8</sup> And indeed, not only had Palmerston underlined his continuing political vitality and potency, but in the aftermath of the split with Russell and Russell's revival of the Reform question, there was reason to believe that Palmerston might be receptive to such Conservative overtures.

Palmerston's problem in 1852 was that whilst he retained a broad base of parliamentary and popular support, he still, as Roebuck noted, 'wants the support of the sedate portion of the politicians'.<sup>9</sup> Greville went further, observing that 'though he is very popular, and can excite any amount of cheering in the House of Commons, he has no political adherents whatever'.<sup>10</sup> In many ways this was the ideal platform for the Palmerstonian performance. He could stand independent of party affiliations, speak his mind, adopt a contrary position whenever it suited him, and in so doing capitalise on what had always been his greatest asset: his strong personality.

Having offered to meet with Malmesbury in order to discuss the main principles of foreign policy, an offer which Malmesbury, who had been reluctant to take the Foreign Office, 'gratefully accepted', Palmerston impressed upon the newly

<sup>7</sup> Quoted P. Guedalla, *Palmerston* (London, 1937), p.291

<sup>8</sup> A. Hawkins, 'Lord Derby and Victorian Conservatism: A Reappraisal', p.287

<sup>9</sup> Roebuck to Sir James Graham, 20 July 1852, quoted D. Southgate, *The Most English Minister...': The Policies and Politics of Palmerston* (London, 1966), p.310

<sup>10</sup> C.C.F. Greville, *The Greville Memoirs (third part): A Journal of the Reign of Queen Victoria, from 1852 to 1860* (ed. H. Reeve), 2 vols. (London, 1887), I, p.3 (22 Oct. 1852)

installed Foreign Secretary the importance of the responsibilities he had now assumed in taking office under Derby: 'You have no idea until you know more of your office what a power of *prestige* England possesses abroad, and it will be your first duty to see that it does not wane ...take care you yield nothing until you have well looked into every side of the question'.<sup>11</sup> Although he did voice criticisms of the new government's foreign policy - as in the case of the maltreatment of a British subject in Tuscany by an Austrian officer in the summer of 1852, a stand strongly reminiscent of his *civis Romanus sum* declaration - he adopted an attitude towards the ministry, according to Herbert Bell, of 'marked benevolence'.<sup>12</sup> He reserved for the Russell government of 1846-52 a degree of censure clearly more personal, or at least so it appeared to contemporary observers. On 29 June Grey, on his way home, met Lansdowne 'who told us that Palmerston had been making a very bitter attack on the late govt. in the House of Commons with reference to Foreign Affairs, there being no one present to answer him'. Having had a chance then to read this speech, Grey observed that it was 'a very bitter attack principally on Lord John', which was 'most discreditable' to Palmerston.<sup>13</sup> Little wonder, then, that, presuming he would join anyone at all, it was the Conservative mast to which it was believed Palmerston would nail his colours, and not that of Russell and the Whigs.

Throughout the ten-month life of the Derby administration, there was a constant search for a more stable government, a desire to do something given that 'Lord Derby's ship', was 'gradually going down'.<sup>14</sup> Significantly, in all of the

<sup>11</sup> Lord Malmesbury, *Memoirs of an Ex-Minister, An Autobiography* 2 vols. (London, 1884), I, pp.305, 317

<sup>12</sup> Bell, *Palmerston*, II, p.61; Southgate, *The Most English Minister...*, p.310

<sup>13</sup> Third Earl Grey, Journal, 29 June 1852, 30 June 1852, Grey Papers, 3rd Earl, Durham University Library, C3/16

<sup>14</sup> Evelyn Denison [Speaker of the House of Commons] to Aberdeen, May 1852, quoted Bell, *Palmerston*, II, p.64

combinations proposed to remedy this weakness, Palmerston's name was to be found in some regard.<sup>15</sup> Palmerston gave serious consideration to the notion that he might bolster the position of the Derby government and felt that he simply awaited a suitable opportunity. As late as the autumn of 1852, for instance, there was still a suggestion that Palmerston would join Derby, as Charles Greville reported to Clarendon from Broadlands:

I have had a long conversation with Palmerston and a good deal of desultory talk with Lady P. and Lord Shaftesbury, and the result is a strong conviction that it will end in P. joining Derby, provided the latter will give him a decent opportunity for so doing. She evidently wishes it very much. ...He will not, however, join alone, whatever may happen, and I see that he will expect a good many changes and exclusions and that he should come in with some adherents.<sup>16</sup>

Quite what Palmerston might have regarded as a 'decent opportunity' remained unclear. According to Greville, foreign affairs continued to pre-occupy Palmerston and it appeared that this was the area in which he would hope to contribute to the ailing Derby administration: 'P. talks with the greatest contempt of Malmesbury,' he noted, 'and seems fully aware of the great danger of having our foreign relations in such incompetent hands in the present state of Europe. Though he relies much on Louis Napoleon's pacific professions, he seems a good deal alarmed at the vast and matured preparations of France and at the utterly defenceless position we are in, and

<sup>15</sup> Bell, *Palmerston*, II, p.64

<sup>16</sup> Charles Greville to Clarendon, 21 Oct. 1852, quoted H. Maxwell, *The Life and Letters of George William Frederick Fourth Earl of Clarendon* 2 vols. (London, 1913), I, p.350 This letter confirms what Sir James Graham had written to Lord John Russell earlier the previous month when he explained that he thought 'if the Government be not broken up, that Ld Derby will come to an arrangement with Palmerston and that an Anti Reform Administration will be formed; or rather I should say that Protection will be abandoned, & that a new Combination will be attempted on High Tory Principles. ...My belief is that both Palmerston and Gladstone are waiting for an opportunity of joining Ld Derby: Ld Clarendon's note confirmed this opinion...' (Graham to Russell, 6 Sept. 1852 (Copy), Graham Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford (microfilm), MS Film 124, Bundle 112).

he owns that the new Emperor's policy may any day take another turn and that his present intentions afford a very imperfect security for us to rely upon'.<sup>17</sup>

However, Palmerston said he was reluctant to return to the Foreign Office.<sup>18</sup> He spoke of the arduous labours involved in managing that office, and claimed that he was no longer young enough to execute such responsibilities efficiently. Others thought he was intriguing to satisfy different ambitions: Sir George Cornwall Lewis had no doubt for example, that Palmerston sought, or at least would secure for himself, a commanding position. In September 1852, as speculation about the future of the government abounded, it was accepted that Palmerston did not want the Foreign Office, but he was thought to be in line for the lead in the Commons, which, Lewis pointed out, if he accepted, 'with his political standing, his official experience, his self-confidence, his love of work, & his disregard for other men's feelings, he would soon make himself the cabinet, in the midst of such a set of colleagues, & Ld Derby would find not only that he had got a master, but a master who made him feel his servitude every day - & rode him with a sharp bit & a hard hand'.<sup>19</sup> Above all, Palmerston was thought to want the premiership, as Lewis suggested to Sir James Graham in late October. In a reconstructed Derby ministry, he wrote:

Ld Derby might be first minister in name, but if Palmn. *not* being Foreign Secretary, were to lead the House of Commons, he wd be

<sup>17</sup> Charles Greville to Clarendon, 21 Oct. 1852; quoted Maxwell, *Clarendon*, I, p.350 Clearly there was a sense that Malmesbury had failed to take on board Palmerston's earlier words of advice.

<sup>18</sup> See M.E. Chamberlain, *Lord Aberdeen* (London, 1983), p.434. In August 1852 rumours had begun to circulate that Palmerston might take the Home Office under Derby, a move which would have allowed Palmerston to steal a march on Disraeli in the Commons and also facilitate the inclusion of Gladstone and other 'useful recruits' within the government. But it was all speculation, and Aberdeen, who heard these rumours, was concerned that Palmerston would fill the Foreign Office when Malmesbury left it, something not unexpected at this time. However, Aberdeen 'was relieved to hear that Palmerston had told Derby that he would never go back there'. This was to be confirmed when Aberdeen came to form his own government four months later. As Aberdeen told Lord John Russell at a later date: 'At the formation of the Government [in December 1852], I proposed to Palmerston to take the Admiralty, but he preferred the Home Office; and as He told me himself ...the Foreign Office had become too much for him...' (Aberdeen to Russell, 30 Nov. 1854, Aberdeen Papers, Add.Mss.43068).

<sup>19</sup> G.C. Lewis to Graham, 8 Sept. 1852, Graham Papers, MS Film 124, Bundle 112

compelled to inform himself about all questions, & he wd in fact guide the policy of the govt. He would be the *real* Prime Minister, & it wd no longer be what it is at present - a Derby Dizzy affair. This is a change which it is easy to make in conversation, or on paper, but I doubt whether it wd be easily made in fact, or if made whether it wd last. Palmn. however will shortly become very impatient. Neither he nor Ld John will give way to the other, an intermediate ministry under Ld Lansdowne is an impossibility, & as he starts from the assumption that he must be in office *somehow*, it remains only that he shd join Ld Derby.<sup>20</sup>

Whilst, as Lewis argued, Russell and Palmerston were ill-disposed to make concessions to each other in the interests of a new government, Palmerston's interest in an association with Derby was little more than a pragmatic response and did not signal a shift in him towards protectionism. So long as the prospect of a Lansdowne-led, 'Liberal' ministry had seemed a viable one, Lewis thought that Palmerston was keen to throw in his lot with the Whigs.<sup>21</sup> Palmerston looked above all for a chance to resume office and envisaged a central role for himself, yet there was a degree of flexibility, or ambiguity, in his sense of party allegiance.

### *On union with the Whigs and Liberals*

It has been said that Palmerston by late 1852 was keen to take up office, or at least Lady Palmerston was keen that he should do so, for pecuniary reasons,<sup>22</sup> but if this

<sup>20</sup> G.C. Lewis to Graham, 25 Oct. 1852, Graham Papers, MS Film 124, Bundle 112

<sup>21</sup> G.C. Lewis to Graham, 11 Oct. 1852, Graham Papers, MS Film 124, Bundle 112: 'I have heard little about Palmn.', he wrote, 'My belief is that he is still unfriendly to the govt., & wishes to form part of a liberal ministry with Ld Lansdowne chief. He will however become impatient if some shake up does not occur soon'.

<sup>22</sup> J. Ridley, *Lord Palmerston*, (London, 1970), p.405. Ridley suggests that the Palmerstons were in need of a ministerial salary, an argument which may possess some force but which must remain conjectural until more work has been done on Palmerston's private affairs in the later years of his life. Meanwhile, Kenneth Bourne's *Palmerston: The Early Years, 1784-1841* (London, 1982), does give a useful insight into Palmerston's complicated and not altogether healthy financial condition for the period covered by the book. Bourne reveals not only that Palmerston had numerous estate concerns which were to drain the family resources (improvements Palmerston was obliged to make in the first half of the century were not to yield profitable results until the end of his life), but also that his numerous amorous affairs had left him with significant financial obligations to mistresses and vulnerable to blackmailers. See particularly pp.181-287 of Bourne's work on these subjects.

Nevertheless, Lady Palmerston undoubtedly was keen to see her husband back in office. She wrote to Lansdowne in December thus: 'I thought you seemed very anxious yesterday that Palmerston

were the case, he might have been expected to pursue more vigorously opportunities to join Derby's administration. Rather he waited for the elusive 'decent opportunity'. Palmerston had been unhappy about the Derby government, and was to be less than sanguine about the prospects of an Aberdeen ministry, yet he joined the latter, reluctantly, whilst allowing the former to go to the wall. With neither did he have an obvious affiliation, although arguably he was more closely connected with the Whigs than any other 'party', and thus his conduct in the closing months of 1852 begs questions about his political motivations.

Although active in the search for an alternative to the Derby government, the various factions sitting opposite the Treasury benches were not particularly well placed to challenge the government. There was a need for some sort of re-alignment of parties, as the Duke of Newcastle argued in a letter to Aberdeen in August 1852 regarding the Peelite position. 'Union with Lord Derby is impossible' he suggested. 'Isolation is pleasant but not patriotic. Co-operation with other Liberals is requisite'.<sup>23</sup> The Peelites and the Protectionists were no longer united under the Conservative banner,<sup>24</sup> and the Whigs, who were led in opposition by Russell, were equally incapable of supplanting Derby themselves. Russell could not command the loyalty and respect of sufficient colleagues and Minto was forced to concede that his

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should join this [Aberdeen's] Government. I am very anxious too as I think it would unite him again with all his Old Friends. ...I think that if you could speak to Palm. again & urge him strongly to reconsider his determination that he might perhaps be induced to do so. We have heard that Clarendon is to have the Foreign Office and not Canning, & I know Palmerston thinks this gives a different Character to the Government & would therefore make him more inclined to accept'. This appeal was not to be communicated to Palmerston (Lady Palmerston to Lansdowne, 'Wednesday', Dec. 1852, Lansdowne Papers, British Library, Lans 3/42, fol 64). Interestingly, Palmerston was later to describe Lansdowne as 'the Person by whose advice I joined the present Government' (Palmerston to Lansdowne, 22 April 1853, Lansdowne Papers, Lans 3/42, fol 37). It is not possible to determine the extent to which Lady Palmerston had an impact upon Lansdowne's advice to Palmerston.

<sup>23</sup> Newcastle to Aberdeen, 2 Aug. 1852, Aberdeen Papers, British Library, Add.Mss.43197, fols 11-18

<sup>24</sup> See J.B. Conacher, *The Aberdeen Coalition, 1852-1855* (Cambridge, 1968), pp.12-36; R. Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher* (London, 1985), pp. 83-4

son-in-law could no longer claim to be able to carry the Whigs forward as a united body. 'Palmerston', he wrote in his journal, 'is I conceive the great difficulty at present; as he would not serve *under* tho he may be ready to serve *with* Ld John as a Colleague and it is to open the door for his return to us that some of our friends have desired to substitute Lansdowne for Lord John as prime minister'.<sup>25</sup> It was, then, in large measure a personal antagonism or rivalry between Palmerston and Russell which damaged Whig prospects and the decent opportunity which Palmerston awaited was not to join Derby, but to return to his former colleagues under a different leadership. Palmerston was attempting to play Derby off against Russell during 1852 as a way of restructuring the Whig hierarchy in such a way as to make it more palatable; to pave the way to his own accession to the premiership in place of Russell.

Palmerston's confidence was mis-placed as the political climate was not conducive at this time to such an enterprise. Now was the time when a new arrangement was called for, be that a union of the opposition members, or some sort of coalition. Newcastle imagined this was a watershed in British politics and sought, 'with a view to real fusion of all Liberals,' to abandon the names 'Whig' and 'Peelite'. A new party, he believed, must be established 'not by one party joining another. With this view all old names as well as old jealousies must be abandoned'.<sup>26</sup> He was only expressing what Aberdeen himself had already said, a little over a week earlier, when he had written to Newcastle expressing his dissatisfaction with the Derby Administration: 'I cannot look to the continuance of the present Government in

<sup>25</sup> Second Earl of Minto, Journal, 28 Aug. 1852, Minto Papers, National Library of Scotland, MS 11998

<sup>26</sup> Newcastle to Aberdeen, 3 Aug. 1852, Aberdeen Papers, Add.Mss.43197

power with any degree of satisfaction...!', he said, concluding that, since Lord John alone could not regain his old position:

I think therefore the time is come when we ought to act in cordial concert with Lord John and the Whigs. I am not aware of any real difference between us. Free Trade, with all its legitimate consequences, is quite safe; and I do not anticipate anything but agreement on the subject of our financial policy. Different views may be entertained respecting education, and the Church; but perhaps these are more theoretical than practical, and in which the necessity of mutual forbearance will be strongly felt. It is to be hoped, after the lesson of last year, that we shall have nothing to apprehend from any hostile interference on the part of the Whigs with religious freedom.<sup>27</sup>

Such aspirations were, however, a little premature. Few had the inclination to stand above party in the manner of Palmerston; fewer still had the ability. An impasse had been reached and the country seemed destined to endure weak government and by definition even weaker opposition for the foreseeable future. Shaftesbury, no great admirer of political factions, bemoaned the country's predicament. 'Party will do its work, and complicate our difficulties', he wrote,

Aberdeen & Canning will essay to destroy the government, tho they cannot form one; the Whigs, the same, with equal incapacity. Party spirit, the strongest of the evil spirits, is the curse of representative government; it will destroy the present administration, &, eventually, the Kingdom. All are alike; where is there an honest public man, who prefers the general good to his own real, or fancied, particular? These men are no better than those who assail them; they may do well now; but, in opposition, they were reckless and unprincipled!<sup>28</sup>

Aberdeen may have been, in Shaftesbury's eyes, unlikely to be able to form a government, but he was the best option. Recognising the need for some sort of Peelite-Whig combination which might underpin a Liberal government, Newcastle had written to Aberdeen as early as August arguing that in the present 'peculiar' circumstances, 'the state of parties [is] unprecedented, and I believe that, if *all* will

<sup>27</sup> Aberdeen to Newcastle, 25 July 1852, Aberdeen Papers, Add.Mss.43197

<sup>28</sup> Shaftesbury Diaries, 7 Dec. 1852, Broadlands Papers, SHA/PD/6

lay aside selfish and personal views and wishes, you can better serve the Queen and the Country than any other person'.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, Russell told Sir James Graham that he was 'quite ready to support Lord Aberdeen as Prime Minister, if the Liberals prefer him to me'.<sup>30</sup> Aberdeen, however, displayed less confidence in his ability and prospects. There had been talk of him replacing Russell in 1848 on which occasion he had told his daughter-in-law, Lady Haddo, 'This would be a dreadful affair, and I trust will never be realised'.<sup>31</sup> His reluctance to take up the reins was entirely personal, as he explained a week later when it appeared that there was little chance of him being called upon, but declaring that if the Russell government was indeed to fall, 'it is my determination to preserve my own freedom'.<sup>32</sup>

By 1852, the ground had shifted. Peel was dead and Aberdeen was quite clearly the leading light amongst Sir Robert's old colleagues. There was also considerable support within the Peelite ranks for an Aberdeen government, and a clear need at Westminster for a new administration. Still Aberdeen was a reluctant candidate and even in the autumn he felt distanced from the attempts to supplant Derby. 'Shortly after the meeting of Parliament,' he told Graham, 'we shall see more clearly what we have to expect. In the mean time, I am disposed to preserve my character of spectator; and as I have really no object of my own, I may do this the

<sup>29</sup> Newcastle to Aberdeen, 2 Aug. 1852, Aberdeen Papers, Add.Mss.43197

<sup>30</sup> Russell to Graham, 18 Aug. 1852, quoted C.S. Parker, *Life and Letters of Sir James Graham, Second Baronet of Netherby, 1792-1861* 2 vols. (London, 1907), II, p.174

<sup>31</sup> Aberdeen to Lady Haddo, 30 June 1848, quoted Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*, p.418. In the summer of 1852 Aberdeen again expressed his desire to avoid resuming office. He did not think it a proposal likely to enjoy much success, but his ideal replacement for the Derby government was one headed by Russell and supported by Aberdeen. As Aberdeen stressed, however, whilst he hoped the Peelites would support such a ministry, he envisaged that he would be 'not in office myself' (Aberdeen to Newcastle, 25 July 1852, Aberdeen Papers, Add.Mss.43197).

<sup>32</sup> Aberdeen to Lady Haddo, 8 July 1848, quoted Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*, p.418

more easily'.<sup>33</sup> He evidently felt hampered by the vagaries of politics of late 1852. He would not attempt to construct a government which would stand little or no chance of survival purely for the sake of replacing Derby, and he seems not to have felt confident of his ability to do otherwise. Foreign affairs, as ever, continued to interest Aberdeen, and it was the poor management of this department which lay at the root of much of his frustration with Derby's government. However, he also maintained that 'the presence of Palmerston, as an influential member of any Govt, would create a serious difficulty; and this he must know perfectly well himself'.<sup>34</sup>

## ii) The formation and foundations of the Aberdeen Coalition

In the closing month of the year the issue was brought to a head. The Derby government was defeated in the House of Commons on a resolution for the increase of the House Tax, and had not sufficient resolution to continue.<sup>35</sup> Although the Derbyites still out-numbered other factions at Westminster, combinations of these opposition groups now appeared well-placed to supplant the government. Derby himself reported to the royal couple that 'he had heard lately from good authority that the Whigs and Peelites had come to an agreement, and were ready to form an Administration on Conservative principles, to the exclusion of the Radicals, under the lead of Lord Aberdeen. Although only 150 strong, they thought, that with all the

<sup>33</sup> Aberdeen to Graham, 7[?, poss. 8, or 2] Oct. 1852, Graham Papers, MS Film 124, Bundle 112

<sup>34</sup> Aberdeen to Graham, 28 Oct. 1852, Graham Papers, MS Film 124, Bundle 112

<sup>35</sup> Derby to Queen, 17 Dec. 1852, A.C. Benson and Viscount Esher (eds.), *The Letters of Queen Victoria: a selection from Her Majesty's correspondence between the years 1837 and 1861* (London, 1907) [hereafter *LQV*], II, pp.499-500

talent they had at their command, they would be able to obtain the confidence of the country, and hold the balance between the two extreme Parties in the House'.<sup>36</sup>

Derby advised the Queen to seek immediately the counsel of Lansdowne and not call upon Aberdeen straight away as such a move would be read by Derbyites as having been prompted by Derby and lead those among the ranks dissatisfied with Derby himself to with-hold support from Aberdeen, whilst those Conservatives who felt betrayed by the Peelites would ally themselves with the Radicals in a perverse act of revenge. It was sensible advice and although the Prince Consort deemed it unconstitutional that an out-going premier should proffer such a recommendation, it did not go altogether unheeded.

The Queen, after consulting Lansdowne and Aberdeen and mooting the idea of some sort of ministry headed by the two of them, was obliged to turn to the latter only as Lansdowne, prepared to support a new 'liberal' administration, was not disposed to attempt to lead one. The Queen had long admired Aberdeen, but still she recognised the difficulties he would face in trying to fulfil his commission. As she wrote to her uncle, the King of the Belgians:

You will have heard of our crisis, and of the resignation of the Government; its overthrow was inevitable; but we must now get a strong and durable Government, one combined of the best Conservatives and Liberals, which is what the country expects, demands, and requires. Lord Aberdeen has undertaken the task, but I cannot yet announce, as I wish I could, the formation of the new Government.<sup>37</sup>

Aberdeen did succeed, however. The new Cabinet comprised six each Whigs and Peelites and one Radical and although it was not to everyone's taste, it was workable.

The Whigs especially were unhappy with the balance in the Cabinet given the

<sup>36</sup> Memorandum by Prince Albert, 18 Dec. 1852, *LQV*, II, pp.500-02. According to Derby's estimates, as recorded in this memorandum, the House was composed of 286 Government supporters, 150 Radicals, 50 'of the so-called Irish Brigade', 120 Whigs and 30 Peelites.

<sup>37</sup> Queen to King of the Belgians, 21 Dec. 1852, *LQV*, II, pp.508-09

discrepancy in numbers in the House, but Russell found that however much he tussled with Aberdeen, he could do little to remedy this fact.<sup>38</sup> Russell was vital to any Whig or Whig-Peelite administration which might be established, and even though he had toyed with the idea of not joining at all until Aberdeen had hinted that he would renounce the premiership in his favour sooner rather than later (an expensive hostage to fortune which was to return to haunt Aberdeen later in the life of the government) Russell was unlikely to stand outside this new government. Less certain, however, was Palmerston's position. He had successfully carved out something of an independent position during the previous ten months and it was not so clearly established that he would automatically join this government; indeed there were those amongst his friends who believed he should not. But if the Aberdeen government was to achieve anything, Palmerston, holding a certain balance between the Protectionists on the one hand and the Whigs and Peelites on the other, must be brought on board.

Palmerston was therefore able to choose his own course. When he joined the government he surrendered, apparently, claims to his old domain at the Foreign Office, and wrote to make his peace with Russell, assuring Lord John that 'we shall meet again as far as I am concerned just as good Friends as if we had never separated'.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps as Palmerston had told Lansdowne, he did not hold a grudge against Lord John, and now that Russell was beaten into second place by Aberdeen and that he could 'serve with him on equal Terms under a Third Person', all was

<sup>38</sup> For a good account of the complicated manoeuvrings and intrigues surrounding the formation of Aberdeen's cabinet, and especially the role played by Russell, see C.H. Stuart, 'The Formation of the Coalition Cabinet of 1852', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th Series, IV (1954), 45-68 and Conacher, *The Aberdeen Coalition*, pp.12-36. A more concise but also useful discussion is to be found in F.D. Munsell, *The Unfortunate Duke: Henry Pelham, Fifth Duke of Newcastle, 1811-1864* (Columbia, 1985, pp.139-41

<sup>39</sup> Palmerston to Russell, 23 Dec. 1852, Russell Papers, Public Record Office, PRO 30/22/10F, fols 117-18

well.<sup>40</sup> So, Russell and Palmerston were reconciled, and Aberdeen and Palmerston, the 'Harrow Boys', were able to re-new their school-boy friendship.<sup>41</sup>

Palmerston's accession to the government was seen in some quarters however as a very expensive and submissive act. The Duke of Argyll for instance felt that Palmerston had made a great sacrifice 'of personal feeling to public duty'. 'It must have cost him a great deal to see that great office [the Foreign Office] deliberately with-held from him,' he continued, 'and given, at least for a time, to the Minister who had summarily dismissed him from it. I was curious to see his bearing under circumstances of union, and under the leadership of a statesman whose arguments against his own policy he had described in the House of Commons as "antiquated imbecility"'.<sup>42</sup> Shaftesbury, too, confided in his diary at the time that Palmerston's acceptance of office, in direct contradiction of everything he had said previously, surprised him greatly, believing Palmerston had in some way been duped by Aberdeen and Russell. 'Johnny & the Scotchman are cunning enough,' he wrote,

they wanted to gag P.; and they have succeeded; they have bound the wild one between two tame elephants... It is a strange transaction; it is either the highest instance of Christian forgiveness, (for everyman in the Cabinet is his enemy) or the most striking concession of principle in exchange for office. His mortification will, I fear, be great almost daily. I regret it for his sake; I am fond of him; he is kind-hearted & friendly; he is getting

<sup>40</sup> 'I said that my private & personal Regard & Friendship for John Russell remain unaltered, and that I must always entertain towards him individually those sentiments of Kindness which one feels for a private Friend with whom one has been acting in public Life for more than Twenty years. But I said that my political Confidence in him is gone, and that I could not again act under him as a chief who should be the arbiter of my Official Position or the Guide of my political Course. That as a Political Leader he is not to be depended upon, is infirm of Purpose, changeable in his views, and perpetually swayed by Influences which are known and felt only by their Results. ...I said to the Duke of Bedford that the upshot of all this was, that I could not again serve under John Russell, but that I should not object to serve with him on equal Terms under a Third Person' (Palmerston to Lansdowne, 4 Oct. 1852, Lansdowne Papers, Lans.3/42, fol 35).

<sup>41</sup> 'Lord Aberdeen said that when he saw Lord Palmerston, who then declined office, nothing could have exceeded the expressions of his cordiality; he had even reminded him that in fact they were great friends (!!!) of sixty years' standing, having been at school together. We could not help laughing heartily at the Harrow Boys and their friendship'. Memorandum by Prince Albert, 22 Dec. 1852, *LQV*, II, p.511.

<sup>42</sup> Argyll, *Autobiography and Memoirs*, I pp.378-89

on in life; & I could have wished him some respect & affection from those who are associated with him in his later days.<sup>43</sup>

It was not so much an act of forgiveness, nor was it quite a concession of principle. Rather, after months of 'acting the part of a very distinguished tight-rope dancer', now was the time, he suggested to his brother-in-law, for practical reasons, to cease playing the part of 'a reckless adventurer' and commit to the cause of 'the great Liberal Party, not in the House of Commons, nor at Brook's, nor at the Reform Club, but in the United Kingdom' and to fulfil his duty to his Tiverton constituents.<sup>44</sup>

There is a keen sense of realism running through Palmerston's correspondence of this time. As he observed, his differences with Aberdeen over the years on matters of foreign policy were not reason enough to refuse to serve with him, and besides, there were in the new government those, notably Russell and Lansdowne, who had been parties to his own foreign policy in earlier governments. The new ministry was not perfect, but likely there never would be such an administration. 'People must in this world take things as they find them,' he wrote, 'and deal with them as best they can; and they who think they can have every thing their own way, generally find that every thing goes the way they wish it not to go'.<sup>45</sup>

The Queen was pleased to have a government 'so brilliant and strong', which she held 'deserves success, and will I think, command great support'.<sup>46</sup> The fact that Aberdeen was at the head of the government was 'a great happiness and comfort', but

<sup>43</sup> Shaftesbury Diaries, 30 Dec. 1852, Broadlands Papers, SHA/PD/6

<sup>44</sup> Palmerston to Sullivan, 31 Dec. 1852; quoted Southgate, *The Most English Minister...*, p.315. Contrast this with Lady Palmerston's brief notice of Palmerston's return at Tiverton in January: 'Election Tiverton everything prosperous. P's speech excellent. He did justice to Ld Derby's G[overnmen]t which [Sir James] Graham & John [Russell] absurdly cried down - a contrast that was very favourable to P' (Diary of Lady Palmerston, 3 Jan. 1853, Lady Palmerston Papers, Hatfield House).

<sup>45</sup> Palmerston to Sullivan, 31 Dec. 1852, K. Bourne (ed.), *The Letters of the Third Viscount Palmerston to Laurence and Elizabeth Sullivan, 1804-1863* (Camden Fourth Series, Vol.23, 1979), p.305. This citation is not the same as that in Southgate, above, n.44.

<sup>46</sup> Queen to King of the Belgians, 28 Dec. 1852, *LQV*, II, p.521

she was also greatly relieved to see that Palmerston's capacity to disrupt public affairs was much reduced. To her uncle she wrote: 'Lord Palmerston is terribly altered, and all his friends think him breaking. He walks with two sticks, and seemed in great suffering at the Council, I thought'.<sup>47</sup> It took more than a bit of gout to keep Palmerston down, however. His colleagues did not assume that he was a spent force, but they did take heart from the fact that his new public role seemed to distance him from his traditional sphere of influence. As the government's new Lord Privy Seal observed: 'The only member of the Government who was considered a dangerous man, and who in very recent years had gone near to embroiling us with France, was safely tethered within the peaceful pastures of the Home Office'.<sup>48</sup>

Palmerston was not to see his public duties as being neatly confined within the arena of domestic affairs, but at the outset all signs augured well for a stable and effective new government. Aberdeen recognised that this Whig-Peelite 'coalition', was a 'great experiment, hitherto unattempted, and of which the success must be considered doubtful. In the meantime, the Public have regarded the new administration with singular favour'. Nevertheless, he could not deny that whilst the coming Parliamentary session would be difficult, 'I am sanguine in my belief, that our good measures will procure for us sufficient majorities in Parliament, as well as the support of the country'.<sup>49</sup> A fortnight later he was even more optimistic, telling Guizot: 'I have every reason to be satisfied with the disposition of my colleagues, and trust it may continue'.<sup>50</sup> Even the Whigs could find grounds for a small measure of optimism. As Clarendon told his wife, 'people were in better heart' now

<sup>47</sup> Queen to King of the Belgians, 31 Dec. 1852, *LQV*, II, pp.522-23

<sup>48</sup> Argyll, *Autobiography and Memoirs*, I pp.389

<sup>49</sup> Aberdeen to Edward Everett (U.S. cabinet minister and friend of Aberdeen), 13 Jan. 1853, quoted Conacher, *The Aberdeen Coalition*, p.49

<sup>50</sup> Aberdeen to Guizot, 26 Jan. 1853, quoted *ibid*, p.49



concerning the prospects of the ministry, even 'the Whig Chiefs who were so alarmed 2 or 3 days ago & if there is a rattling opposition to keep them all together the experiment may succeed but there is many a rock ahead'.<sup>51</sup> Minto was worried about the 'rival ambition of party distinction' undermining a government 'combining such an amount of talent, experience & high character' which on paper gave 'a promise of good government to the country', but he too was prepared to be positive: 'We must however hope for the best where so many men of sense & public virtue are combined for a common object and united by a common interest'. Such hopes, he believed, would be fulfilled provided the Peelites recognised the importance of not alienating Russell and the Whigs, numerically the mainstay of the new administration.<sup>52</sup> Walter Bagehot went further, describing the Aberdeen Cabinet as 'the ablest we have had, perhaps, since the Reform Act', but as he also noted, it was 'a Cabinet not only adapted, but eminently adapted, for every sort of difficulty save the one that it had to meet'.<sup>53</sup> And that difficulty, significantly, was one of foreign affairs.

<sup>51</sup> Clarendon to Lady Clarendon, 27 Dec. 1852, English Manuscripts, Bodleian Library, MSS. Eng.c.2085

<sup>52</sup> Minto, Journal, 1, 2 & 3 Jan. 1853, Minto Papers, MS 11999. Minto's attitude in January 1853 shows a marked change from that which he held in the previous autumn. In September, for example, he had urged Lord John to remain in opposition, telling him that by so doing 'you will recover your individuality instead of being seen as the impersonation of other mens errors'. He looked forward he said 'with no satisfaction to the time which must come when you are again called upon to conduct a government with colleagues dragging you down to their low level' (Minto to Russell, 17 Sept. 1852, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/10E). But he did recognise that Russell would very likely be soon involved in government again. In such a case, he advised Russell: 'Your present attitude I think should be that of head of the great Whig party, regardless of any partial disaffection in the ranks. ...There are however only two men alive under whom you could submit to serve. Of these two I should greatly prefer Lansdowne, however unsuited in some respects for the post. ...With Aberdeen I do not imagine that you would have much difficulty in coming to a good understanding upon our domestic policy, but I do not so clearly see how your opposite views & principles of foreign policy are to be reconciled' (Minto to Russell, 4 Oct. 1852, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/10E).

<sup>53</sup> W. Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (1867; London 1993 edn.), p.81

*Palmerston, the Home Office and foreign policy*

On taking up the reins of office in December 1852, Aberdeen felt it one of his first duties to address the question of the government's foreign policy. Particularly with Palmerston sitting on the Treasury bench, it seemed requisite that some sort of declaration be made and Aberdeen played deftly upon a common belief that any future threat to the integrity of Britain would come from France. 'The truth is,' he told the House of Lords:

that for the last thirty years the principles of the foreign policy of this country have never varied. There may have been differences in the execution, according to the different hands intrusted with the direction of that policy: but the foundation of the foreign policy of this country has been, I repeat, for the last thirty years the same. It has been marked by a respect due to all independent states, a desire to abstain as much as possible from the internal affairs of other countries, an assertion of our honour and interests, and, above all, an earnest desire to secure the general peace of Europe by all such means as were practicable and at our disposal.<sup>54</sup>

Muriel Chamberlain has said that this 'assertion of the essential continuity of British foreign policy caused understandable surprise, but he had worded the statement very carefully and there was, perhaps, an element of casuistry in it'.<sup>55</sup> Surprise it may have caused, but anyone who looked closely at what Aberdeen had said might not have been so taken aback. Principles were reasonably consistent, in that it was the responsibility of any Foreign Secretary to promote national interests, but also, differences were to be seen in the execution of this policy. It might have been that Aberdeen and Russell regarded Palmerston's earlier conduct as 'freakish', but that did not mean that they did not share his concern with national interests. In emphasising the desire to assert British honour and interests, and to preserve European peace, Aberdeen simply drew out those factors which underpinned all foreign policies,

<sup>54</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd series, CXXIII, 1724 (27 Dec. 1852)

<sup>55</sup> Chamberlain, *Aberdeen*, p.451

which represented the similarities between all British Foreign Secretaries of the nineteenth century: the legacy of Pitt.

The question of the basis of British foreign policy and indeed, the manner of its implementation, is particularly important during this period. During the nineteenth century, at least down to the early 1880s, there are commonly held to be two distinct traditions, or schools, of foreign policy. On the one hand, Castlereagh, Aberdeen and Gladstone represented the 'European' approach, whilst Canning, Palmerston and Disraeli are seen to have pursued 'English' policies. It is the younger Pitt who is frequently seen as the first British statesman to have established with any degree of clarity the foundations upon which British foreign policy ought to be based. His Memorandum on the Deliverance and Security of Europe of 19 January 1805 is a good elucidation of these principles.<sup>56</sup> In essence he laid down that British foreign policy should be directed towards the promotion of British interests, particularly economic and commercial; and, integral to this, that a balance of power in Europe must be established and maintained. It is the interpretation of these terms, of course, which has caused confusion.

Castlereagh sought to bind the European Powers together, in a congress system, which he succeeded in doing, for example, in the Treaty of Chaumont (March 1814) which tied Britain, Russia, Prussia and Austria together in the search for peace, and later in the Quadruple Alliance (November 1815), which re-affirmed Chaumont, and also the peace settlement of Vienna (March 1815). Canning followed him into the Foreign Office, but quickly set about changing such a 'new and very questionable policy', which would involve Britain 'deeply in all the politics

<sup>56</sup> Quoted K. Bourne, *The Foreign Policy of Victorian England, 1830-1902* (Oxford, 1970), pp.197-98

of the Continent, whereas our true policy has always been not to interfere except in great emergencies, and then with commanding force'.<sup>57</sup> To contemporaries, at Westminster at least, the differences between these two approaches were fairly obvious, and in the 1850s, there was an important clash between these two traditions, as Palmerston and Aberdeen fought to establish a supremacy in the Cabinet for their own strategies over the Crimean situation.

Meanwhile, Palmerston was safely ensconced at the Home Office where he was to set about his new duties with vigour and enthusiasm. The demands of a new role represented an exciting challenge, and not only was he content to forego any claims to the Foreign Office, but he believed that foreign affairs were unlikely to figure very greatly in the coming political season. He did continue to concern himself with questions of national defence, but, with regard to the threat from France, he told Aberdeen, 'I think that with common Prudence, & common Good Fortune we are safe for 1853 and I should hope for 1854', and thus the priority for the government was 'to employ this interval in preparing actively permanent means of Defence'.<sup>58</sup> But this could, of course, be monitored easily from the Home Office.

The new Home Secretary busied himself with domestic affairs and set about his new duties with the same vigour as had characterised his tenure of the Foreign Office, even to the extent of demanding of his new clerks, as he had at the Foreign Office, that they pay great attention to their hand-writing. During the life of the government Palmerston oversaw the introduction of the Factory Act of 1853, which whilst not fulfilling all of the hopes of reformers such as Shaftesbury, did go some way towards improving industrial working conditions, especially for children. He

<sup>57</sup> Quoted M.E. Chamberlain, *'Pax Britannica'?: British Foreign Policy 1789-1914* (London, 1988), p.63

<sup>58</sup> Palmerston to Aberdeen, 10 Jan. 1853, Aberdeen Papers, Add.Mss.43069

also attempted to pass legislation which would have confirmed the rights of Trade Unions to combine for lawful purposes as laid down in an Act of 1825 (although he resisted trade union demands for the legalisation of peaceful picketing) and, more successfully, introduced the Truck Act under the terms of which workers were entitled to payment in money, rather than goods or tokens for employers' own shops. Palmerston also sought to improve the condition of society, both environmentally and morally. He pioneered legislation aimed at curbing pollution with the weak but well-intentioned Smoke Abatement Act in August 1853, for example, and throughout was a firm friend of the Temperance societies. Nor did he shy away from the thorny problems associated with prisons and their reform.<sup>59</sup>

Although the duties of the Home Office were great,<sup>60</sup> Palmerston's colleagues, or at least some of them, still wanted him to be involved in foreign politics. From the outset Palmerston was regarded as an important figure in foreign affairs, significantly being among the select group which met the diplomatic corps in January,<sup>61</sup> and the government was not yet three months old when, at Clarendon's suggestion, Palmerston was invited to join Aberdeen, Russell, Graham and Clarendon for a meeting at the Admiralty to discuss affairs relating to Constantinople. With the Eastern question again developing into an issue of great

<sup>59</sup> See D. Roberts, 'Lord Palmerston at the Home Office', *The Historian*, XXI, No.1 (1958), 63-81, and J. Ridley, *Lord Palmerston* (London, 1970), pp.406-412 for detail about these and other measures which occupied Palmerston's time at the Home Office.

<sup>60</sup> Roberts, 'Lord Palmerston at the Home Office', p.68: 'Besides planning reforms Palmerston had to perform the regular duties of the Home Office, in detail and number quite harassing. Though in April [1853] he wrote that work at the Home Office was lighter than at the Foreign Office, by July he confessed "I have never found time to read these [prison] reports and despair of being able to do so."'

<sup>61</sup> When a dinner was held at the beginning of the ministry's life to meet diplomatic staff Lady Palmerston recorded that: 'Paln. dined at Ld Aberdeen's to meet Corps Diplomatique. 4 English Secys of State present Ld A[berdeen], P[almerston], (past), [Lord] John [Russell], (present), Clarendon, (future)' (Diary of Lady Palmerston, 10 Jan. 1853, Lady Palmerston Papers). Note also that Clarendon is already recognised as the heir apparent to the Foreign Office.

moment, by keeping Palmerston within the inner circle it was hoped to avoid him damaging the government's foreign policy from without.

It is not insignificant that Palmerston's interest in home affairs, whilst sincere enough, was to wane as problems in the East developed. The Home Office was engrossing and, he thought, worthwhile, but he could not disguise the fact that foreign affairs remained his first concern. When strikes broke out in the north of England as workers demanded a 10 per cent wage increase, the *Economist* asked with some justification, 'is Palmerston aware of these things?,'<sup>62</sup> whilst the Home Secretary placed his faith in the market to resolve the problem.<sup>63</sup> When asked by the Queen for news about these strikes it is said that Palmerston replied: 'There is no definite news, Madam, but it seems certain that the Turks have crossed the Danube'.<sup>64</sup> Later, Shaftesbury was to complain when measures for various reforms seemed to be making little or no ground at Westminster, that: 'I have much to complain of in the sluggishness, indifference, & yet promises & professions of Palmerston. He undertakes every thing, performs nothing, but actually destroys a great deal'.<sup>65</sup>

With matters in the Ottoman Empire now coming to a head, Palmerston had no desire to pass up an opportunity to engage once again in matters of foreign policy. He might have told Clarendon that it was 'a great Comfort and Satisfaction to me to know that the Conduct of our Foreign Relations is in such able Hands as yours; and your administration of your important Department is attended with this great

<sup>62</sup> *Economist*, 26 Nov. 1853

<sup>63</sup> Roberts, 'Lord Palmerston at the Home Office', pp.69-70

<sup>64</sup> Ridley, *Lord Palmerston*, p.414; K. Martin, *The Triumph of Lord Palmerston* (London, 1963 edn.), p.145: Martin quotes Palmerston as saying 'No, Madam, I have heard nothing; but it seems certain that the Turks have crossed the Danube'.

<sup>65</sup> Shaftesbury Diaries, 28 June 1854, Broadlands Papers, SHA/PD/6

advantage to the Country that, from a variety of Circumstances, you can say and do Things which could not so easily have been said or done by me',<sup>66</sup> but still he felt that a degree of guidance was required. Implicit in the letter which Palmerston wrote to Clarendon in August 1853 is a suggestion that the Home Secretary felt that his experience would be valuable to the Foreign Secretary who had been:

put into the position of a general who, having taken the command of an army one day, should be called upon to go into action the next, before he had made himself acquainted with the qualities, habits and dispositions of his officers, and before he had had time to sound the tactics of his opponents; and who, moreover, should find himself fettered by a council of war some of whose members were of the slow-march school.<sup>67</sup>

Clarendon's insistence that Palmerston be included within the inner Cabinet bore testimony to the importance of Palmerston's decade-and-a-half spent at the Foreign Office, but Palmerston's inclusion was also a safety device, as Aberdeen explained to the Queen on one occasion:

Unless he [Palmerston] should continue to be a cordial Member of Your Majesty's Government, he may very easily become the leader of the Opposition. Lord Aberdeen is, at this moment, ignorant of his views, and intentions. He has more than once, recently, been thwarted in his endeavour to press a warlike policy upon the Cabinet; and it has been reported to Lord Aberdeen, that he has expressed himself in terms of great hostility. This cannot, perhaps, be avoided, and is only the result of taking different views of the public interest; but it is very essential that Lord Palmerston should have no personal, or private, cause of complaint against Lord Aberdeen.<sup>68</sup>

Nevertheless, even Aberdeen was to find this ultimately unacceptable. Bell has written of the growing dissatisfaction which the Prime Minister felt as he saw the influence Palmerston had over Clarendon,<sup>69</sup> and by the autumn of 1853 Russell, who undoubtedly had ulterior motives in view, wished that Palmerston could, in some

<sup>66</sup> Palmerston to Clarendon, 31 July 1853, Clarendon Deposit, MSS.Clar.dep.c.3, fols 108-09.

<sup>67</sup> Palmerston to Clarendon, 26 Aug. 1853, quoted Maxwell, *Clarendon*, II, p.18

<sup>68</sup> Aberdeen to the Queen, 10 Sept. 1853, quoted Conacher, *The Aberdeen Coalition*, p.127

<sup>69</sup> Bell, *Palmerston*, II, p.90

way, be ejected from the government. Palmerston was an active Home Secretary, but he did not confine himself to domestic labours, and nor was this what influential members of the Cabinet wanted of him. However, Palmerston was not to be the steady counsellor which Aberdeen for one would have liked, but rather he was to seek to press upon the Cabinet a Palmerstonian outlook. The Eastern question brought the problem to the forefront of politics and the nature of the divisions within the British Cabinet did little to prevent the Ottoman business erupting into chaos and war.

#### *The origins of problems in the East*

It has for a long time been commonplace to talk of the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century as moribund, decaying and weak. Without doubt, there was at Constantinople a lesser degree of stability than was to be found, perhaps, in the capital cities of the other Great Powers, but it was not inevitable that the particular sickness of that Empire in the 1850s would drag the others into a costly and damaging conflict.<sup>70</sup> The crisis of 1839-41 had done little to halt the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, nor were antagonisms between the Great Powers of Europe which were centred around the Near East completely overcome. Rivalries were, however, noticeably less acute and the 1840s witnessed something of a rapprochement, most significantly perhaps in the so-called agreement between Russia and Britain concluded in 1844. Whilst the Tsar continued to regard the

<sup>70</sup> A particularly good history of this subject is provided by M.S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774-1923* (London, 1966); see especially pp.110-149 on the Crimean War. An important account may also be found in D.M. Goldfrank, *The Origins of the Crimean War* (London, 1994), although this work does contain flaws in the discussion particularly of domestic conditions, notably in Britain. It is nonetheless excellent in the breadth of its study including useful insights into the workings of governments heretofore little discussed in English language texts, especially Russia. A more interpretative approach, but one which is very important and stimulating is that of G.B. Henderson in his collection, *Crimean War Diplomacy and Other Historical Essays* (Glasgow, 1947).

collapse of the Ottoman Empire as imminent, he was desirous of averting this problem for as long as possible, thus allowing provisions to be made for a stable partition of the territory. The nature of the balance of power meant that Russia would not, indeed could not, achieve this single-handed, but Franco-Russian relations were not conducive to an accord and overtures towards Metternich in 1843 had failed to bring Russia and Austria together on the issue. In Britain, Peel's Foreign Secretary, Aberdeen, had been more receptive to the Tsar's appeals and an agreement between Britain and Russia was forged in the summer of 1844 founded in no small measure upon a mutual dislike of France.<sup>71</sup> In effect it represented little more than a commitment to cooperate in the event of an attack upon, or a collapse of, the Ottoman Empire. There was no discussion of what constituted a genuine threat to Turkey's existence, nor was there any specific discussion of how Ottoman land would be disposed of in such a case. The Tsar, though, was satisfied. He saw to it that the agreement was 'formalised' in what has become known as the Nesselrode Memorandum, and in Britain, Peel and Aberdeen accepted this summary of the summer's dialogue as accurate.

It has been said that the Tsar mistakenly placed too much trust in this agreement and saw the Nesselrode communication as a symbol of a solid alliance. Certainly, the Russians placed a good deal more stock in the understanding than did the British, especially given that, not having been formalised by treaty but rather by more casual means it was not to survive in any meaningful way beyond the life of Peel's government which fell in 1846. As Anderson argues, subsequent events - the revolutions of 1848 for instance - served only to illustrate the great divide which

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<sup>71</sup> Anderson, *The Eastern Question*, p.111

separated Russia and Britain.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, when the dispute arose over the Holy Places in the late 1840s, the Tsar believed he could count on British support and by 1853, with Aberdeen back in office, now as Prime Minister, he perhaps had grounds to feel sanguine. Thus it was that in January 1853 Nicholas sought to revive the 'spirit of 1844' by opening conversations with Sir Hamilton Seymour, the British Ambassador to Russia.

According to Anderson, the Tsar's approaches to Seymour 'provided apparent justification for British distrust by indulging in another venture in personal diplomacy'.<sup>73</sup> Indeed the role of Seymour points to the importance of personalities on both sides in exacerbating the tensions. It was a fundamental aspect of nineteenth century diplomacy that diplomats themselves exercised a good deal of personal influence, and, significantly, in the first half of 1853, according to Gavin Henderson, 'Seymour was ...anti-Russian at a time when the British Cabinet and the Russian Government were still on the most amicable terms: and, presuming that the Czar's assurances contained some real security against Russian aggression, Seymour had ceased to be a suitable minister for the maintenance of cordial relations'.<sup>74</sup> So the British Minister at St. Petersburg was ill-suited to his task and the Tsar had dispatched to Constantinople on what Goldfrank calls a 'mission impossible' to tie Russia and Turkey together against the western Powers, 'the perennially sarcastic, nationalist-minded, lackadaisical Minister of the Marine since 1830, Prince A.S.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, pp.112-114. For example, Britain and France came together to support the Sultan against Russian demands that Polish revolutionaries in Turkey be extradited. Russia did not take kindly to finding the British fleet in the Straits during this crisis. It was yet one more example of how far Britain and Russia were from genuine cooperation over the Near East.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p.118

<sup>74</sup> Henderson, *Crimean War Diplomacy*, p.9

Menshikov, a man with questionable diplomatic credentials'.<sup>75</sup> It did not augur well for a peaceful year in the East.

In London these developments had far-reaching ramifications. The Duke of Argyll believed that there was reason initially to expect unity and firmness within the Cabinet, the Eastern question, he suggested, being the one foreign question which would not tear the new Aberdeen administration apart, pointing especially to Aberdeen's approbation of Palmerston's Eastern policy of 1839-41 as reason enough to trust that 'the basis of our policy in any revival of the Eastern Question rested on maxims of policy on which all the members of that Cabinet had long been thoroughly agreed'.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, however dubious its status, the Nesselrode Memorandum gave the British Cabinet 'no reason to believe that ...[the Tsar] contemplated a different course of policy, we had every right to entertain that unsuspecting confidence in European peace which was undoubtedly the attitude of all our minds during the earlier months of 1853'.<sup>77</sup> Such was the attitude of the Cabinet indeed that in the opening few weeks of 1853, according to Argyll, the Eastern question impinged but little upon its meetings, given the faith placed in Aberdeen and Foreign Secretary Russell and the over-riding concern with the fate of Gladstone's budget. Only Palmerston, suggests Argyll, entertained any sympathy for Turkey although even this was little evident at the time.<sup>78</sup>

Palmerston recognised that this was a question above all of *Realpolitik*, and his Turcophile attitude was dictated largely by his conception of the British national

<sup>75</sup> Goldfrank, *The Origins of the Crimean War*, p.117

<sup>76</sup> Argyll, *Autobiography and Memoirs*, I p.441. Compare this with Muriel Chamberlain's view that the Crimean War was to see, in a sense, 'a disastrous clash between the two traditions, now represented by Aberdeen and Palmerston' (*Pax Britannica*?, p.102).

<sup>77</sup> Argyll, *Autobiography and Memoirs*, I pp.442-43

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, I pp.445-46. Russell was Foreign Secretary until February 1853, at which point he was replaced by Clarendon.

interest. As he wrote to Clarendon in September 1853, 'the activity, spirit & the Energy, moral & Physical, military & political which the Turks have displayed in dealing with their present Crisis, must surely convince any impartial & unprejudiced Person that Turkey is not a dead or dying Body, but that on the Contrary it possesses Powers of Life & national Resources which render it worth maintaining as a useful Element in the European Balance'.<sup>79</sup> In a letter to the same a month later he elucidated further:

We maintain the Integrity & Independence of Turkey not for the Love & affection for the Turks, but because we prefer the existing state of Things there, to any other state of Things which at present wd be humanly possible, and because the Interest political and Commercial of England & of Europe would be dangerously injured by the Destruction of that Integrity and Independence. For these Reasons we have undertaken to defend Turkey against Russia, and we could not sacrifice those great Interests by abandoning Turkey to her Fate merely because the Turkish Govt might not take our advice. ...Things have in truth come to such a Pass that the real Conflict is between Russia on the one Hand & England & France on the other, much more than between Russia & Turkey, & unless England & France are prepared to sink down into the Condition of second Rate Powers they *must* prevail, by negotiation if possible, but by Force of arms if necessary.<sup>80</sup>

Soon foreign policy did come to occupy a central role in politics and not only was Palmerston brought into the inner Cabinet in March, but by late April it is reported that every meeting of the full Cabinet was dominated by foreign affairs. Argyll records that at these meetings Palmerston was usually quiet and passive; that he concurred in the general thrust of the ministry's policy and did not wish to undermine Clarendon.<sup>81</sup> This was partly due to his own standing. It was also, perhaps, the result of Stratford Canning directing affairs on the government's behalf at Constantinople. There is much written on the extent to which Canning must

<sup>79</sup> Palmerston to Clarendon, 12 Sept. 1853, Broadlands Papers, GC/CL/523/enc.1

<sup>80</sup> Palmerston to Clarendon, 14 Oct. 1853, Broadlands Papers, GC/CL/1371/1

<sup>81</sup> Argyll, *Autobiography and Memoirs*, I pp.455-56

shoulder the responsibility for embroiling Britain and indeed Russia and Turkey in war, but little on the way in which this impacted upon Palmerston's own position.

Initially, Stratford found favour with the new government and Clarendon enthused on receipt of his first dispatches from Constantinople, 'We have a real jockey on our horse instead of a stable boy [Colonel Rose whom Canning replaced], and the odds are highest against the Czar'.<sup>82</sup> By May of 1853, however, the lustre was fading and Graham complained that the British ambassador 'is a Bashaw [i.e. a Pasha] - too long accustomed to rule alone. Such tempers and manners are not the pledges or emblems of peace'.<sup>83</sup> He was not the only member of the Cabinet to become frustrated with Stratford.

Throughout the year there was a feeling that Stratford was pursuing his own programme at Constantinople and by November Aberdeen declared, 'I have not the slightest confidence in him, I only feel some curiosity to see how he will contrive to defeat the objects of his government'.<sup>84</sup> Stratford was not necessarily intriguing to undermine the government in London; as he acknowledged himself, in discussing policy in correspondence with ministers, it was his duty to confine himself 'to general intimations, conceiving that all beyond is the special domain of Her Majesty's Government',<sup>85</sup> but his actions did contribute to the divisions and fragmentation of that administration. Meanwhile Clarendon, at least, feared that a perception of Palmerstonian bellicosity within the Cabinet was fuelling Canning's forcefulness at Constantinople, and hoped, in December, that 'Palmerston's

<sup>82</sup> Clarendon to Cowley, 29 April 1853, quoted Goldfrank, *The Origins of the Crimean War*, pp.147-148

<sup>83</sup> Graham to Clarendon, 9 May 1853, quoted Maxwell, *Clarendon*, II, p.12

<sup>84</sup> Aberdeen to Clarendon, 20 Nov. 1853, Aberdeen Papers, Add.Mss.43188. See also J.L. Herkless, 'Stratford, the Cabinet and the Outbreak of the Crimean War', *Historical Journal*, XVIII, 3 (1975), for a fuller discussion of relations between Stratford and the Cabinet.

<sup>85</sup> Stratford Canning (Lord Stratford de Redcliffe) to Clarendon, 3 Feb. 1853, Aberdeen Papers, Add.Mss.43355.

resignation may make Lord Stratford more pacific'.<sup>86</sup> If neither Canning nor Palmerston directly encouraged the other, their outlooks still remained essentially concordant and frequently Stratford's actions were grist to Palmerston's mill, giving him grounds upon which to challenge the foreign policy of the government, which he was to do in conjunction with Russell during 1853.

### iii) The Aberdeen Government and the Eastern Question

#### *1853: Hawks and Doves*

It is important to remember that in most areas other than foreign policy the Aberdeen government enjoyed a particularly successful first year. The Cabinet was united on most issues and wherever divisions did occur, they were not along old party lines. As Aberdeen told Princess Lieven in the autumn, 'We have brought the Session of Parliament to a triumphant close; we have carried many useful and important measures; our majorities were numerous; and although a coalition of very different materials, we have adhered well together. For my part, I think I have done quite enough, but when *chained to the oar* it is difficult to escape'.<sup>87</sup> However, the omission of any reference to questions of foreign policy is striking for in this field there was anything but a sense of the Cabinet adhering well together. The roots of the coalition were exposed as Whigs and Peelites adopted differing stands over foreign policy, or at least over the Eastern question, and Greville recorded the observation made to him by Clarendon that far from the continuity in foreign affairs

<sup>86</sup> Clarendon to Aberdeen, 8 Jan. 1854, Aberdeen Papers, Add.Mss.43188. The quote is Aberdeen's who made this note on the letter.

<sup>87</sup> Aberdeen to Madame Lieven, 8 Sept. 1853, quoted Conacher, *The Aberdeen Coalition*, pp.172-73. See pp.119-20 for Conacher's own observations on the success of the government's first session.

of which Aberdeen had initially spoken, the Foreign Secretary found himself, by the summer of 1853, 'mediating between Aberdeen and Palmerston, whose ancient and habitual ideas of foreign policy are brought by this business into antagonism'.<sup>88</sup> The rivalry between Aberdeen and Palmerston was reflected more widely in the general division between Peelites and Whigs into Doves and Hawks respectively.

This is, of course, a simplification and the split within the Cabinet was not as straightforward as this. During the spring and summer of 1853 the Aberdonian outlook gained an ascendancy within the Cabinet and frequently Palmerston was obliged to back down, as on one occasion in the summer, for example, when Palmerston, who had been advocating a forward policy through the sending of the fleet up to the Bosphorus, admitted that Aberdeen's hesitation to adopt this line was fair and the Prime Minister rejoiced to think that now 'all *polémiques*' should cease between them on the matter.<sup>89</sup> Palmerston, though, had not given up in his attempts to influence foreign policy, and nor for that matter had Russell. To see the Cabinet as neatly divided between Hawkish Whigs and Dove-like Peelites with Aberdeen's approach in the ascendancy overstates the case and fails to convey the nature of the dynamics of the Cabinet over the affairs of the East.

Different members of the government viewed the priorities of the session differently. Aberdeen was concerned to preserve the unity of the Cabinet, to prove that a coalition could succeed, and hopefully to live up to Bagehot's later description of this Cabinet as 'the ablest we have had'. There was a full programme of domestic legislation planned and indeed followed through, and somewhat ironically, as a result of this, it was Gladstone, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who emerged early

<sup>88</sup> C.C.F. Greville, *The Greville Memoirs (third part): A Journal of the Reign of Queen Victoria, from 1852 to 1860* (ed. H. Reeve), 2 vols. (London, 1887), I, p.71 (22 June 1853)

<sup>89</sup> Aberdeen to Palmerston, 15 July 1853, quoted Conacher, *The Aberdeen Coalition*, p.160

on as the strong man in the government.<sup>90</sup> In fact, had the senior members of the Cabinet been drawn into agreement over the Eastern question, foreign affairs would not have scuttled the ministry as they did.

As Aberdeen had himself acknowledged, whilst all foreign policy was guided by national interest, there were differences in the methods and approaches of different Foreign Secretaries. What he had not paid sufficient attention to was the seriousness of this divide. From the very outset, the Aberdeen Cabinet was doomed to fissure and fragmentation, for although there was a consensus even that in large part the Eastern question and its particular interest for Britain was as a balance of power question, there was not, significantly, a common view of what the balance of power meant.

For Aberdeen, preserving the balance of power meant focusing on the congress system of resolving disputes by negotiation. For Palmerston and Russell, whilst not speaking with one voice by any means, a more *Realpolitik* approach of checks and balances was the only way of preserving an equilibrium. Consequently, when Russia claimed rights over Ottoman territories, the Cabinet did not react in unison. There was, throughout the life of the government, a contest between advocates of a forward policy which aimed at the preservation of Turkish independence as a brake on Russian expansionist tendencies, and a more conciliatory approach arguing for a more accommodating attitude towards Russia given that British interests were not directly and materially affected. In terms of

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p.119: In addition to the various fiscal measures which Gladstone proposed, the government was also committed to bringing railways more under governmental control, to reform of universities and of the civil service, and of, course, to parliamentary reform, Russell's own favourite cause.

decision-making within the British Cabinet on matters of foreign policy, 1853 was a year of discord.

Until the autumn of 1853 Aberdeen successfully held the various factions within the Cabinet together. Whilst his views did not have currency all around the table, there was an unwillingness to pull the government apart if this could be avoided and even as late as September, the Prime Minister was able to hold his inner Cabinet together. Early in that month he convened a meeting with Clarendon, Russell and Palmerston, and though the mood was bellicose, Aberdeen's measured response to the situation carried the day. As the Prime Minister told his friend Sir James Graham:

The present state of Eastern affairs was fully discussed, as well as plans for the future. There was no very great difference of opinion, except a strong desire on the part of my three companions to come to a decision that we should enter the Dardanelles, as soon as the state of the weather rendered it necessary to leave Besika Bay. I rejected this suggestion, partly as being premature, and partly because it was a measure of too great importance to be taken without the consent of the whole Cabinet....

Palmerston was not so warlike as Lord John; but neither of them was very unreasonably pugnacious. I thought the manner of both rather constrained.<sup>91</sup>

Furthermore, Aberdeen and Clarendon were able to out-Palmerston Palmerston, presenting him with a *fait accompli* when the Home Secretary had objected to the wording of a despatch to Stratford, asserting that it laid the ground for the abandonment of Turkey, in which case, he argued, 'it is high time that another Government was formed'.<sup>92</sup> Yet, drawing partly on the advice of the Queen, who recognised Palmerston's bullying tactics of old, Clarendon sent the despatch off without attending to the alterations put forward by Palmerston. Palmerston was not insensible of this, and acknowledged that such a pragmatic approach was quite the

<sup>91</sup> Aberdeen to Graham, 4 Sept. 1853, Graham Papers, MS Film 124, Bundle 114

<sup>92</sup> Palmerston to Clarendon, 20 Oct. 1853, quoted Conacher, *The Aberdeen Coalition*, p.204

most appropriate course. 'As your Despatch is gone, it is gone,' he wrote to the Foreign Secretary, 'and I daresay no Harm will come of it, and our future Course will be determined by Events as they arise more than by what may from Time to Time have been written'; adding, by way of avoiding loss of face: 'I can quite imagine that you must have had a hard Task of it to get a Team which is disposed to go so many different ways to agree to any common Pull together'.<sup>93</sup>

Sir James Graham in particular was concerned about the potential impact Palmerston could have on proceedings should he gain ground within the Cabinet, and such fears weighed heavily with Aberdeen, and perhaps also account in part for Clarendon's loyalty to Aberdeen during the first three-quarters of the year. Two letters which Graham addressed to Clarendon illustrate clearly the nature of these concerns, which go to the very root of the government's troubles during these months. In July he wrote that: 'Palmerston has seriously alarmed me by the eagerness and impatience of his tone and language. I am afraid that he may operate unfavorably [sic] on Walewski [the French minister in London] and thro' him on our Ally'.<sup>94</sup> A month later he raised the spectre of domestic troubles:

I always foreboded mischief from a H. of Commons discussion on foreign affairs at this critical juncture. We have a stand-up fight between Cobden and Palmerston - the former the champion of Russia and Christianity - the latter the sworn ally of Turkey and Mahometanism. Both made very able speeches in opposite senses; but both pushed their doctrines to an extreme. Cobden, in the long run, will have England with him; but the Derbyites were enchanted with Palmerston and cheered him to the echo. So did young India, who were most offensive in their language towards Aberdeen. Fortunately it is the last night of the session; and before we meet again the Turkish affair, at least for the present, will probably be adjusted; otherwise the breach on our side of the House would soon spread into an open rupture.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Palmerston to Clarendon, 27 Oct. 1853, Clarendon Deposit, MSS.Clar.dep.c.3, fols 209-12

<sup>94</sup> Graham to Clarendon, 14 July 1853, Clarendon Deposit, MSS.Clar.dep.c.4, fols 178-79

<sup>95</sup> Graham to Clarendon, 16 Aug. 1853, quoted Maxwell, *Clarendon*, II, p.16

Aberdeen had a delicate balancing act to play. Palmerston, and Russell, were they allowed to exercise a commanding influence over the Cabinet would, it was believed, jeopardise the relationship with France; their isolation, however, would also be dangerous as there was a sufficiently large element within Parliament willing to unite under Palmerston should he break away from the coalition. Such a compromise policy served only to weaken the ministry, for in securing what was ultimately only grudging acceptance of Aberdonian policy from the vociferous Whigs, such attempted conciliation caused the policy of the government to become vague and ill-defined.

Palmerston was keen that the government's policy should be clearly directed towards checking the progress of Russia. By the summer of 1853 the Russian threat had become more pronounced. In May Menshikov had demanded of the Porte that Russia should be allowed to guarantee the position of the Orthodox Christians within the Ottoman Empire. Possibly encouraged by Stratford Canning, Turkey had rejected this as establishing a dangerous precedent for unchecked Russian interference in Ottoman domestic affairs. The failure of Menshikov's mission, however, raised the stakes and the prospect of military action by Russia in the form of occupation of the Ottoman Principalities loomed. British warships were dispatched to Besika Bay, just outside the Dardanelles, at the beginning of June in an attempt to avert any potential Russian threat there, and along with a French squadron took up position by the middle of the month. This demonstration of solidarity steeled Turkish resolve, and Russian demands were finally rejected on 16 June. This led inevitably to direct Russian action, and on 3 July Russian forces crossed the Pruth into the Ottoman Empire. No power could afford now to stand down without

loss of face, yet the positions adopted portended a confrontation.<sup>96</sup> Palmerston, prescient of this, urged on his colleagues that the British fleet should be ordered up to the Bosphorus. He was 'confident that this Country expects that we should pursue such a Course, and I cannot believe that we should receive anything but support in pursuing it, from the Party now in Opposition',<sup>97</sup> he told Aberdeen, who replied that he had,

not the least doubt that the country, and the party of Opposition in the House of Commons, would be delighted if we took such a step. But the Country would not look to the consequences, and the Opposition would only anticipate our speedy overthrow. In a case of this kind I dread popular support. On some occasion, when the Athenian Assembly vehemently applauded Alcibiades, he asked if he had said anything particularly foolish!<sup>98</sup>

Such differences lay at the heart of the tensions within the government. Aberdeen distrusted Palmerston's motives and objectivity; Palmerston saw Aberdeen as too hesitant and not sufficiently cavalier. Initially it had appeared that Palmerstonian and Aberdonian policies would work together, fulfilling Argyll's early hopes. In Cabinet discussion, Palmerston frequently raised objections to the wording of diplomatic instructions and Aberdeen evidently felt that he could assuage his colleague's reservations by adopting his suggestions, since they were, as he commented on one occasion, 'not of sufficient importance to make it worth while to contest them; although few of them appear to me to be improvements'.<sup>99</sup> And even Palmerston, for a while, was prepared to give the Prime Minister the benefit of the doubt. In July the Cabinet became the scene of squabbles over the course of policy, centring on the value or otherwise of sending the British fleet up to the Bosphorus, and it was Aberdeen who won the argument and pressed on his colleagues the

<sup>96</sup> Anderson, *The Eastern Question*, pp.120-125

<sup>97</sup> Palmerston to Aberdeen, 4 July 1853, Aberdeen Papers, Add.Mss.43069

<sup>98</sup> Aberdeen to Palmerston, 4 July 1853, Aberdeen Papers, Add.Mss.43069

<sup>99</sup> Aberdeen to Clarendon, 15 July 1853, Aberdeen Papers, Add.Mss.43188

desirability of negotiated peace. 'I acquiesce in Aberdeen's argument', wrote Palmerston, 'that it is better even to submit to Insult than to Endanger the pending negotiation by throwing into it any fresh Element of Difficulty which could afford the Pettifogging & Quibbling Govt with which we have to deal any Pretence for rejecting Proposals in themselves unobjectionable and I am willing to share the Responsibility of such a Course though contrary to my first opinions'.<sup>100</sup>

Had Aberdeen's policy produced favourable results, there is reason to believe the course of British involvement in the Eastern question would have been far happier. However, it did not, and Palmerston, amongst others, was to become increasingly frustrated with this state of affairs. At the time that he was making the concessions to Aberdeen over the fleet in the Bosphorus, Palmerston was in reality far from contented. He argued that Aberdeen was sending out signals which were leading the Russian government on, believing the British government timid and in search of *la paix à tout prix*. Thus the Russians were, he argued, arrogantly pretending to forbid the British and French fleets from frequenting the waters of another Power, over whom the Russians had absolutely no jurisdiction, and who had in fact invited the British and French to be there. 'It is the Robber who declares that he will not leave the House until the Policeman shall have first retired from the Courtyard', he complained.<sup>101</sup> Palmerston was not the only member of the government becoming increasingly frustrated with the progress of affairs and Russell, too, no longer directly concerned with the impact of Palmerston's relations

<sup>100</sup> Palmerston to Clarendon, 15 July 1853, Clarendon Deposit, MSS.Clar.dep.c.3, fols 98-99

<sup>101</sup> Memorandum circulated to members of the Cabinet by Palmerston, 12 July 1853, Broadlands Papers, GC/AB/304

with the Crown, became an ever more enthusiastic advocate of Palmerston's policies.<sup>102</sup>

As the summer waned, however, even Russell and Palmerston grew discordant. 'Palmerston and Lord John Russell', wrote Argyll, 'were very far from being close allies. Sometimes their views coincided, but as often they disagreed, and it was evident from Palmerston's manner that old scores had been by no means forgotten'.<sup>103</sup> Russell, in writing to Clarendon late in September, did not suggest that he sought in conjunction with Palmerston to upset the government, far from it in fact. 'I trust that when I have not wholly approved your course, I have not been wanting in the duty of fighting your battles, & sharing your responsibility', he said, but in thus defending a policy for which he entertained little sympathy 'you have made me feel my degradation more than I ever felt it before'.<sup>104</sup> If Russell did feel that he had been degraded by his association with the government's foreign policy, he did not see the remedy for this condition in an alliance with Palmerston. That

<sup>102</sup> Bell, *Palmerston*, II, p.92

<sup>103</sup> Argyll, *Autobiography and Memoirs*, I p.459. It was also felt outside the government in some quarters that the Cabinet was being torn apart: that Palmerston was pressing his views ever more strongly, but that this did not signal a renewing of the alliance between Palmerston and Russell. The following (edited extract) comes from the *Press* (Disraeli's organ and to which Disraeli contributed many articles himself) of 10 Sept. 1853:

A CARD PARTY AT THE FOREIGN OFFICE

ABERDEEN: Shuffle, Clarendon.

CLARENDON: You are always making me shuffle. It's Palmerston's lead.

PALMERSTON: I wish it was.

LORD JOHN RUSSELL: I've followed your lead, Palmerston.

PALMERSTON: And won the trick. It's a way people have who do as I bid them. If somebody I know had trumped Menshikoff's ultimatum with Dundas's Broadside, as I advised, we four should not be sitting in a back office in the first week of September instead of shooting partridges. However, we won't talk of that, or the Premier will go revoking to the damage of Clarendon's peace of mind.

ABERDEEN: I wish ye'd just play. Dinna talk so much.

PALMERSTON: You never see me put out.

ABERDEEN (spitefully): Not since Christmas twelvemonth.

PALMERSTON (laughing): Very good, very good indeed. Who says the old gentleman's memory is failing? Christmas had a February after it, hadn't it, Russell?

RUSSELL: Never mind. You play the deuce?

PALMERSTON: I did, though I ought not to say so.

<sup>104</sup> Russell to Clarendon, 23 Sept. 1853, Clarendon Deposit, MSS.Clar.dep.c.3, fols 425-27

Palmerston had recommended a policy which the Cabinet had approved at this time, for example, cut little ice with Russell.<sup>105</sup> Not that Russell and Palmerston were enemies, but rather they had not combined to counter Aberdonian foreign policy, sharing only a desire to change the government's outlook. Palmerston saw little improvement in the conduct of affairs as the weeks passed, and was to write scathingly to protest about the weak and lacklustre leadership of Aberdeen: 'I will confess to you in Confidence', he wrote to Clarendon, 'that the Language I have heard on this matter in our Cabinet Discussions has often tried my Patience and led me to the Conclusion that we are in one Respect at least like Turkey, & have also our 'wretched' Pasha'.<sup>106</sup> Thus two of the government's chief sources of strength and inspiration, Palmerston and Russell, were dissatisfied with the ministry's approach to the most important issue of the day.

The chief problem of this period was that Aberdeen's policy was inadequate and neither Russell nor Palmerston had the ability or the desire to push the point too far, offering only a sporadic and piece-meal alternative foreign policy. In the middle of everything was Clarendon, who found these competing factions within the government frustrating and problematic as he sought to strike a balance between them. In early October, Clarendon complained to Aberdeen that the 'difficulty is very great of reconciling the opposite views held in the Cabt & of satisfying my own notions of moderation & firmness'.<sup>107</sup> From Sir Charles Wood, he was 'only too happy to receive your opinions for I feel the enormous responsibility of acting at this most critical moment without the entire Cabt', lamenting further that, 'no one but myself can have an idea of what I go through in endeavouring to reconcile the

<sup>105</sup> Russell to Aberdeen, 24 Sept. 1853, Aberdeen Papers. Add.Mss.43067

<sup>106</sup> Palmerston to Clarendon, 14 Oct. 1853, Clarendon Deposit, MSS.Clar.dep.c.3, fols 187-92

<sup>107</sup> Clarendon to Aberdeen, 8 Oct. 1853, Aberdeen Papers, Add.Mss.43188

discordant views of Abn., J.R. & Palmn. but I never end by writing or doing exactly what I myself approve'.<sup>108</sup>

Aberdeen liked to imagine that he was master of his administration. He remained blind to the fragmentation of his Cabinet and when reporting on a meeting during which the Eastern question had been discussed on 7 October for instance, he told the Queen that although the 'meeting was very long, and considerable difference of opinion prevailed in the course of the discussion', he had ultimately the satisfaction of seeing that 'there was such an agreement as ensured a certain degree of unanimity'.<sup>109</sup> The royal couple were not convinced, however. A letter from Aberdeen to Graham which had been submitted to the Queen revealed quite clearly the divisions within the Cabinet,<sup>110</sup> and following an interview with Graham, it seemed to the Queen and Prince 'evident that Lord Aberdeen was, against his better judgement, consenting to a course of policy which he inwardly condemned, that his desire to maintain unanimity at the Cabinet led to concessions which by degrees altered the whole character of the policy, while he held out no hope of being able permanently to secure agreement'.<sup>111</sup>

This failure to pursue a consistent and effective line on foreign policy gave little cause for optimism, particularly when in October matters came to a head. On the 4th, Turkey declared war on Russia. With no room left for vacillation, these

<sup>108</sup> Clarendon to Wood, 20 Oct. 1853, Hickleton Papers, Brotherton Library, Leeds University (microfilm) A4.57

<sup>109</sup> Aberdeen to Queen, 7 Oct. 1853, *LQV*, II, pp.551-52

<sup>110</sup> Although the letter sought to play down the differences, that they were described at all is significant. In reporting the course of a Cabinet summoned to discuss the Eastern question, Aberdeen wrote: 'The aspect of the Cabinet was, on the whole, very good. Gladstone, active and energetic for Peace; Argyll, Herbert, C. Wood, and Granville, all in the same sense. Newcastle, not quite so much so, but good; Lansdowne, not so warlike as formerly; Lord John warlike enough, but subdued in tone; Palmerston urged his views perseveringly, but not disagreeably. The Chancellor said little, but was cordially peaceful. Molesworth was not present, there having been some mistake in sending the notice' (Aberdeen to Graham, 8 Oct. 1853, Aberdeen Papers, Add.Mss.43191).

<sup>111</sup> Memorandum by Albert, 10 Oct. 1853, *LQV*, II, pp.552-54

developments in the Near East provoked important shifts within the British Cabinet.

From Turin, Minto viewed the progress of events with little satisfaction:

There is no doubt I fear that the feeble course of the English Government in its dealing with the Turkish question has tended greatly to lower us in the estimation of other nations and to deprive us of much of the influence we might have. For the impression is very general that the Aberdeenian [sic] policy prevails with us & that our aid is no longer to be counted on in the cause of freedom or independence. It will require some emphatic display of vigour to remove this impression & restore our old reputation.<sup>112</sup>

There was no doubt in Minto's mind that a 'higher tone' and 'more decided measures at an earlier period' would have prevented the Eastern question from descending into the troubled condition it was in by the autumn of 1853.<sup>113</sup> It was a view widely held within the Cabinet as well, where all members felt that a firmer and more decided line was needed. A few continued to believe that Aberdeen's plans for negotiated peace still desirable,<sup>114</sup> but the heavyweights were beginning to see the value of a more aggressive Palmerstonian approach. Certainly Clarendon came to see Palmerston as the prime source of advice and support during the course of this month.<sup>115</sup> And perhaps even more ominous for the future of the government, Graham noted that: 'The reunion of Ld John and Palmerston is certainly formidable; but much will after all depend on the righteousness of the Cause and on the purity of motives and of conduct. It is premature to form even an opinion: it would be most

<sup>112</sup> Minto, Journal, 8 Oct. 1853, Minto Papers, MS 12000

<sup>113</sup> Minto, Journal, 7 Nov. 1853, Minto Papers, MS 12000

<sup>114</sup> Wood, for example, wrote to Russell in December: 'Now I hold it to be the worst & most discreditable course of conduct to alter a course once deliberately adopted. We must I think steadily pursue the attempt to settle by negotiation. We must follow up the attempt which we have made to bring the two parties to a meeting in the presence of a conference. If we fail in that, a change of circumstances will have taken place which may justify, & even call for a change of conduct....' (Wood to Russell, 13 Dec. 1853, Hickleton Papers, A4.56.5).

<sup>115</sup> Clarendon to Palmerston, 20 Oct. 1853, Broadlands Papers, GC/CL/540/1-5. The letter opens: 'I must ask you to read these papers & to give me your opinion for I am not justified in acting singly upon such important matters, & my difficulties are of course much increased by the different views held in the Cabinet as to the best mode of proceeding....'

unwise to come to any decision'. Premature and unwise or not, even Aberdeen himself was forced to concede that Palmerston's interpretation of events had some merit. War in the Ottoman Empire forced a re-evaluation: 'It is very true that I may formerly have regarded with the utmost incredulity *the possibility of war between England and Russia* but for some time past,' he told Palmerston, 'I have seen the desire for war increase so much, as to lead me to think that it is but too probable. At present therefore, *vous prêchez le Converti*'.<sup>116</sup> Aberdeen was not the only proselyte and a letter from Clarendon to the Prime Minister confirmed the ascendancy of Palmerston's opinions during the course of October.<sup>117</sup>

The fluctuations within the government of October did not herald a new era of stability and clarity, however. Throughout November, divisions within the Cabinet grew ever more pronounced, and the split between Clarendon and Aberdeen particularly served to undermine the solidity of the government at this critical juncture.<sup>118</sup> Heretofore, the majority of the Cabinet had, generally, concurred in the Aberdonian line, and although it had not been terribly effective, it had not been especially dangerous either and opponents of this course had suppressed their objections to a large extent. Now, however, the Palmerstonian approach was increasingly attractive, but there was not the flexibility amongst the Aberdonians to adapt. The government in late 1853 therefore was characterised by indecision and faction, and by the end of the year the pretence of a united Cabinet was impossible to maintain, and the coalition which had initially promised so much descended into rivalries between its component parts. Whilst Aberdeen's faith in Clarendon had been somewhat restored, there was no denying that important divisions still existed.

<sup>116</sup> Aberdeen to Palmerston, 5 Oct. 1853, Aberdeen Papers, Add.Mss.43069

<sup>117</sup> Clarendon to Aberdeen, 4 Nov. 1853, Aberdeen Papers, Add.Mss.43188

<sup>118</sup> See Conacher, *The Aberdeen Coalition*, pp.207-212

Russell had let Aberdeen know that he did not know what the Prime Minister aimed at; 'I say the same of him,' Aberdeen told Clarendon, adding, 'The only real explanation is that which I have already given you, viz: that he intends war, and I intend peace'.<sup>119</sup>

By December the government's prospects appeared even more bleak. On the 16th, the Peelite members of the Cabinet - Aberdeen, Graham, Newcastle and Gladstone - met at the Admiralty to discuss the Eastern question and the course to be pressed upon the rest of the Cabinet the following day, thus further establishing the Peelites as a distinct group within the ministry.<sup>120</sup> At the meeting the next day Aberdeen believed that everything went off well, evidently the solidarity amongst the Peelites had given him renewed confidence. Russell, though, was less pleased. 'I confess I was surprised & mortified...!', he wrote, 'it is obvious I cannot trust to any compromise, & must henceforth state fully my own views in the Cabinet and press for a positive decision. If it is against me I must consider what is due to my own character & the reputation of the country'.<sup>121</sup>

However, Palmerston was now 'out' of the government. Aberdeen took this as an opportunity to break what ties there might have been between Russell and Palmerston, for whilst Russell and Palmerston might only have been allies of convenience, they were nonetheless united in their desire to upset the government's course. However, alone they were unlikely to be able to achieve this, certainly of the two Russell was not well-placed to supplant Aberdeen, and Aberdeen used the

<sup>119</sup> Aberdeen to Clarendon, 3 Dec. 1853, Clarendon Deposit, MSS.Clar.dep.c.4, fol 35

<sup>120</sup> Conacher, *The Aberdeen Coalition*, p.238

<sup>121</sup> Russell to Graham [?], 18 Dec. 1853, quoted Conacher, *The Aberdeen Coalition*, p.239. This was not the first time Russell had been unhappy with the Cabinet discussion of foreign affairs. Only a little over a week before this episode, he had written to Graham to say: 'I cannot help telling you that I was sorely disappointed at the result of the Cabinet of yesterday....' (Russell to Graham, 9 Dec. 1853, Graham Papers, MS. Film 124, Bundle 115).

opportunity to appease Russell. As Graham explained to Lord John: 'I can bear witness to Ld Aberdeen's constant and anxious desire to act in concert with you on Foreign Affairs to the utmost limit consistent with his strong sense of public duty. It would be a great calamity, if there were any serious misunderstanding in spite of such a friendly disposition: I cannot believe that it will occur'.<sup>122</sup>

*Palmerston's resignation and the rivalry with Russell*

Palmerston had made no secret of his opposition to Russell's various plans for Reform. Throughout his career he remained a staunch opponent of franchise extension, and certainly regarded the 1832 Act as 'final', yet Reform became again a current issue in December 1853. Whilst British participation in the war in the Near East was looking increasingly likely, it was not inevitable, and there was a return within the government to some consideration of domestic questions and particularly of franchise reform, if only, as Albert suggested, 'pour les beaux yeux de Master Johnny'.<sup>123</sup> Palmerston claimed he could not tolerate membership of an administration not only committed to, but now actively pursuing, the Reform issue. In a letter to Lansdowne, he explained that he could no longer bring himself to serve the government. Despite having 'Matters in Hand which I should much wish to bring to a Conclusion', at the Home Office and believing that he could offer a valuable counter-point in the Cabinet to those advocates of a foreign policy injurious 'to the Interests & Dignity of the Country', he concluded that he could not 'consent to stand forward as one of the authors and supporters of John Russells sweeping

<sup>122</sup> Graham to Russell, 20 Dec. 1853, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/11B

<sup>123</sup> Memorandum by Prince Albert, 16 Dec. 1853, quoted J. Prest, *Lord John Russell* (London, 1972), p.361

alterations'.<sup>124</sup> This move caused great consternation and Prince Albert wrote from Osborne to Aberdeen urging him to seek an accommodation with Palmerston. Not only did Palmerston have a legitimate departmental right to offer criticism of the proposed Reform measure, but it was important also 'to balance the probable value of the modification with the risk of allowing Lord Palmerston to put himself at the head of the Opposition Party, entailing as it does the possibility of his forcing himself back upon ...[the Queen] as leader of that Party'.<sup>125</sup> Accordingly, Palmerston's objections were considered by Lord John and Graham as well as Aberdeen, but despite 'a sincere desire to ...meet your views, and if possible obviate your objections', they could not avoid concluding that, 'they appear to be so serious as to strike at the most essential principles of the measure. Under these circumstances, we fear it would be impossible to make such alterations as could be expected to afford you satisfaction'.<sup>126</sup> Palmerston asked then that his resignation be placed before her Majesty and a few days later, once Palmerston's resignation had become public knowledge, Albert wrote that there could 'be no doubt that Lord Palmerston will at once try to put himself at the head of the late Protectionist party'.<sup>127</sup>

It was a source of some surprise to certain observers that Reform should cause such turmoil within the government. Shaftesbury felt that the 'indifference in many cases, & the antipathy in others, to Reform is singular; not a meeting, not a letter, not a speech, scarcely an article in behalf of it!'.<sup>128</sup> Strange indeed, it seemed,

<sup>124</sup> Palmerston to Lansdowne, 8 Dec. 1853, Lansdowne Papers Lans. 3/42, fol 39; also copy: Broadlands Papers, GC/LA/111

<sup>125</sup> Prince Albert to Aberdeen, 9 Dec. 1853, *LQV*, II, pp.568-69

<sup>126</sup> Aberdeen to Palmerston, 14 Dec. 1853, Broadlands Papers, GC/AB/302

<sup>127</sup> Memorandum by Prince Albert, 16 Dec. 1853, *LQV*, II, pp.569-70

<sup>128</sup> Shaftesbury Diaries, 21 Dec. 1853, Broadlands Papers, SHA/PD/6

that Palmerston should have taken this opportunity to turn his back on the government, but, there was a considerable body of feeling that Reform was not the issue at stake. To the majority of his colleagues, Palmerston's resignation appeared to be motivated by considerations of foreign policy: certainly they believed that his going would have ramifications for that area of business.

Earl Grey, who disclosed in his diary that though 'it seems to be given as from authority that Palmerston's resignat[i]o[n] had reference only to the plan of Reform the world will believe (as I confess I shall too) that it has some connect[i]o[n] at least with foreign politics',<sup>129</sup> was not alone in this view. Clarendon wrote immediately to Cowley, admitting that whilst the resignation was said to be founded on the Reform question, and had nothing to do with the Eastern question, 'we may swear that till we are black in the face and nobody will believe either at home or abroad'. Not only did the Foreign Secretary regret the loss of a sincere friend and an 'invaluable colleague' on the Eastern question, but he feared that, 'our difficulties abroad will be increased by the notion that we shall be more disposed than hitherto to tolerate Russian encroachment on Turkey or Russian insolence to England'. He pressed upon Cowley the importance of not allowing Princess Lieven to report to the Tsar that, 'Palmerston's resignation is a letter of licence to the Czar, or that there will be any change of policy here or less union with France'.<sup>130</sup> Whilst he acknowledged politely Palmerston's help over the past year, Clarendon could not help worrying about the future prospects of the government.<sup>131</sup> Lord John Russell concurred: 'It increases all our difficulties, at home and abroad'.<sup>132</sup> As Charles Wood observed:

129

Grey, Journal, 17 Dec. 1853, Grey Papers, 3rd Earl, C3/17

130

Clarendon to Cowley, 16 Dec. 1853, quoted Maxwell, *Clarendon*, II, p.35

131

Clarendon to Palmerston, 14 Dec. 1853, Broadlands Papers, GC/CL/549

132

Russell to Clarendon, 15 Dec. 1853, Clarendon Deposit, MSS.Clar.dep.c.3, fols 562-63

'Palmerston out of the Govt wd lead or support such an attack [on the government's foreign policy], & many of those who wd shrink from voting against us on Reform itself, wd gladly & eagerly avail themselves of the opportunity of voting against us on such a question, not sorry to ward off or postpone Reform by so doing'.<sup>133</sup>

To Aberdeen, Palmerston's resignation appeared to present a good opportunity to remove a troublesome interference over foreign affairs. At the outset, Graham had impressed upon the Prime Minister the need to steal this march on Palmerston. The letter which Palmerston had initially addressed to Lansdowne and which had come into the possession of Aberdeen, Graham pointed out, 'touches very lightly on the Eastern question and puts Reform prominently forward. For this reason it suits our purpose best; and I would advise strongly, that you should confine your observations in answer principally, if not exclusively, to that letter, and make the difference on the Foreign Question secondary in your estimation'.<sup>134</sup> When the 'mis-understanding' was exposed and Palmerston was allowed to withdraw his resignation - on the grounds that he had framed it on an erroneous assumption that a definite decision had been reached regarding Reform - the Prime Minister was keen to keep foreign affairs out of the picture as far as possible. Palmerston had let it be known that his decision to return to the government was due in no small part to a Cabinet decision made in his absence to accede to French proposals about sending the fleets.<sup>135</sup> Aberdeen welcomed Palmerston's approval, but remarked pointedly:

<sup>133</sup> Wood to Russell, 25 Dec. 1853, Hickleton Papers, A4.56

<sup>134</sup> Graham to Aberdeen, 10 Dec. 1853, Aberdeen Papers, Add.Mss.43191

<sup>135</sup> Palmerston wrote to Lansdowne on 22 December 1853 that: 'The Decision of the Cabinet to accede to the French Proposal, which I took Care to have confirmed by Walewsky before I wrote my Letter to Aberdeen places our future Course in regard to Turkish affairs in a proper Direction & was a great Inducement to me to comply with the wishes which had been so strongly expressed to me [by Newcastle, Gladstone, Sidney Herbert, Molesworth and Charles Wood, that Palmerston should continue as a member of the government]' (Broadlands Papers, GC/LA/112). Similarly to Aberdeen, he addressed the following: 'You will perhaps allow me to add that the Decision which I am informed the Cabinet came to yesterday to accede to the Proposal of the French Government, whereby the

'Although not connected with the cause of your resignation, I am glad to find that you approve of a recent decision of the Cabinet, with respect to the British and French fleets, adopted in your absence'. Nor could he resist adding, 'I feel assured you will have learnt with pleasure that whether absent, or present, the Government are duly careful to preserve from all inquiry the interests and dignity of the country'.<sup>136</sup>

To read Palmerston's resignation of December 1853 simply as a disagreement over Reform is erroneous - whether Palmerston genuinely resigned over this issue alone is almost immaterial, for the perception was that the Eastern question was just as, if not more, important - and yet also, to see it as a clever manoeuvre over foreign affairs, similarly misses the essence of the matter. Palmerston's resignation was, in a sense, a personal contest; it was as much about a rivalry between Palmerston and Russell as between Palmerston and the Aberdeen government.

Heretofore, Palmerston and Russell had acted in unison inasmuch as they had both opposed the general Aberdonian tone of British foreign policy. However, whilst there was indeed a genuine concern with the issues at stake, both were fully aware that this government was a coalition, comprising two (if not more) different and potentially antagonistic factions. Newcastle's earlier hopes that the terms 'Whig' and 'Peelite' be dropped in favour of something of a more general 'liberal' nature had not been fulfilled. The differences between the groups had been subsumed by the coalition, but not extirpated, scarcely even marginalised and, whatever this might mean for the stability of the Cabinet as a whole, it also kept alive questions about

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British and French Squadrons will have the Command of the Black Sea, greatly enters into the Considerations which have led me to address this Letter to you' (Palmerston to Aberdeen, 23 Dec. 1853, Aberdeen Papers, Add.Mss.43069).

<sup>136</sup> Aberdeen to Palmerston, 24 Dec. 1853, Aberdeen Papers, Add.Mss.43069

political leadership. By virtue of having led a Whig government, and a Whig opposition, as well as leading the Whigs into the Aberdeen administration, Russell was, whether *de jure* or *de facto*, the head of the parliamentary Whig faction. Palmerston, however, remembered all too well the experiences of the late 1840s and early 1850s, and he had little doubt that only circumstance, and not ability, deprived him of this position. Russell, as a subordinate member of the Aberdeen ministry, feared that his standing was undermined and that he risked losing his hold over the great Whig legacy. Both, then, had cause to make whatever political capital they could during the life of the government.

There were fears throughout the life of this government that Palmerston and Russell sought to, or at least might, leave the government and supplant it. Aberdeen's initial intimations that he would renounce the lead in favour of Russell, 'when the time was right', had raised Russell's expectations, and the failure to fulfil them did little to fortify the government. Consequently, the tussles between Palmerston, Russell and the Cabinet over foreign policy and the Eastern question, were significant not only for their own sake, but also as symptoms of a struggle, never made explicit, between Russell and Palmerston for the leadership of the Whigs and Liberals at Westminster. Neither could afford the charge of wilfully engineering the overthrow of the Aberdeen government and needed an issue which would neatly polarise the Cabinet and if the ministry fell as a result (not something to be aimed at straight away), they had to appear as the government's saviour, not the root of its downfall.

Russell appears to have been the first to attempt to use foreign affairs to this end. As Aberdeen wrote to Graham in September 1853:

...it seems to me pretty clear that Lord John is determined to go. It is probable that on reflection, he found that the intention of leaving a Government with whom he entirely agreed, and a place, which however exceptional, was of his own making, would put him in a ridiculous point of view, and was in fact an untenable position. It was therefore necessary to have some ground of difference; and this Turkish affair presented one, out of which some capital might be made into the bargain. He has made a bad hit this time; but he may be more successful on the next occasion.<sup>137</sup>

However, Russell had not the means to make a more successful hit. Whilst he was popular amongst the Whig grandees, it was Palmerston to whom those outside the present government - and upon whose support a replacement would draw - looked for inspiration. He, too, however was obliged to await a suitable opportunity.

The re-introduction of Reform to the political arena did much to appease Russell, giving him an opportunity to pursue a policy to which he had a long-term commitment and with which his name was clearly and commonly identified. The same was not to be said of Palmerston, as his correspondence of December 1853 demonstrates and in this sense he did resign over Reform. Nevertheless, both Reform and foreign policy were central and whilst Palmerston could have resigned exclusively over Eastern affairs, have carried the country with him, undermined Aberdeen's government and placed himself at the head of the list of possible replacement Prime Ministers, he probably would still remain politically shackled to Russell. However, in making Reform the cause of his resignation, whilst allowing foreign affairs to be cited in the country at large, Palmerston could secure popularity for removing himself from an unpopular government, without giving Russell an opportunity to join him in the venture and share in the credit.<sup>138</sup>

Palmerston called the government's bluff: the Cabinet could not afford to allow him to stand outside the government, and Martin is perhaps right that

<sup>137</sup> Aberdeen to Graham, 22 Sept. 1853, Graham Papers, MS Film 124, Bundle 114

<sup>138</sup> Martin, *The Triumph of Lord Palmerston*, pp. 159-60

Palmerston would have failed had he attempted to take the lead of the Tories in opposition,<sup>139</sup> but he had made, as Aberdeen saw early on, 'a very dextrous move'.<sup>140</sup> He had established an ascendancy over the rest of the government regarding the Eastern question - that the rest of the Cabinet wanted him back on the grounds that he posed a serious threat in this field (above and perhaps to the exclusion of all others) is evidence of this<sup>141</sup> - but by implication in so doing he had also stolen a march on Lord John Russell. He was shown to be, as he had always liked to believe, the real strong man within the government. The point was not lost on Prince Albert:

Now Palmerston is again in his seat and all is quiet. The best of the joke is, that, because he went out, the Opposition journals extolled him to the skies, in order to damage the Ministry, and now the Ministerial journals have to do so, in order to justify the reconciliation, ...I fear the whole affair will damage the Ministry seriously. Palmerston gulps down, it is true, all his objections to the Reform Bill (which is to be altered in none of its essentials), but he will lead the world to believe that it is to *him* concessions have been made.<sup>142</sup>

Palmerston was not yet *l'inévitable*, but in 1854 as the problems of the Eastern question deepened, and Britain was plunged into war, he was, arguably, *juste ce qu'il fallait*.

#### *1854: Palmerston's ascendancy within the government*

With Palmerston back in, it was hoped that the government might now survive. Earl Grey was not at all sanguine about the prospects for harmony within the Cabinet as letters from friends including Ellice and Charles Wood persuaded him, 'that there

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, p.160

<sup>140</sup> Aberdeen to Graham, 10 Dec. 1853, quoted Conacher, *The Aberdeen Coalition*, p.221

<sup>141</sup> Palmerston reported to Lansdowne that several members of the Cabinet actively sought an arrangement at this time with the aim of securing Palmerston's return to the government. Primarily these ministers included: Newcastle, Gladstone, Sidney Herbert, Molesworth and Sir Charles Wood (Palmerston to Lansdowne, 22 Dec. 1853, Broadlands Papers, GC/LA/112).

<sup>142</sup> Prince Albert, 24 Dec. 1853 [?], quoted Bell, *Palmerston*, II, p.101

can never be a good understanding again between Palmerston & some of his colleagues, & it will be difficult indeed for a Cabinet so avowedly divided to go on'.<sup>143</sup> Good understanding or not, however, Palmerston was to exert considerable influence over the course of affairs throughout 1854.

In the opening few weeks of the new year, the likelihood of Britain becoming involved in the fighting in the Near East became ever greater. At the very beginning of the year, Clarendon wrote to his wife, 'for my part, I am getting *in favor of war*'.<sup>144</sup> Aberdeen continued to hope for peace,<sup>145</sup> but his hold over Cabinet opinion was diminishing. Even those members of the government heretofore identified as being on the peace wing of the Cabinet - namely Gladstone, Argyll, and Granville - by January were endeavouring to justify British participation in the war, should it become necessary.<sup>146</sup> Aberdeen's growing separation from his ministers is perhaps implicit in his admission to Clarendon that war did not seem inevitable, 'unless indeed we are determined to have it, which perhaps for aught I know, may be the case'.<sup>147</sup>

Fresh from his 'resignation triumph', Palmerston assumed a central role in the direction of foreign policy at this crucial moment. Significantly, even Russell was drawn to conclude a letter to Clarendon on the nature of Russia's intentions and possible responses of France and Britain with the observation: 'Mighty questions these, & I should like to hear Palmerston's opinion upon them; no one sees so

<sup>143</sup> Grey, Journal, 31 Dec. 1853, Grey Papers, 3rd Earl, C3/17

<sup>144</sup> Clarendon to Lady Clarendon, 2 Jan. 1854, Maxwell, *Clarendon*, II, p.37

<sup>145</sup> For example, on 12 January, he wrote to the Queen regarding proposals for the course of action of the European allies: 'Should a real desire exist to arrive at peace, on both sides, these difficulties of form [about the proposals] may be overcome' (Quoted, Conacher, *The Aberdeen Coalition*, p.245).

<sup>146</sup> Conacher, *The Aberdeen Coalition*, pp.261-63

<sup>147</sup> Aberdeen to Clarendon, 12 Feb. 1854, Clarendon Deposit, MSS.Clar.dep.c14, fol 12

quickly & so clearly in these matters'.<sup>148</sup> It was Palmerston who took it upon himself in March when a declaration of war appeared imminent to lay out formally the aims of British involvement in the war in which his 'beau Ideal' aimed at a far-reaching re-casting of Europe designed not only to preserve peace and under-pin the balance of power, but also to add to British prestige,<sup>149</sup> and Clarendon observed in May that he was 'perpetually making new maps of Europe'.<sup>150</sup>

The great problem was that, even with Palmerston attempting to drive the Cabinet on, and a disposition within the Cabinet to pursue the war (which Britain entered on 27-28 March), there still remained a lack of leadership from Aberdeen. From the initial approach of war, Aberdeen had indulged in morbid reflections on the state of affairs, and Russell observed that 'the late meetings of the Cabinet have shown so much indecision, & there is so great a reluctance to adopt those measures which would force the Emperor of Russia to consent to a speedy peace that I can feel no such confidence. Indeed the sooner I can be relieved from my share of the responsibility the better'.<sup>151</sup> To Clarendon, Russell argued that the 'great want of all is a head of the English Cabinet', concluding later in the year that, 'I by no means admit that he [Aberdeen] has at any time adequately performed the duties of Prime Minister'.<sup>152</sup> Shaftesbury, in August, observed that the 'Government within & without weak as sour milk; strong in nothing but the war',<sup>153</sup> but even this would appear generous. Those on the inside were becoming increasingly bitter about the

<sup>148</sup> Russell to Clarendon, 15 Jan. 1854, Clarendon Deposit, MSS.Clar.dep.c.15, fols 311-12

<sup>149</sup> Memorandum by Palmerston, 19 March 1854, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/11/C, fols 267-68

<sup>150</sup> Clarendon to Russell, 7 May 1854, G.P. Gooch (ed.), *The Later Correspondence of Lord John Russell, 1840-1878* 2 vols. (London, 1925), II, p.164

<sup>151</sup> Russell to Aberdeen, 5 May 1854, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/11D

<sup>152</sup> Russell to Clarendon, 12 May 1854, Clarendon Deposit, MSS.Clar.dep.c.15, fols 485-88;

Russell to Clarendon, 12 Oct. 1854, Clarendon Deposit, MSS.Clar.dep. c.15, fols 679-80

<sup>153</sup> Shaftesbury Diaries, 9 Aug. 1854, Broadlands Papers, SHA/PD/6

government's lack of direction. The Duke of Argyll, typical of many of his colleagues, wrote:

What I dread is our going on without some purpose more definitely recognised - afraid of public opinion because we do not try to lead or guide it;- shy of each other because we do not know exactly each others' views. I do not believe that there is any difference which will prevent a practical conclusion, provided we try to come to it. But there is quite enough variety of *tendency* & of *feeling*, if we do not try, to keep our language various - our course unsteady - perhaps I ought rather to say, to prevent any definite course from being shaped at all. We shall then be at the mercy of tides; and our motion becomes a mere drift.<sup>154</sup>

At Court, too, the erstwhile favourite was losing favour, as Albert told Stockmar in March: 'Even yet Aberdeen cannot rise to the level of the situation, the war in his eyes "like a civil war, like a war between England and Scotland"!'.<sup>155</sup>

These problems within the government served only to emphasise the importance of Palmerston remaining within its bounds, particularly now that, as Prince Albert observed, 'the Country' thought him 'the only able War Minister'.<sup>156</sup> Palmerston's advocacy throughout 1853 of a firm line towards Russia had identified him very clearly with the 'war party' and consequently it was now in a way inevitable that he should enjoy an ascendancy within the Cabinet as a result, if only because his interpretation of events had been borne out. Now, however, he was seen as the government's ablest candidate for the post of war minister and this allowed him to gain an ascendancy over Russell.<sup>157</sup> With Britain fighting in the war, arguments over foreign policy gave way to concern over how to manage the war itself. With

<sup>154</sup> Argyll to Clarendon, 25 Oct. 1854, Clarendon Deposit, MSS.Clar.dep.c.14, fols 706-15

<sup>155</sup> G.B. Henderson, *Crimean War Diplomacy*, p.72. As late as October 1853, Graham had reported to Aberdeen from Balmoral: 'One one thing you may rely, and that is, the utmost support, which the Crown can give. While you are willing to fight the battle and to remain at the Head of Affairs, I am confident, that the man does not live, who can supplant you in Royal Favor. What is far better than Favor, you possess a willing and well-grounded Confidence' (Graham to Aberdeen, 8 Oct. 1853, Aberdeen Papers, Add.Mss.43191).

<sup>156</sup> Memorandum by Prince Albert, 10 April 1854, *LQV*, III, pp.27-28

<sup>157</sup> This is probably why he was 'furious' that Newcastle was to be War Secretary in June 1854: see Malmesbury, *Memoirs*, I, pp.435-436

unprecedented press coverage of the conflict, the conduct of the military campaigns was a matter of immediate concern and belief in Palmerston's ability to direct the war was recognised far and wide, from the Court to the popular press. Russell, by contrast, although during 1853 a consistent advocate of a more assertive foreign policy was now being left behind. As Lord Minto, who had discussed matter with Russell privately recorded:

He is almost without support in the Cabinet. On great questions of foreign policy indeed Lansdowne, Palmerston and he, and I may add Granville, heartily agree, and in recent questions some of the Peelite members of the Cabinet entirely go with them. But as regards general support of him individually as the head of their party he can count upon none I think except Granville & I believe the Chancellor, & probably now George Grey, but on questions of foreign affairs the latter will bring him weakness rather than strength, and his most wretched speech at his election at Morpeth, as well as his conversation since has greatly lowered the estimate of the value of his accession to the government.<sup>158</sup>

Russell undermined his own position in the course of 1854, however, by persisting in making personal attacks the core of his political endeavours. Throughout the year, although himself becoming frustrated and disappointed with Aberdeen's lack of leadership, Clarendon defended the Prime Minister against Russell's attacks, accusing Russell of disloyalty and arguing that disparaging Aberdeen would not alleviate the government's problems.<sup>159</sup> Russell's mistake was to persevere in personal attacks on Aberdeen which became more frequent, almost comically so, Prince Albert even being moved to arrange a special file, entitled 'Concerning the part which Lord John Russell took in breaking up Lord Aberdeen's Governmt, Nov 1854-Feby 1855'.<sup>160</sup>

<sup>158</sup> Minto, Journal, 30 June 1854, Minto Papers, MS 12001

<sup>159</sup> See Conacher, *The Aberdeen Coalition*, p.492

<sup>160</sup> Henderson, *Crimean War Diplomacy*, p.34

Russell did much to weaken his own position and Palmerston capitalised on this. Palmerston was assisted by the general lack of vitality among his colleagues. On the Cabinet's decision to order Raglan to lay siege to Sebastopol at the end of June, for example, Russell claimed that, 'the expedition had occupied the anxious thoughts of the members of the Cabinet for several months and that it had been discussed very carefully and maturely', but he did not deny the claim made by Kinglake in *The Invasion of the Crimea* that the ministers slept whilst the despatch was read out to them by Newcastle.<sup>161</sup> In fact, such ministerial somnolence appears not to have been at all uncommon.<sup>162</sup> It was not difficult then for Palmerston to exercise very considerable influence over the Cabinet in matters relating to the strategy and tactics to be adopted in the war.

The decision to press an early attack on Sebastopol was, without doubt, Palmerston's doing. The Cabinet papers relating to this resolution remain among Palmerston's private papers and show how he persuaded his colleagues that having entered the war at great expense and for a great purpose, Britain and France would, 'lose Caste in the world if they concluded the war with only a small Result'.<sup>163</sup> Aberdeen noted that on this resolution to destroy Sebastopol and the Russian fleet, 'there appears to be very little difference of opinion'.<sup>164</sup> When, at Russell's injunction, Palmerston sent 'this Box around again in order that Each member of the

<sup>161</sup> Conacher, *The Aberdeen Coalition*, p.453

<sup>162</sup> As Conacher has noted, Russell effectively confirmed 'that it was a common occurrence at after-dinner meetings, recalling an occasion at Holland House when Lady Holland once walked into a large room in which the cabinet were assembled and found Lord Melbourne asleep on one sofa and Lord Glenelg on another' (Conacher, *The Aberdeen Coalition*, p.453, n.2).

<sup>163</sup> Memorandum by Palmerston 'on the measures to be adopted against Russia', 15 June 1854, Broadlands Papers, CAB/65

<sup>164</sup> Memorandum by Aberdeen, nd, Broadlands Papers, CAB/66. Argyll, for example, believed Palmerston's proposals 'wd go far to settle the war at once, and command an immediate & advantageous peace' (CAB/67); Sir George Grey agreed 'in the general views expressed by Lord Palmerston' (CAB/72); as did Clarendon (CAB/68), Granville (CAB/71) and Molesworth (CAB/75)

Cabinet may see the observations made by his Colleagues', he was gratified to find that they all shared his concerns.<sup>165</sup>

There was little doubt in the Cabinet that Palmerston was the best man to conduct the war. For this reason, and because it appeared necessary to reduce the demands made of the Secretary for War and Colonies, it was hoped in late 1854 to award Palmerston this position officially. Russell wrote to Aberdeen in November, stressing 'the necessity of having in that office a man, who from experience of military details, from inherent vigour of mind, & from weight with the H. of Commons can be expected to guide the great operations of war with authority and success'. He believed that there was 'only one person belonging to the Govt who combines these advantages', and that was Palmerston, who should therefore 'be entrusted with the seals of the War Department'.<sup>166</sup> Aberdeen feared that the duties would be unduly onerous for one who 'possesses no immunity from the effects of age',<sup>167</sup> but there were hints of party intrigue in this objection to Palmerston. As Palmerston noted, such a change at the War Office would have unavoidable repercussions:

Clarendon said that as the matter now stands, Aberdeen declares that if Newcastle is forced out he Aberdeen will resign, while on the other Hand he Clarendon fears that John Russell will say that he will leave the Govt if Newcastle does not give up the Conduct of the War. Clarendon seemed to think this an Intrigue got up for the Purpose of breaking up the Govt and getting John Russell back as Prime Minister.<sup>168</sup>

<sup>165</sup> Memorandum by Palmerston, 22 June 1854, Broadlands Papers, CAB/79/2

<sup>166</sup> Russell to Aberdeen, 17 Nov. 1854, (Copy), Newcastle Papers, Nottingham University Library, NeC 10295/1-2

<sup>167</sup> Aberdeen to Russell, 21 Nov. 1854, Aberdeen Papers, Add.Mss. 43068; also Newcastle Papers, NeC 10298/1-2 (Copy)

<sup>168</sup> Minute by Palmerston, 2 Dec. 1854 on letter from Clarendon to Palmerston, 30 Nov. 1854, Broadlands Papers, GC/CL/582

Russell's claims to the premiership were not as strong as they had been in 1853, however, if only because with the war now the central issue in politics it was Palmerston who had won over the Cabinet and the public on this issue and not Lord John. Thus it was Palmerston, not Russell, of whom Clarendon wrote to his wife in December, that much 'if not all will depend' on what he determined since if 'he says that any change at this moment wd be detrimental to the public service the thing will fall to the ground as Johnny wd have no support at all, but if P (wch is not likely) was to condemn Newcastle then I see nothing for it but a break up & as that wd destroy the confidence of France & crush the nascent vitality of Austria & be worth a dozen victories to Russia it wd I think fulfill [sic] all the conditions of treason'.<sup>169</sup>

Yet, as Clarendon supposed, Palmerston was not likely to condemn Newcastle. Throughout the year, Palmerston and Newcastle had enjoyed a good understanding on matters pertaining to the war and there was no reason for Palmerston to seek to undermine his colleague. Only when Russell threatened to resign over Roebuck's motion in January 1855 did Palmerston put himself forward for the post at the War Department, pointing out that he did not believe that he could do the job as well as Newcastle, but hoping that if necessary this might be one way of saving the government from dissolution.<sup>170</sup>

Ultimately, however, the government could not be saved. Roebuck's motion for a committee of inquiry into the conduct of the war, effectively a question of confidence in the ministry, was carried by a vote of 305 to 148 against the government and the Ministers resigned on 30 January 1855. The search for a successor was not straight forward. Derby was called for but he was not able to

<sup>169</sup> Clarendon to Lady Clarendon, 5 Dec. 1854, MSS. Eng.c.2085, Bodleian Library.

<sup>170</sup> See Munsell, *The Unfortunate Duke*, pp.209-10

form his second government just yet. The Queen and Prince, who were resolved to exhaust everything before they send for Palmerston',<sup>171</sup> were eventually forced to do just that. Even Russell was obliged to concede that, 'the country wanted Lord Palmerston either as War Minister or Prime Minister',<sup>172</sup> and so the Queen's hand was forced - Palmerston had to be offered the premiership:

I know this would be very objectionable in many respects, and personally not agreeable to me, [she wrote] but *I think of nothing* but the country, and the preservation of its institutions, and *my own* personal feelings would be sunk if only the efficiency of the government could be obtained. *If the Peelites and Whigs* would serve *under* Lord Palmerston, *I should not* apprehend the consequences - for they would restrain him from mischief, and Palmerston *himself* in *that position* would feel the weight and responsibility of *such a position* in a manner that would make him feel very differently to what he has hitherto done, as a subordinate.<sup>173</sup>

The Queen claimed that in appointing Palmerston, she 'had *no* other alternative',<sup>174</sup> and Palmerston believed that he was now *l'inévitable*. He had finally achieved the position of Prime Minister.

The basis of Palmerston's political potency and ultimately of his accession to the highest office of state rested on more than his ability to play forces off against each other at Westminster, however. Throughout the life of the Russell government he had set the Court against the Cabinet over his policy, with some degree of success until the end of 1851, and during Aberdeen's ministry, from his position at the Home Office, he offered a compelling alternative foreign policy to that of Aberdeen and simultaneously used this as a means of overcoming Russell in the campaign to claim the leadership of the Whigs and Liberals. His base of support and his political standing, widely acknowledged as 'popular', were taken as tacit justifications for his

<sup>171</sup> Shaftesbury Diaries, 2 Feb. 1855, Broadlands Papers, SHA/PD/6

<sup>172</sup> Memorandum by the Queen, [3 Feb. 1855?], *LQV*, III, pp.118-19

<sup>173</sup> Memorandum by the Queen, 1 Feb. 1855, quoted Henderson, *Crimean War Diplomacy*, p.81

<sup>174</sup> Queen to the King of the Belgians, 6 Feb. 1855, *LQV*, III, p.128

manoeuvrings at the political centre. Lady Palmerston claimed, for example, in January 1852 shortly after Palmerston had been removed from office under Russell: 'Public opinion is very much annoyed with Lord John, and sides whole-heartedly with my husband',<sup>175</sup> but there was no explicit consideration of what this meant.

The importance of 'popular support' and indeed the strength conferred by the approbation of 'public opinion' was commonly acknowledged throughout the political world. King Leopold, for example, had warned his niece Queen Victoria, that in his experience the monarchy 'has its sole foundation in the will of the people. Without that will it cannot stand and from that will it derives every prerogative and power'.<sup>176</sup> Prince Albert maintained that the people 'will, even if they in the beginning lend their hands willingly, deny their hearts and in the course of the struggle they will obey the great moral law which governs this earth more than their governments',<sup>177</sup> yet he also later suggested that it was perhaps possible for a minister still to guide the feeling of these peoples. 'Lord Palmerston', he wrote in 1852 in a survey of Palmerston's foreign policy, 'could bring no counter poise except that which he always declares to be stronger than any material force, "*the public opinion of England*". Significantly, Albert argued that Palmerston 'had to create this opinion, however', and in the case of Portugal, for instance, he had achieved this by 'incessantly blackening the character of the Court of Portugal and its advisers'.<sup>178</sup> Perhaps it was easier to manipulate public opinion over a foreign question with arguments couched always in terms of the superiority of the British in contrast to the

<sup>175</sup> Lady Palmerston to Princess Lieven, 27 Jan. 1852, quoted Lord Sudley (ed.), *The Lieven-Palmerston Correspondence, 1828-1856* (London, 1943), p.298

<sup>176</sup> Memorandum by Anson, 14 July 1841, quoted F. Eyck, *The Prince Consort: a Political Biography* (Boston, USA, and Cambridge, 1959), p.29

<sup>177</sup> Albert to King of Prussia, 21 Dec. 1846, quoted *ibid*, p.47

<sup>178</sup> Albert's memorandum on Palmerston's foreign policy, 14 July 1852, quoted *ibid*, p.53

foreign. Palmerston, at least, was frequently cited as enjoying such support and it was often conveniently identified as underpinning his position, a short-hand explanation for any ministerial deference to his views, but in what was still a largely unrepresentative political system, at least one in which the franchise was not widely spread, cultivating such a base of support required careful manipulation of extra-parliamentary, extra-governmental factors; attention to 'low' political influences.

Presenting Palmerston and Palmerstonism beyond Westminster demanded a more varied and sophisticated approach than did parliamentary intrigues. The political nation, which comprised more than just the enfranchised members of the population, particularly in terms of representing the nation abroad, operated at many different levels. Accordingly Palmerston sought to exploit popular feeling in a variety of ways. At no point, however, did he appeal to public opinion for guidance: the political capital to be made from the people was derived from their *post facto* approval or more general demonstrations of faith in Palmerston's ability.

To the middle classes, Palmerston could speak through the newspapers and journals. They offered an excellent medium through which to communicate ideas and arguments beyond Westminster. However, Palmerston was not the only minister to recognise the value of the press as a political battle-ground. Although, as will be seen, he was arguably one of the most accomplished manipulators of the press, he needed still to count on support from classes beyond the newspaper reading public. Palmerston demonstrated his ability to sway audiences and interest groups (such as the Manchester commercial classes) through his employment of rhetorical assurances and careful cultivation of the image of guardian of the national interest.

Here his contribution to a new political style was perhaps the most remarkable. The following two chapters explore these themes in more detail looking firstly at the careful manipulation of the press followed by the less tangible but no less important cultivation of the image of the most English minister amongst those proud to proclaim, 'as the Roman, in days of old ...*Civis Romanus sum*'.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> From Palmerston's Commons speech 25 June 1850, *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXII, 444

## CHAPTER 4. COMPELLING BUT NOT CONTROLLING?:

### PALMERSTON AND THE PRESS, 1846-1855

#### i) Perceptions of the role and influence of the press.

The role of the press in nineteenth century politics, at least prior to the repeal of the so-called 'taxes on knowledge',<sup>1</sup> is an ambiguous one; at once the guide and the reflector of 'public opinion' and simultaneously both manipulated by influential politicians and able to exercise considerable sway over them. Editors of the major newspapers and periodicals were often no strangers to political life at the centre and for those for whom parliamentary life at Westminster was that of spectator and not participant, such as Walter Bagehot, journalism was a means by which a 'failed MP', to borrow Richard Crossman's phrase, could still engage in political life, indeed even hope to exercise more influence that way.<sup>2</sup> For politicians, too, newspapers were seen as valuable barometers of the mood of the nation and also a medium through which to affect such moods. Both sides had claims upon the other, whilst newspaper readers were their stock. Newspapers needed to sell to a wide readership, for commercial reasons if nothing else, whilst politicians needed to appeal to an ever widening political nation; for both sides political knowledge and insights were therefore a staple currency.

<sup>1</sup> The stamp duty on newspapers was repealed on 15 June 1855.

<sup>2</sup> Crossman, for example, argues that Bagehot's failure to secure a place in Parliament - he missed out on a nomination for the London University seat in 1860, withdrew from the election in Manchester in 1860 and finally lost a by-election in 1866 at Bridgwater - was in actual fact a blessing. Had he secured a place in the Commons, Crossman argues, Bagehot 'could hardly have combined a political career with the kind of writing that gave him so much influence as an editor outside.' W. Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (1867; London 1993 edn.) with an introduction by Richard Crossman, p.4

Palmerston himself partially captured the essence of the matter when he told Lady Cowper (later Lady Palmerston), that the only influence he was able to exert over an editor (in this instance of the *Courier*) was 'positive not negative'; that he could prevail upon the editor to insert an article today but not prevent him from inserting a quite contrary one tomorrow, in short that from within the government, Palmerston could 'compel' (although he might more accurately have suggested that he could 'impel'), but not 'control'. Whilst news directly from the government would always be welcome, this did not outweigh the commercial considerations of the newspaper editor and proprietor.<sup>3</sup> As he explained to Lord John Russell in 1846, 'no Govt can do any thing for a newspaper, that can compensate for a Curtailment of Circulation & that Circulation depends upon free & unfettered Discussion of Events at Home & abroad; & that in such Discourses, newspapers Express Either their own opinions or those which they think will be agreeable to their readers'.<sup>4</sup> In a similar vein, the *Times* in an editorial of 1852 proudly announced that it was not the place of the press to interfere in the duties of politicians and thus, 'our vocation is, in one respect, inferior to theirs, for we are unable to wield the power or represent the collective dignity of the country; but in another point of view it is superior, for, unlike them, we are able to speak the whole truth without fear or favour'.<sup>5</sup>

The newspaper, and, to a slightly lesser extent, periodical press of the mid-nineteenth century was both a political weapon of the ruling elite and a political lever to be employed by those beyond the confines of Westminster; but at no time and in no instance is either label to be taken as indicative of a fixed role. The

<sup>3</sup> Palmerston to Lady Cowper, 21 Sept. 1831, quoted C. Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston, 1830-1841* 2 vols. (London, 1969), I, pp.47-48

<sup>4</sup> Palmerston to Russell, 14 Dec. 1846, Russell Papers, Public Record Office, PRO/30/22/5F, fols 181-182

<sup>5</sup> *Times*, 7 Feb. 1852

position of the press within the political world remained fluid and ill-defined, although there was no shortage of attempts made to apply specific definitions. Members of the press themselves were clear about not only their status, but also their duty. The idea of a 'fourth estate' was invoked ever more often as a means of determining a society's degree of civilization, 'an index to its social state', as Frederick Knight Hunt described it in 1850. Where there was an abundance of journals, Hunt argued, 'the people have power, intelligence, and wealth; where Journals are few, the many are in reality mere slaves'.<sup>6</sup> The newspaper press was in a sense seen by some as an integral part of the fabric of the British representative system, the superiority of which was in no small measure attributable to the maturity of the British press. Thus the sometime editor of the *Morning Advertiser*, James Grant, felt confident enough to assert in the introduction to his history of the newspaper press that the 'Press has before it one of the most glorious Missions in which human agencies ever were employed. Its Mission is to Enlighten, to Civilize, and to Morally Transform the World'.<sup>7</sup>

The belief that the press occupied a place at the heart of the British constitution and indeed thereby conferred upon that system a degree of superiority found voice in a number of journals. The *Economist*, a weekly paper, in 1852, for example, whilst professing to believe that the press in Britain remained 'wholly independent of Government, and exclusively dependent on its readers', perhaps accurate for the periodical press but less so in the case of daily newspapers, still echoed such missionary zeal. Unlike French, German and other continental journals,

<sup>6</sup> Frederick Knight Hunt, *The Fourth Estate* 2 vols. (1850), quoted S. Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain: Vol. I The Nineteenth Century* (London, 1981), p.70

<sup>7</sup> J. Grant, *The Newspaper Press - its origins - progress - & present position* 3 Vols. (London, 1871-2), I, p.vi

which suffered under the demands of corruption and intriguing for honours among the journalistic classes, the British press 'is the natural growth of the national progress: it belongs to all the people, is a part of their daily lives, and is indispensable to civilisation'.<sup>8</sup> In reality, the British journalistic classes were often just as susceptible to corruption and intrigue as those elsewhere,<sup>9</sup> yet the belief remained that the British press was essentially superior to its continental counterparts.

Crucially, the press' contribution to civilisation extended beyond simply ensuring that the populace was well-informed about the conduct of affairs. The great advantage of the British press over the continental, it appeared, was the ability of the former to activate the latent political influence of its readers. By courting 'public opinion' and presenting such through the leader columns of the newspapers, the press could start to introduce some notion of public accountability; as the *Globe* suggested in February 1848, public opinion was 'the only power to which any effectual appeal can be made for controlling the obliquities of official action, when unknown to, or unsanctioned by that opinion'.<sup>10</sup> The implication was not simply that statesmen could now, and therefore should, be reigned in by an enlarged political nation which enjoyed a uniquely free and varied mode of expression, but that this influence, or at

<sup>8</sup> *Economist*, 22 May 1852

<sup>9</sup> Thus, for example, the account given to Palmerston by a journalist who had been rejected by the *Times* as a possible leader writer, which whilst rather partisan, is still interesting as an insight into that paper: 'My object in writing to your Lordship is to assure you, that all Editors are not such unredeemed scurrilous scribes as the writers of the *Times*; & to make known to you some circumstances which may confirm in your Lordship's mind, the opinion which you cannot but entertain, & which I plainly avow, that the unscrupulous statements made in the foreign departments of the *Times* have their origin in personal corruption....'

In the course of that interview [for the post of leader writer at the *Times*] with Mr Walter [proprietor of the paper], he told me "that the malpractices of the conductors of the *Times* had arrived at such a height, that they had formed a plan even to shut out him i.e. young Walter from all participation in the Paper".... These are the men who impute "personal baseness" to your Lordship!...' (Charles Blake to Palmerston, 22 June 1850, Broadlands Papers, Southampton University Library, PRE/13/1-2).

<sup>10</sup> *Globe*, 14 Feb. 1848

least recourse to appeal, ought to be employed to the greater good not only of the British people, but especially with regard to foreign affairs, the peoples of other states as well. The 'obliquities of official action' could be clarified through the medium of the press. In response to a suggestion in the *Spectator* that diplomacy should remain at all times a secretive pursuit, the *Globe* argued that, whilst exposing the intricacies of diplomatic negotiations at every juncture would be to 'drive all diplomatic transactions into holes and corners, or out of existence', it should remain a maxim that 'ultimate publicity should be the rule, secrecy the exception'.<sup>11</sup>

Increasingly, many editors at this time generally believed, popular feeling and opinion were important considerations in the practice of diplomacy and by putting these before the view of the world, Britain would carry more conviction abroad. As another daily paper, the *Morning Chronicle*, had put it in 1846, there were two ways for one country to exercise influence over another, firstly through official channels, secondly by the force of public opinion. Whilst 'the capabilities of the blue ribbon', and the potential of 'a bundle of red tape' were not inconsequential, the *Chronicle* argued that these were not alone sufficient and that it 'is the united opinion of those millions in one country that acts upon the conduct of another far more than all protocols or documents'. As such, the editors of that paper, as journalists, and thus as 'the delegates of opinion, as senators are of power, should feel ourselves wanting in the discharge of a sacred duty did we forbear from expressing broadly what the feeling of the English people is with respect to the question of Poland'.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Globe*, 3 July 1848

<sup>12</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 13 Aug. 1846

What is omitted from the newspaper columns during these discussions of 'public opinion', however, is some attempt to define that public opinion. Newspapers spoke confidently of the influence of the 'people' and their duty to relay the sentiments of these people through their papers as well as to educate them, but they represented only a relatively small, though influential, section of the population. Editorials interchanged freely the terms 'people' and 'readers', yet they were clearly not synonymous. The national press, still in essence metropolitan, was far from enjoying a position of widespread currency, as circulation figures indicate.<sup>13</sup> Whilst circulation figures are not an accurate guide to actual numbers of readers, it is incontestable that no newspaper or journal of the day was able to reach and therefore claim to represent the majority of the population. But, equally, nor did they try. Newspapers of the mid-nineteenth century, with the exception of the various working-class, radical, unstamped and even clandestine publications, were aimed squarely at educated readers, leisured and active, who might be deemed to make up the 'middle classes', those who were not the only class within the political nation, but who were arguably becoming the most vociferous, interested and therefore important.

In writing to Palmerston in 1851, James Grant measured the growing success of the *Morning Advertiser*, a paper originally established as the organ of London publicans, (which now had 'a circulation nearly *double* that of any morning paper except the *Times*, and almost *treble* that of some of its contemporaries') by the nature

<sup>13</sup> The *Times* in 1850 for example, had a average daily circulation of 38,141; that of its five main metropolitan rivals combined was an average of 17,889. See T. Morley, "'The Arcana of that Great Machine": Politicians and *The Times* in the Late 1840s', *History*, 73 (1988), p.38, n.1. Estimates of circulation figures for some of the periodical journals reveal the following statistics. 1843: *Economist* 1,969; *Punch* 3,938; *Spectator* 3,557. 1848: *Economist* 4,245; *Punch* 7,366; *Spectator* 3,283. 1853: *Economist* 4,106; *Punch* 7,567; *Spectator* 2,817. See R.D. Edwards, *The Pursuit of Reason: The Economist, 1843-1993* (London, 1993), p.35

of its readership. Grandly claiming that the paper was now 'read among *all* classes', he emphasised the increased stature of the title, saying that it 'is taken into all the Clubs and Reading Rooms'.<sup>14</sup> Significantly, the clubs and reading rooms, as well as public houses in which the London newspapers were made available gave many more people access to the press output. Newspapers may have been written primarily for the middle classes, but they were read also by many members of the working classes. Publicans not only subscribed to certain newspapers, but they would frequently organise for the papers to be read to their illiterate customers; other venues of social interaction, such as barber's shops, coffee houses and mechanics institutes also took a number of newspapers and a number of news items would find their way onto the street in the form of ballads. According to Donald Read such arrangements saw readership among the urban working classes escalate during this period.<sup>15</sup>

Grant's *Morning Advertiser* was perhaps read by 'all classes' but generally the constituency to which the metropolitan press appealed was not that comprising all social classes, but rather all classes within the political nation, and that the 'high' political nation. It would be foolhardy indeed to claim that a circulation measured only in four figures was in any way representative of the entire nation, but this merely reflects the prevailing notion of what or who made up public opinion. As the *Times* suggested in one of its leaders, public opinion was properly represented in the Imperial Parliament and therein dissident voices were heard through people such as Richard Cobden.<sup>16</sup> However widely newspapers were read, the interaction with

<sup>14</sup> James Grant to Palmerston, 27 Dec. 1851, Broadlands Papers, GC/GR/98

<sup>15</sup> D. Read, *Peel and the Victorians* (Oxford, 1987), pp.39-42 See also A. Jones, *Powers of the Press: Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth-Century England* (Aldershot, 1996), pp.181-187 on similar means of achieving wider newspaper readership.

<sup>16</sup> *Times*, 15 March 1851

'public opinion' or 'the people' worked on different levels. The middle classes had legitimate claims to be represented by, or even define and inform, public opinion, whereas the lower classes read the newspapers simply to be informed. The Leeds Operative Conservative Association looked to the press for guidance: they read 'to furnish our minds by means of newspapers and other publications with correct views on political subjects, and to furnish an antidote to those publications of a dangerous tendency which are everywhere obtruded upon us'.<sup>17</sup> It was not surprising to find a conservative association seeking thus to be informed, but the sentiment is echoed in a motion passed by the Manchester Literary Society which was 'essentially a radical institution'. On 7 November 1848 that Society voted by a margin of 16 to 2 in favour of the motion 'Is the tendency of the [journalistic] literature of the present day in England to elevate and enlarge the public mind?'.<sup>18</sup> The motion clearly indicates an appreciation of the didactic qualities of the press.

From outside Parliament the prevailing (middle class) public opinion was to be found elucidated in the newspapers, and primarily the *Times*: 'A charge or an inquiry made through this journal produces an answer the next day with infallible precision. No man refuses to set himself right with his countrymen through the columns of *The Times*' it observed in late 1851,<sup>19</sup> cognisant that the *Times* not only dominated the 'national' daily press market, but also, and particularly with regard to international stories, was the source of most news and intelligence for local or provincial papers.

<sup>17</sup> C. Richardson [of the Leeds Operative Conservative Association] to Peel, 26 March 1835, quoted Read, *Peel and the Victorians*, p.41

<sup>18</sup> Quoted Jones, *Powers of the Press*, pp.194-195

<sup>19</sup> *Times*, 10 Dec. 1851

There would have been a danger, had it gone unnoticed, of the British press becoming so obsessed with its own importance, indeed perhaps a perceived omnipotence, that it would lose sight of its true role and invest in the power of 'opinion' such grandiose capabilities as were not to be realised. Yet the introspective nature of many titles' editorials during these years brought the question into the open. In July 1846 the *Morning Post* expressed unease about what it saw as the growing influence of public opinion and the stock placed in it. It was that paper's duty, it said, to 'contend against the dogma that what popular newspapers call "public opinion" is to be the all-prevailing power and director in matters political'. Bemoaning the degradation of principled politics, the *Post* expressed concern that a blinkered, even lazy, approach to politics would prove ultimately detrimental: 'At the risk of being classed among those who should be sneered down as "admirers of the heroic," we must continue to protest against slavish submission to the political slang of the day, however general and prevalent it may be'.<sup>20</sup> The *Economist* went further, concerned about 'newspapers writing for effect'. Exaggerated and 'unmeaning' writing, or 'rant', it contended, in former times had been more prevalent than at present and it would be well to avoid again making 'men of reputation and ability treat newspapers with well-merited contempt'; 'grand and comprehensive measures' for public affairs, the *Economist* feared, were now being put forth by some contemporaries 'for effect, without reflection either on the nature of society or on what the best and wisest of governments can do for mankind'. There was no disputing the central role played by the press, but this was potentially a force for bad as well as good: ministers, it lamented, had 'been flattered by the vulgar demands of

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<sup>20</sup>*Morning Post*, 7 July 1846

the multitude, including newspaper writers, into the belief that they can model mankind and make nations great and good, and they have assumed a responsibility in consequence that they now find most irksome, from the hopeless impossibility of doing what is required of them.<sup>21</sup> There was a clear distinction to be drawn here between the 'vulgar demands of the multitude', and the more respectable or rather legitimate, opinion advanced by the middle classes.

Even the *Times*, which enjoyed by far the largest circulation of any newspaper of the day balked at investing in 'public opinion' a greater significance than was merited. Whilst 'incessantly devoted' to the 'uses and direction' of the power of public opinion, the *Times* in a leading article of August 1849 noted that with regard to that power, 'we hold it to be inconsistent with truth and prudence to exaggerate its efficacy or to assert its omnipotence without reference to the natural limits and obstacles which it may have to surmount'. In a rather Palmerstonian tone, the editorial continued that only through the employment of material force and not simply by relying on strong words would the public opinion of England be able to accomplish great objects such as the overthrow of continental powers like Napoleonic France.<sup>22</sup> Indeed it was one of the few Palmerstonian attributes which the *Times* admired: 'Does not public opinion act on foreign countries precisely in proportion to the amount of actual force which it sets in motion, and which we are prepared to employ in support of it?' a leader of July 1849 had asked.<sup>23</sup>

Acknowledging the pivotal role the press was commonly held to fulfil (among members of the press at least), the *Times* struck a chord of moderation in its consideration of the influence of public opinion through the columns of the

<sup>21</sup> *Economist*, 3 March 1849

<sup>22</sup> *Times*, 20 Aug. 1849

<sup>23</sup> *Times*, 23 July 1849

newspapers. Whilst it was no longer true that ministers could and should be able to force through their measures in the face of popular opposition, this did not mean that the balance had swung wholly in the opposite direction. Public opinion, declared the *Times*, has a hand in the creation of ministers, but then once they are in office, 'regulates their proceedings, and modifies their measures'.<sup>24</sup> This was in essence an affirmation of Palmerston's earlier distinction between compelling and controlling; neither one side nor the other had the upper hand, and by the same token neither side could now act, successfully or at least popularly, without the cooperation or support of some portion of the other.

In a sense, then, the press was the medium through which the readers could communicate with ministers and ministers could communicate with those beyond Westminster. Journal readers were not the only members of the political nation from whom ministers would wish to solicit support, but it was important to carry them with the government if it was to proceed smoothly and the press offered an immediate and useful means of reaching these people. In fact, according to the *Times*, such was the importance of the press in communicating with the people on behalf of the government, that 'the duty of the Press is to speak; of the statesmen to be silent'.<sup>25</sup> Not only were the newspapers obliged to listen to and report opinion outside Parliament, but to establish links within Parliament in order to give expression to the 'governing opinion'. Delane, editor of the *Times*, for instance, felt it his responsibility to make his paper the organ of this governing opinion and place himself in close connection with the leaders of each party.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *Times*, 10 Dec. 1851

<sup>25</sup> *Times*, 6 Feb. 1852. See also Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press: Vol. I*, p.9

<sup>26</sup> See E. Cook, *Delane of the Times* (London, 1915), p.34

Prominent men within each party were well aware of the unparalleled advantages associated with cultivating allies within the newspaper press. Beyond Westminster, within Westminster, and for personal gain, politicians were well-advised to establish links with one or more titles, and this lesson was heeded across the political spectrum. The rhetorical claims made in leading articles regarding the ability of the press to sway popular moods, and thus in a sense stabilise, harmonise and unite the country at large, were taken on board and fully exploited by politicians. Lord Aberdeen, erstwhile Foreign Secretary and subsequent Prime Minister, told Delane in the autumn of 1848: 'The people of this country may be carried away for a time by attractive notions and projects; but the reasoning in the Article to which I refer, is quite irresistible, and I have no doubt will come home to the feelings of every candid and impartial man'.<sup>27</sup>

Yet newspapers were not seen solely as tools with which to communicate with the nation. Inevitably the press became politicised and as a necessary corollary of this, polarised, causing different titles to be used as a means of fighting political battles by proxy. An assault launched under the banner of one newspaper title was not necessarily one between the 'public' and the government, but often one designed to be resolved ultimately within Parliament, between contending party factions. Thus, for example, Lord Lincoln, later the fifth Duke of Newcastle, appealed to John Cook, then at the *Times*, at the end of 1845, to assist in cementing a tie between that newspaper and the government, so that the beleaguered Peel administration might thus withstand parliamentary onslaughts and intrigues. 'It really is of such vast importance (now more than ever)', he told Cook, 'to strengthen the hands of the

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<sup>27</sup>

Aberdeen to Delane, 4 Sept. 1848, Delane Papers, Times Newspapers Ltd. Archive, 3/50

Executive by every proper means that I am most anxious to avail myself of any opening to make a renewed effort for this object and to allow *bygones* to be forgotten'.<sup>28</sup> In return, newspapers expected a certain amount of support from ministers. When in 1854 it appeared to Reeve of the *Times* that Aberdeen had reneged on this tacit reciprocal agreement in a parliamentary discussion of the Eastern question, he complained to Clarendon:

it is impossible not to feel that Lord Aberdeen's conduct in this debate has been cowardly & ungrateful, if it be true as reported that he cheered Lord Derby's threats against the *Times*, & he certainly did not take the opportunity of saying one word of acknowledgement of those independent services which a Government does not disdain to receive from a newspaper. Considering how very large an amount of those services have been rendered him, without even the slightest return of formal civility, by persons he hardly knows, he was bound as a man of spirit & fairness not to see them unjustly attacked in Parliament without an attempt to vindicate their real motives & position.<sup>29</sup>

In an age when personality was often more important than notions of party in dictating political allegiances, newspapers were also seen as a means by which an individual at Westminster could enhance his standing beyond that palace. This was especially important to a figure such as Palmerston, who might have denied the link, but who was unquestionably persuaded by the example of his earlier colleague George Canning in appreciating fully the importance of counting public opinion amongst one's allies. As a pamphlet published in 1830, *An Authentic Account of Mr Canning's Policy*, written by Canning's widow explained:

While *he* was at the helm there was not one of the European governments who dared to provoke the vengeance of England, because they well knew that a war with England would be a measure *too unpopular* to hazard. Thus Mr Canning was able to hold language and to carry measures in defiance of some [i.e. the Tories], and contrary to the orders of the Governments of the Great

<sup>28</sup> Lincoln (Newcastle) to J.D. Cook, 22 Dec. 1845, Newcastle Papers, Nottingham University Library, NeC 12,169

<sup>29</sup> Reeve to Clarendon, 'Sunday morning', July 1854, Clarendon Deposit, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS.Clar.dep.c.14, fols 54-56

Continental Powers. By these means he obtained over these governments an influence which he employed not only to promote the interests of England, but the general prosperity of the world.<sup>30</sup>

Canning had employed newspapers as a means of effecting this influence, although he was keen to make clear that this in no way caused him to feel beholden to the press: 'I acknowledge its power, I submit to its judgement, but I will not be summoned to its bar!', he had declared in 1816.<sup>31</sup> Palmerston took these sentiments a step further, acknowledging the power of the press and refusing to be summoned to its bar, but not necessarily believing that he must submit to its judgement. The press had developed into a much more sophisticated medium since the days of Canning and writing was not now exclusively that of reporting, but equally, that of polemic. The power of the press was to be harnessed by politicians as far as possible. When the Palmerstons visited Paris in the spring of 1846 on a bridge-mending mission, Palmerston returned most satisfied that a visit that had been 'most gratifying to us' would also, he believed, prove to have been 'politically useful by promoting a good understanding between the Two Countries'. Significantly, however, he attributed the kind reception in France 'by all Parties & Classes' to the efforts of John Easthope of the *Morning Chronicle* who had in his own visits to Paris done much 'to prepare the way for us'.<sup>32</sup> A friendly connection with influential journals could be used as a

<sup>30</sup> Lady Canning, *An Authentic Account of Mr Canning's Policy* (1830); quoted H.W.V. Temperley, *The Foreign Policy of Canning, 1822-1827* (2nd edn., London, 1966), p.315 (emphasis added by Temperley). Palmerston in later life denied that he had 'aimed at acquiring the reputation of being Mr Canning's successor', as a biographer had sought to suggest, but he did not deny that he had learnt the Canningite lessons (see K. Bourne, *Palmerston: The Early Years, 1784-1841* (London, 1982), p.235). If he was not Canning's pupil, Palmerston was certainly perpetuating the Canningite tradition.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted Temperley, *The Foreign Policy of Canning, 1822-1827*, p.305

<sup>32</sup> Palmerston to Sir John Easthope, 2 May 1846, Broadlands Papers, GC/EA/45. Easthope and the French Prime Minister François Guizot appear to have enjoyed a close friendship which certainly had a bearing on the French response to Palmerston's visit to Paris and return to office in 1846. 'I am glad our friend, Lord Palmerston, visited Paris in the Spring;' wrote Easthope to Guizot, 'both he & his friends in England could not feel other than extreme gratification at the kind reception he met with. I need not express to you my entire confidence in his desire to promote the best possible understanding with your country. I am sure you will both act kindly together under those views. In this persuasion I look forward to the pleasure of witnessing national rivalry without bitter jealousy,

valuable means of affirming cordial relations abroad and also, no less importantly, do much to strengthen an individual ministers' standing. The Palmerstons' trip to Paris had, after all, done much to repair Palmerston's damaged reputation. It clearly gave Easthope considerable satisfaction to note that his influence had contributed to this result, and also that he regarded Palmerston as having 'destroyed the misrepresentations in Paris and London and I am sure that both yourself and Lady Palmerston will give me credence for having heard of your triumph with delight'.<sup>33</sup>

For Palmerston, as a minister concerned primarily with foreign affairs, this was a valuable asset. Crucially, journalists also gave him a useful additional means of portraying himself abroad in a favourable light. Personal friendships and animosities played an important role in characterising the external relations of different countries - witness only the potential impact on Britain's foreign relations it was widely feared Palmerston's return to the Foreign Office in July 1846 might have - and therefore it was important that Palmerston try to present himself in a favourable light abroad.

Various journalists were available to be 'bought' by a sagacious politician. Palmerston himself, for example, in 1851 made the acquaintance of an American journalist named Henry Wikoff, working in Paris and writing for a number of American journals. Algernon Borthwick, then Paris correspondent of the *Morning*

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and advancing prosperity in both Kingdoms, with progressive good will'. Guizot replied that he shared the desire for a good understanding and peace between Britain and France: 'I shall continue my course', he told Easthope, adding, 'You will assist I am sure to persevere and to persevere with some success' in the pursuit of this goal. The return of Palmerston to office, he hoped, would be to good effect and that now a 'system of confidence and reciprocal arrangements will obtain between Lord Palmerston and myself'. Guizot concluded his letter with the wish that the Easthopes would soon be again in Paris: 'It will be a great pleasure to me to have some conversations with you - in the mean time accept the expression of my sincerest homage and regard' he wrote (Sir John Easthope to Guizot, 1846; Guizot to Sir John Easthope, 14 July 1846 [reply to Easthope's letter], Sir John Easthope Papers, Duke University Special Collections Library, North Carolina, USA).

<sup>33</sup> Sir John Easthope to Palmerston, 2 May 1846, Broadlands Papers, GC/EA/21

*Post* also met this 'great supporter of Lord P.'s', who had already spent time with Palmerston at Broadlands, and persuaded Wikoff to recycle the *Post's* articles in America as an antidote to the impressions given by the *Times* as reported there.<sup>34</sup>

Palmerston personally and actively courted Wikoff's assistance as a means of promoting his reputation in America, and indeed paid Wikoff from Secret Service funds to this end.<sup>35</sup> Only when Wikoff's unscrupulous character and later personal disgrace came to Palmerston's attention was this connection severed.<sup>36</sup>

Whatever potential existed for the press to relay the temper of 'public opinion' to parliamentarians, Palmerston remained steadfastly wary of such influences. He knew his own policies well enough and sought to use the press largely as a medium through which to lay his policy before the public, yet, knowing the ever increasing importance attached to the press as a barometer of the national mood at Westminster, he could also use newspaper support as supposed evidence of popular approbation of his policies.

#### ii) The politics of the press: ownership, editorship and patronage.

As a preliminary to further discussion of the relationship between Palmerston and the press, it is necessary to sketch out the practical histories of the primary

<sup>34</sup> Algernon Borthwick to Peter Borthwick, 'Monday' (Feb. 1851), Glenesk-Bathurst Papers, Brotherton Library, Leeds University, MS.Dep.1990/1/1106

<sup>35</sup> Algernon Borthwick to Peter Borthwick, 2 July 1851, Glenesk-Bathurst Papers, MS.Dep.1990/1/1111

<sup>36</sup> Familiarity with Wikoff's conduct in Paris soon alarmed Algernon Borthwick who warned his father that he considered Wikoff 'unworthy of being treated with the slightest *confidence*, not on account of his vile *métier* but on account of personal idiosyncrasy' and urged him to relay this to Palmerston (Algernon Borthwick to Peter Borthwick, 2 July 1851, Glenesk-Bathurst Papers, MS.Dep.1990/1/1111). By the summer of 1852 Palmerston had already his own reasons for distrusting Wikoff, who wrote from Genoa Prison asking for Palmerston's assistance in extricating himself from a scrape which he felt the British diplomatic representative there was doing much to magnify (Henry Wikoff to Palmerston, 10 July 1852, Broadlands Papers, GC/WI/4/1-2; enc.1).

newspapers to be discussed in this chapter in order to establish details of proprietorship and editorship. The *Times* was unquestionably the largest newspaper of the mid-nineteenth century with a circulation roughly ten times that of its nearest rivals. It was taken abroad to be the official organ of British governments, indeed of the British nation, giving it, whether deserved or not, a role in political life far more imposing than that of its contemporaries; it 'stood unequalled in the breadth and depth of its reporting, the gravity of its tone, the grandeur of its pretensions and its sheer physical bulk'.<sup>37</sup> The *Times* was under the editorship of John Thaddeus Delane who had risen to that post at the age of only twenty-three within months of entering Printing House Square in 1840, and who continued to fill that office until his retirement in 1877, fully justifying the initial faith placed in him by the paper's chief proprietor in 1840, John Walter. The task of editing a paper of the size of the *Times* presented logistical problems not to be found in the offices of other newspapers. It was necessary for Delane to delegate much editorial responsibility to others and he filled the offices of the *Times* with Oxford contemporaries, notably George William Dasent who became the paper's assistant editor in 1845 having spent many years as an occasional writer and contributor to its columns.<sup>38</sup> At the foreign news desk, Henry Reeve, who had been with the paper since 1840, wrote the leading articles and enjoyed 'virtual autonomy' with regard to the *Times*' handling of foreign affairs.<sup>39</sup>

Despite Delane's professed aim to give voice through the *Times* to the governing opinion and place the paper in friendly relations with prominent political figures, it was a paper with pre-eminently conservative sympathies. There had been

<sup>37</sup> Morley, "The Arcana of that Great Machine", p.38

<sup>38</sup> For the role of Delane and his relations with colleagues, see A. I. Dasent, *John Delane, 1817-1879* 2 vols. (London, 1908) and Cook, *Delane of the Times*

<sup>39</sup> Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press: Vol.1*, p.72

a close connection with Aberdeen at the Foreign Office during Peel's government of 1841-1846, although not with the Prime Minister himself. Indeed it is suggested the *Times* had earlier enjoyed a connection with the Young Englanders,<sup>40</sup> but as a consistent advocate of free trade it is more convincing to see the paper as siding with the Peelites; and on questions of foreign policy Delane certainly continued to admire many of Aberdeen's policies. When Lord John Russell came to the premiership, he did not find the *Times* welcoming him with a friendly attitude, nor did Palmerston find that his return to the Foreign Office was very warmly applauded,<sup>41</sup> but for the duration of this government, Delane did maintain close links with Sir Charles Wood and Lord Granville; Wood, indeed, appears to have acted as an occasional conduit for a supply of documents directly from Palmerston to Delane.<sup>42</sup> Henry Reeve meanwhile enjoyed an extensive correspondence with Clarendon who also maintained a connection with Delane which he was able to use to the benefit of the governments of both Russell and Aberdeen.<sup>43</sup> Potentially more damaging to the government, members of the diplomatic corps were found to be leaking information

<sup>40</sup> George Smythe to Lord John Manners, 19 Oct. 1842, quoted R. Blake, *Disraeli* (New York, 1987 edn.), p.174. See also Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press: Vol.1*, pp.63-64.

<sup>41</sup> Only a few months into the life of the Russell government, for example, a *Times* leader observed: 'The foreign policy of Lord ABERDEEN loses nothing by the contrast with that of his successor; and a series of untoward circumstances has cast a remarkable gloom over Lord PALMERSTON'S return to the department over which he presides' (7 Nov. 1846).

<sup>42</sup> Palmerston told Wood on one occasion that: 'There can be no objection to giving them to Delane, but *in Confidence*; that is to say he may be at Liberty to state the general Facts if he likes and to argue upon them, but he must not publish the Documents themselves nor any literal extracts from them' (Palmerston to Wood, 31 Jan. 1849, Hickleton Papers, Brotherton Library, Leeds University (microfilm), A4.63.7).

<sup>43</sup> In June 1847, for example, Clarendon wrote to Russell to say that over Spanish affairs: 'I have stated our case to Delane & he has promised to stand by the Govt stoutly and to affirm we cld have done nothing but what we have done. All he asks is to be put in a condition to make no mistake & he wd be very glad to have a copy of the papers that are to be presented on Monday... Will you speak to Palmerston about this...' (Clarendon to Russell, 4 June 1847, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/6D, fols 18-19). In a letter to Clarendon in the summer of 1854, Russell still described Delane as 'your friend' (12 June 1854, Clarendon Deposit, MS.Clar.dep.c.15, fols 505-506).

to the *Times* from time to time, as Palmerston warned Lord Ponsonby, the British Ambassador in Vienna, in late 1849:

I think it right to tell you that I hear from several Quarters, that Mr Samuel your secretary is one of the correspondents of the *Times*; a newspaper particularly & pointedly hostile to me individually & politically, & whose language on all Foreign Affairs is unEnglish while it makes itself on every occasion the subservient apologist and Defender of Everything that is arbitrary & Tyrannical & hostile to England, in the Conduct of any Foreign Govt great or small in any part of the world. It is not fitting that any Person connected with the British Embassy at Vienna (or with any Mission anywhere else) should be in communication direct or indirect with the *Times*; & I can assure you that the Impression, whether founded or not, which prevails on this subject is injurious to yourself; as People, however unjustly, are led in some degree to connect your opinions with those which they imagine come to the *Times* from your private secy, & they thence infer that the British Embassy does not rightly represent the Feelings & sentiments of the English Government & nation.<sup>44</sup>

When Aberdeen returned to office, in 1852, as Prime Minister, the close links which had been maintained throughout the previous seven years were initially to bind the *Times* to the leadership of the government, but similarly the connection with Lord Clarendon offered the *Times* an alternative view from within the Cabinet which was to prove absolutely critical as the Crimean war developed. By the end of 1854 the *Times* could no longer with any justice be regarded as Aberdonian in its view of foreign affairs and Aberdeen, while conceding that 'it is believed that The *Times* is especially my organ', claimed in early 1854 that 'in fact there is very seldom an Article in it from which I do not entirely dissent', significantly attributing the attitude of the *Times* by this point to information garnered directly from Clarendon's Foreign Office.<sup>45</sup>

The *Globe*, unlike most other important dailies was an evening paper, which had started out in 1803 as a trade journal for booksellers. Gradually it developed

<sup>44</sup>

Palmerston to Ponsonby, 19 Oct. 1849, Broadlands Papers, GC/PO/839/2-3

<sup>45</sup>

Aberdeen to Clarendon, 28 Feb. 1854, Clarendon Deposit, MS.Clar.dep.c.14, fols 16-17

Whig tendencies and following an amalgamation with the *Traveller* in 1823 it became a forum for political economists. By 1830 so strong were its Whig sympathies that the paper had become something of an embarrassment to the Whig leaders. Thereafter editors of the *Globe* steadfastly resisted dictation from the leading Whigs, but in the 1840s could not avoid the attentions of Lord John Russell and Palmerston who 'played at "battledore and shuttlecock" with the *Globe's* editorial policy' from which tussles it was Palmerston who emerged as victor enjoying close connections with and the support of that paper henceforth,<sup>46</sup> exploiting through his Foreign Office clerks, a connection with Wilson of the *Globe*.<sup>47</sup>

Two morning papers, the *Morning Chronicle* and the *Morning Post* have a particular significance for considerations of Palmerston and his relations with the press. John Easthope had headed a syndicate which had acquired control of the *Morning Chronicle* in 1834 and quickly set about turning it into a Whig paper. Lords Brougham, Althorp and Durham were all early allies of the *Chronicle*, but it was Palmerston who most carefully cultivated a contact with Easthope and 'quickly eclipsed' his Whig colleagues.<sup>48</sup> Very soon it was widely believed that Palmerston was writing regularly for the *Chronicle* and supplying from his desk at the Foreign Office a good deal of foreign news; certainly Lord Grey saw in the accuracy of the

<sup>46</sup> Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press: Vol.I*, p.45. Indeed, as early as the winter of 1839/1840, the *Quarterly Review* had already identified this allegiance to Palmerston. Welcoming this mode of communicating with the public, the *QR* noted that 'Lord Palmerston remains Secretary for Foreign Affairs despite of his alleged contributions to the *Globe*' (*Quarterly Review*, LXV, Dec. 1838-Mar. 1840, 468).

<sup>47</sup> Palmerston to [Spencer Ponsonby], note accompanying article 'for the *Globe*', 24 Dec. 1848, Broadlands Papers, PRE/B/138/enc.1; Memorandum by Palmerston, 8 Sept. 1850, Broadlands Papers, PRE/B/146

<sup>48</sup> In April 1839 Russell wrote to Palmerston twice in the same day in order 'to request you not to send any information to that paper [the *Morning Chronicle*] for the present'. Russell was keen to see and end to the 'tirades' against himself and was concerned also lest he was misrepresented over the question parliamentary reform (Russell to Palmerston, 11 April 1839, GC/RU/26-27).

*Chronicle's* articles a Palmerstonian influence and he learned from Clarendon that Palmerston was in daily contact with Andrew Doyle, Easthope's nephew and manager of the paper.<sup>49</sup> In return Palmerston commanded from Easthope a 'slavish worship', as Charles Mackay, a former employee of the *Chronicle*, described it, and certainly the baronetcy which Easthope was awarded did much to preserve his loyalty.<sup>50</sup> Despite his willingness to play the *Chronicle* off against the *Globe* throughout the 1840s, much to the annoyance of Lord John Russell who was attempting to use the *Globe* as something of a mouthpiece of his own, Palmerston retained the friendship, personal and political, of Easthope and the support of the *Chronicle*, in spite of Easthope's general irritation with the government's various connections with the *Times*, until the *Chronicle* was bought out by a group of Peelites in February 1848. Henceforth, the *Chronicle* ceased to be a reliable ally for Palmerston, despite Easthope's parting appeal that this aspect of the editorial policy be preserved.<sup>51</sup> The *Chronicle* had been purchased by a group including Lord Lincoln, Sidney Herbert, Edward Cardwell and possibly Gladstone, although reports concerning the latter's involvement were unconfirmed.<sup>52</sup> The Peelites installed John D. Cook as editor of the *Chronicle* and found in him a willing devotee to the Peelite cause, which the paper pursued with ever-greater vigilance after the death of Peel in 1850. Cook, a personal friend of Lincoln's, who had relied fully on Lincoln's counsel in the course of his career to date, appears to have taken no important step in

<sup>49</sup> Third Earl Grey, Journal, 12 Feb. 1847, Grey Papers, 3rd Earl, Durham University Library, C3/13

<sup>50</sup> See Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press: Vol. I*, pp.74-75

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, pp.76-77, 86-87

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p.87; F.D. Munsell, *The Unfortunate Duke: Henry Pelham, Fifth Duke of Newcastle, 1811-1864* (Columbia, 1985), p.99. Munsell mentions only Lincoln and Herbert as purchasers, Koss widens the composition of the group.

the editorial management of the *Chronicle* in these early years without prior reference to his 'Chief'.<sup>53</sup>

Having 'lost' the *Chronicle*, Palmerston turned his attention to the *Morning Post*, which since the change in its ownership in the summer of 1849 was disposed to accommodate him, indeed it became from that date 'Palmerston's Paper', according to one historian of the *Post*.<sup>54</sup> The history of the *Morning Post* may be traced back to 1772 and in its first three-quarters of a century it experienced a diverse history.<sup>55</sup> In the 1840s, under the editorship of C. Eastland Michele, the *Post* had been solidly Protectionist and numbered amongst its contributors Benjamin Disraeli. Seeking overall control of the paper, Michele raised a mortgage of £25,000 in 1842 in order to buy out the other shareholders and steel the paper's anti-Peelite resolve. It was an ill-advised financial venture, however, and within five years Michele was desperately seeking new backers, only to find that leading Protectionists such as Lord George Bentinck and Lord Henry Bentinck were not prepared to supply the necessary capital. Eventually, finding no willing investors, Michele was obliged to concede defeat and the paper passed into the hands of T.B. Crompton, a Lancashire paper manufacturer and Michele's chief creditor. Crompton immediately installed Peter Borthwick, M.P. for Evesham, as the paper's new editor.<sup>56</sup> Borthwick had been connected with the *Post* for some time already and was

<sup>53</sup> Newcastle Papers: In the following exchanges, Cook and Lincoln are concerned with Cook's career; Lincoln, whilst unsuccessful, has clearly been endeavouring to secure employment for Cook: Lincoln to J.D. Cook, 15 July 1846, NeC 12,170; J.D. Cook to Lincoln, 25 July 1846, NeC 12,171; Lincoln to J.D. Cook, 17 Aug. 1846, NeC 12,172a-b. For correspondence relating to early guidance sought by Cook from Lincoln, see: J.D. Cook to Lincoln, 'Tuesday Morning' [post Feb. 1848 as letter dated 'The Morning Chronicle Office'], NeC 12,182; J.D. Cook to Lincoln, nd, NeC 12,183; J.D. Cook to Lincoln, nd, NeC 12,185. In an undated letter to Newcastle [i.e. after Lincoln's elevation to the Lords], Cook describes him as 'my Chief', NeC 12,191.

<sup>54</sup> W.H. Hindle, *The Morning Post, 1772-1939: Portrait of a Newspaper* (London, 1937), esp. pp.187-202

<sup>55</sup> See R. Lucas, *Lord Glenesk and the 'Morning Post'* (London, 1910), esp. pp.12-34

<sup>56</sup> The full story of the change in the *Post's* ownership can be found in Lucas, *Lord Glenesk and*

a known admirer of Young England and protectionism.<sup>57</sup> He was perhaps on initial inspection a curious ally for Palmerston, but that he became. Palmerston's association with the *Post* is not necessarily inconsistent, however. He was regarded as a conservative at home, indeed had been attacked by the *Post* from the left in earlier days, and thus upon his death in October 1865, the *Post* did not hesitate to salute him as having been 'the staunchest Conservative in the kingdom'.<sup>58</sup> Palmerston's close connection with the Borthwicks (both Peter and his son Algernon) and the *Morning Post* lent him a most valuable political support over the coming years.

Having lost the support of the *Chronicle*, Palmerston had been on the look-out for a new title to manipulate to his own ends, and with changes afoot at the *Post*, he saw, and seized, an opportunity, taking a close interest in the machinations as Michele tried to sell the paper. Ironically, Palmerston had scarcely established his new ties with the *Post*, when a Peelite challenge to the proprietorship threatened to undermine his influence there in a manoeuvre exactly reminiscent of events at the *Chronicle* a little over a year-and-a-half earlier. Whether in either case the aim was to scupper Palmerston as much as to wrest control of a paper for Peelite ends, the coincidence is too striking not to be remarked upon. As a letter from John Cook to Lord Lincoln reveals, the new owners of the *Chronicle* were keen to expand their newspaper empire:

I have taken the necessary ...[steps to] obtain the information required; ...[and] you may rest assured that I have exp[ressed]

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*the 'Morning Post'*, pp.28-34 and Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press: Vol.I*, pp.78-80

<sup>57</sup> According to Robert Stewart, Peter Borthwick 'had been an opponent of Peel, but he was a protectionist only because of a connexion with the Jamaica lobby [Stanley to Beresford, 11 Nov. 1849]...' (R. Stewart, *The Politics of Protection: Lord Derby and the Protectionist Party, 1841-1852* (Cambridge, 1971), p.163 and n.3).

<sup>58</sup> *Morning Post*, 19 Oct. 1865. For further elucidation on these points, see Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press: Vol.I*, pp.80-81

...myself in the most guarded manner. ...[I have] mentioned no name, and merely state[d] that some friends of mine, who had no party nor political objects in view, wished to purchase the M.P., if they could ob[tain] ...it upon reasonable terms. There is noth[ing] ...in my letter to commit any one to the purchase; but I have promised to let the party, to whom I have written, kn[ow] ...whether my friends can agree to the proprietor's terms...<sup>59</sup>

### iii) Palmerston and the press, 1846-1855

According to Stephen Koss, Palmerston was, in the mid-nineteenth century, 'the envy of his parliamentary rivals':

Although the diminished resources of the *Morning Chronicle* had been lost to him, the *Morning Post* stuck to him through thick and thin. The *Globe* was in his corner and, it was said, in his pocket. Neither the *Daily News*, with its progressive leanings, nor the *Standard*, with its ultra-Tory ones, was immune to his appeal. And despite 'the well-known fact' (cited by Greville) that *The Times* 'was Aberdeen's paper', it was veering in his direction; after 1855, when Delane's instincts had triumphed over Reeve's bias, it took its natural place in the Palmerstonian ranks.<sup>60</sup>

Palmerston was the ablest manipulator of the press of his time, or least in this regard he was unsurpassed. Nevertheless, his ability to command such loyalty and win over admirers who later became adherents is remarkable; whatever his talents, he was not the only important political figure with influence amongst members of the press and yet over one of the key questions of the mid-century decade with the potency to divide the political nation, namely the Crimean war, it was Palmerston and not any of his rivals who carried the bulk of the newspaper titles with him. Significantly, Palmerston's public image and his standing with the press was based upon his reputation as forged in the field of foreign affairs and foreign policy.

<sup>59</sup> J.D. Cook to Lincoln, 2 Dec. [1849], Newcastle Papers, NeC 12, 188a-b (This letter has been damaged by fire).

<sup>60</sup> Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press: Vol. I*, p.82

External policy, unlike any other area of public business was not judged along the partisan lines that frequently dictated a newspaper's view and representation of issues relating to domestic politics. Thus it was that papers which were avowedly Whig or Tory, free-trade or protectionist, were not by these terms of reference bound in the case of foreign affairs. A 'national' perspective meant that a paper might criticise every principle of a particular party at home and yet rally to the cause of that party's foreign minister; similarly a pro-governmental organ would not support a foreign secretary exclusively on the grounds of party allegiance. Not that by virtue of its different character would foreign policy always command universal support - far from it in fact - but foreign politics nonetheless transcended all other political divisions, as an article written in the immediate aftermath of the Don Pacifico debate in the *Morning Post* suggests. The *Post* had remained a staunch advocate of protection and vehement critic of Peel in the wake of the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, but was forced to concede that 'the importance to a great commercial country like this of the maintenance of sound principles of foreign policy, such as were in question in the late debate, is much too grave to permit of a wrong decision, even had that decision tended to the re-establishment of a sounder system of financial economy at home'. Whilst a return to protectionism, which would require the ejection of the Russell ministry was in itself a noble objective, to pursue that goal when the prospects of a protectionist government were poor (given the defection of the Peelites) was foolhardy and to use the debate on Palmerston's foreign policy as a tool to effect this change represented a 'dark and dastardly

conspiracy' which would be 'utterly destructive of all hope of a return, at least for many years, to the domestic policy for which we have all along contended'.<sup>61</sup>

In joining the Russell government, the *Times* felt that for one who 'had always dealt rather with European than insular quarrels', Palmerston's loyalty to his 'party' had demonstrated 'an attachment even raised to the pitch of devotion by the personal sacrifices which it has cost', referring to the repeal of the Corn Laws and the supposed adherence to the principles of free trade which this entailed.<sup>62</sup> The *Times* is not the only observer to see some measure of personal sacrifice in Palmerston's return to the Foreign Office in 1846, but that his concern had always been primarily with foreign policy suggests not that party loyalty swept him into office, but rather that in this domain he felt able to stand above the 'insular quarrels' and domestic political disputes which in the main delineated the parties at this time.

On this footing Palmerston was able to command the support of disparate political journals for his foreign policy, even if his domestic views ran contrary to their own. Whilst the *Economist* could express a 'cordial acquiescence in its doctrines' when Palmerston made a speech at Tiverton in support of free trade in which he claimed 'I feel that I am foreseeing and expressing an opinion in favour of the continuance of that system which is for the benefit of all classes of the community';<sup>63</sup> such sentiments did not necessarily alienate the protectionist papers in their consideration of his foreign policy. Reginald Lucas in his book *Lord Glenesk and the 'Morning Post'* suggests that Palmerston's membership of a Liberal ministry was no bar to approval of his foreign policy in the *Post*, especially after 1849. The paper was, as Peter Borthwick maintained, Postite before all things, and thus whilst

<sup>61</sup> *Morning Post*, 1 July 1850

<sup>62</sup> *Times*, 7 July 1846

<sup>63</sup> *Economist*, 27 Sept. 1851

over trade policies Palmerston and the *Post* differed - and the belief in protection was one of the *Post's* most strongly felt convictions - so long as they could find merit in Palmerston's foreign policy, 'there was nothing to make the connection repugnant or difficult; and although he was neither a Conservative nor a Protectionist, he became their Minister, if they did not become his agents'.<sup>64</sup>

This relationship between foreign policy, the Foreign Secretary and the press was in no small measure determined by the peculiar way in which the press could assist in the presentation of Britain abroad; indeed in the case of the *Times*, there was a duty to act with this consideration always in mind. The influence of that paper was 'enormous', largely by virtue of the fact that its articles were 'looked for, & watched with greatest anxiety', as Charles Greville observed to its editor.<sup>65</sup> Not only did its articles have an important bearing upon what Aberdeen described as 'the general feeling of the country', but those especially concerned with foreign policy were, he felt, to be taken as 'some indication of the sentiments of the Government'.<sup>66</sup> The *Times* in particular, of all British journals, thus had a particular responsibility. Whilst other titles might be regarded as the exponents of cliques, the *Times*, as Clarendon told Henry Reeve, was seen as the organ of English public opinion - what that opinion 'is or will be' - and 'as it is thought that whatever public opinion determines with us the Govt ultimately *does*, an extraordinary & universal importance attaches to the views of the *Times*'.<sup>67</sup> Therefore in November 1846, for example, when Aberdeen felt that as Anglo-French relations became 'very critical', it was the *Times*, of all instruments, that held the balance between peace and war

<sup>64</sup> Lucas, *Lord Glenesk and the 'Morning Post'*, p.128

<sup>65</sup> Charles Greville to J.T. Delane, 20 Sept. 1846, Delane Papers, T.N.L., 2/38

<sup>66</sup> Aberdeen to J.T. Delane, 12 July 1847, Delane Papers, T.N.L., 2/73

<sup>67</sup> Clarendon to Henry Reeve, 18 June 1848, Clarendon Deposit, MS.Clar.dep.c.534, fol 189

between the two countries: it was the duty of the *Times* to urge a pacific course, he argued, since a 'little more excitement may place it beyond control in both countries'.<sup>68</sup> Palmerston, conscious of this power of the *Times*, feared that without proper management it would only provoke unwanted results in diplomatic affairs. A presumptuous declaration of the resolution of the British Cabinet, presented as an established fact by the *Times* in 1850 for instance, Palmerston complained was not only 'a departure from all Rule' but as it was over a question involving the French government and the interests of the Russian, it was liable to dangerous misconstruction. 'I should very much wish that before the Times uses in future his [the editor's] double Edged sword drawn avowedly from the Government Scabbard he should receive from me Instructions in the Sword Exercise so that his Cuts might tell upon Foes & not upon ourselves & our Friends'.<sup>69</sup>

Foreign affairs, then, were above party political considerations and newspapers were as much a tool of the diplomatic trade as they were its critical observers. Clarendon had pressed this point on Lord John Russell in the first year of Russell's government, as he reported to Reeve in a letter of spring 1847:

I had some talk with Ld John about the expediency of rousing public opinion & *informing* the people of England that they are not the powerless effete community wch Foreign Powers delight in thinking them. I told him that this altho difficult might be possible if the Govt & the Press acted together, but that the latter wd become ridiculous & perhaps mischievous if it blew up a great fire & the former had nothing *to cook* by it.<sup>70</sup>

Newspaper criticism of policies in general could be constructive and healthy, but there was a prevailing sense that whilst foreign policy was by no means sacrosanct, attacks made upon it were potentially more dangerous and thus to be made with

<sup>68</sup> Aberdeen to J.T. Delane, 22 Nov. 1846, Delane Papers, T.N.L., 2/48

<sup>69</sup> Palmerston to Wood, 26 Oct. 1850, Hickleton Papers, A4.63.10-11A; Broadlands Papers (Copy), GC/WO/188/1-2

<sup>70</sup> Clarendon to Henry Reeve, 1 April 1847, Clarendon Deposit, MS.Clar.dep.c.534, fols 43-46

greater care.<sup>71</sup> This is evident from the correspondence between Aberdeen and Delane during the years of the Russell government. Having overcome the dismissal from office in July 1846 and his initial dismay that the *Times* appeared to have 'established a very intimate connection' with the new administration, Aberdeen, buoyed up by assurances that the *Times* was still in fact, 'independent', told Delane that he felt 'no objection to communicate with you confidentially upon the subject of the Spanish Marriages, or upon any other you may desire'.<sup>72</sup> The character of the succeeding correspondence, however, is instructive. Aberdeen, in his letters to Delane, did not seek to discredit the new government. His letters stressed how efficacious and productive his tenure of the Foreign Office had been and how the transfer of that responsibility could now only usher in a period of poorer diplomatic management and relations, but he continued nevertheless to regard the *Times* as occupying a position in foreign politics in some way simultaneously dependent on (or connected with) and independent of the government. Thus, whilst the *Times'* articles were taken as illustrative of the government's position, those concerned with foreign policy were above party intrigue; they had a responsibility to portray and present a 'true' version of events given the immense influence which the *Times*, as has been demonstrated, was perceived to exercise. Aberdeen's letters to Delane therefore lacked vitriol and tended to offer, superficially at least, an attempt to provide a reasoned view of foreign affairs.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>71</sup> In September 1848, for instance, in response to an article in the *Times* critical of a multitude of Governmental policies, Sir Charles Wood wrote directly to Delane. He addressed the grievances of the *Times* point-by-point, until he came to an attack on foreign policy. On this question he acknowledged the scope for opposition but stressed the need for Cabinet unity and conceded that external factors had acted upon the government's course, stressing that an alternative policy was not pursued because of the 'risk of changes at such a time'. Clearly with a view to the damage an assault in the *Times* might cause, Wood sought to exert a tempering influence on the *Times'* editorial policy (Charles Wood to J.T. Delane, 6 Sept. 1848, Delane Papers, T.N.L., 3/52).

<sup>72</sup> Aberdeen to J.T. Delane, 31 Oct. 1846, Delane Papers, T.N.L., 2/44

<sup>73</sup> Aberdeen certainly believed himself justified in bringing to Delane's attention perceived

Given that foreign policy was not exclusively a party political subject, and as reactions to changes in the administration of that policy from abroad indicate, it was an area of public business in which the role of the individual was paramount. The main change in British foreign policy in July 1846 was not from Conservative (or Peelite) to Whig, but from Aberdonian to Palmerstonian. The *Morning Chronicle* celebrated the close of the first session under the new government in August 1846 with the claim that: 'Never were the "continued assurances of friendly dispositions from Foreign Powers" more reliable than at the conclusion of a session which has not only witnessed the adjustment of a particularly anxious and harassing international controversy, but widened the basis of those friendly and mutually gainful international relations which constitute the best guarantee of the world's peace', and the *Economist* was reassured that in Palmerston Britain had 'a man of high spirit and great firmness, and about the least likely statesman living to allow any power in Europe to take a sharp advantage of him', but their eulogies were in a sense premature.<sup>74</sup>

The most pressing foreign question when Palmerston came to the Foreign Office in July 1846 was arguably that of the Spanish Marriages.<sup>75</sup> The *Globe* acknowledged that it had not given as much attention to the question as some of its contemporaries because it did 'not attach equal importance to it', preferring to see this as a perpetual Franco-Spanish struggle in which the protagonists were 'not in the present century... likely to be more fruitful than heretofore'. Approving of British

misrepresentations of his years at the Foreign Office under Peel (see for example, Aberdeen to J.T. Delane, 30 June 1849, Delane Papers, T.N.L., 3/88), but by the same token, the Russell government, he wrote in conclusion to a letter discussing foreign policy, 'have no realm [reason] to complain of the Press; and I have not the least wish to deprive them of the support which they now receive' (Aberdeen to J.T. Delane, 22 Nov. 1846, Delane Papers, T.N.L., 2/48). His letters then, in the main, fulfil his initial promise that he would engage in a confidential discussion of foreign policy.

<sup>74</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 28 Aug. 1846; *Economist*, 12 Sept. 1846

<sup>75</sup> See above pp.69-70

abstention, the *Globe* presented this as an issue which it was beyond the realm of Downing Street to influence.<sup>76</sup> This was a somewhat naïve attitude, but at least in the view that Palmerston could not be held directly responsible for its course it did find something of an echo in an article in the *Times* a couple of months later. Making, from a Palmerstonian perspective, an unfavourable comparison between Aberdeen's handling of the question prior to July and Palmerston's subsequent handling of the affair, the *Times* did concede that: 'The sinking tide has, however, disclosed rocks and shoals about our course, over which we floated a few months ago in confidence and safety.... We are not so unreasonable or so unjust as to impute to Lord PALMERSTON evils which he could not prevent and cannot repair'.<sup>77</sup> In absolving Palmerston of blame for the problems with which he was now faced, the *Times* did not, however, speak for all of its contemporaries. The Spanish marriage question was not new in 1846 and, perhaps with some legitimacy therefore, hostile papers could refer back to Palmerston's tenure of the Foreign Office during the governments of Grey and Melbourne for evidence with which to condemn him. The *Morning Post*, still under the old regime of C. Eastland Michele, in looking back ten years, found ample grounds upon which to charge the Foreign Secretary:

Lord PALMERSTON and his French friends were at that time redolent of a mutually overflowing admiration; they were congratulating each other on the success of their aggression. By transgressing all principles of individual justice and international respect and equity, they had just 'planted liberty on the soil of the Peninsula,' and were in no wise measured in interchange of compliments. But the entente cordiale was a bond forged in fraud and dishonour; and, like most combinations against the right and the truth, has brought forth its issue of enmity and discord.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>76</sup> *Globe*, 10 Sept. 1846

<sup>77</sup> *Times*, 7 Nov. 1846

<sup>78</sup> *Morning Post*, 24 Sept. 1846

Whilst the French were proving to be unreliable allies, the *Post* could not resist the conclusion that it was Palmerston's management of affairs that served to exacerbate the situation.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, such was Palmerston's bad influence, the *Post* believed, that to foreign courts London had become 'the *point de mire* of all the revolutions of Europe, and Lord PALMERSTON to be considered by them as the "Messiah on whom they rely for the accomplishment of all their *projets de bouleversement*"'.<sup>80</sup> This was extreme, but there was some merit in ascribing worsening relations to the return of Palmerston to office once again. As Aberdeen told Delane, he had done everything in his power to smooth the advent of his successor to office, but everywhere his return was met with apprehension. 'This state of feeling might easily lead to mischief;' he wrote, 'and I never expected that the cordial understanding with France, which depended so much on personal confidence, could possibly have any longer duration'.<sup>81</sup>

Above all, the strength of British policy overseas was determined by the strength of the Foreign Secretary. As Clarendon put it to his correspondent at the *Times*, Reeve: 'We may be isolated at this moment, but if P[almerston] were the blandest of God's creatures with what Power cld we at this moment fraternize?'<sup>82</sup> Thus when the *Times* attacked Palmerston over his Greek policy in May 1850, Clarendon reproached Reeve, significantly, for writing articles that were 'antinationals as well as antiPalmn'.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>79</sup> *Morning Post*, 12, 17 Oct. 1846, 7 Nov. 1846

<sup>80</sup> *Morning Post*, 12 Nov. 1846

<sup>81</sup> Aberdeen to J.T. Delane, 22 Nov. 1846, Delane Papers, T.N.L., 2/48

<sup>82</sup> Clarendon to Henry Reeve, 21 Jan. 1848, Clarendon Deposit, MS.Clar.dep.c.534, fols 147-156

<sup>83</sup> Clarendon to Henry Reeve, 24 May 1850, Clarendon Deposit, MS.Clar.dep.c.534, fols 373-382

A statesman, and particularly one who had built his reputation in the field of foreign affairs, had to be personally 'popular'. Lacking any direct control over a newspaper, Palmerston had to ingratiate himself with journalists and not rely exclusively on them remaining well disposed towards his policies. Palmerston was quite determined in his courting of journalists. He met them socially, indeed invited them to Lady Palmerston's soirées, and as he had with Wikoff, bribed them with material rewards. James Grant, of the *Morning Advertiser*, who claimed to have had the 'privilege to enjoy some measure of personal intimacy with him', wrote in 1870 that there 'never was a man who was so great a favourite personally with, not the reporters only, but with all the gentlemen filling higher positions on the press, as the late Lord Palmerston'.<sup>84</sup> This affection was the product of careful attention to the needs of journalists over the years, testament to the principle of reciprocity. When he spoke in Hampshire or Tiverton, Palmerston always attracted the attention of the metropolitan press, but the distance from London made it difficult on occasion for reporters to return to their offices with accounts of the speeches in time for the following day's issue. According to Grant, when this was brought to Palmerston's notice, he would seek to re-arrange the times of the meetings, or when this proved impossible, would provide the reporters with advance notice of the subjects he intended to refer to in order that they could still write up the speech, and since both Palmerston's 'matter and manner were familiar to reporters', this was enough to satisfy their needs. Crucially, Grant stresses that whenever he sought to re-arrange the schedule of a meeting, Palmerston 'put all such applications on the footing of

<sup>84</sup> Grant, *The Newspaper Press*, I, pp.205-206

favours personal to himself; and whenever and wherever circumstances would permit, their solicitations never failed to be successful'.<sup>85</sup>

There was no surer way of winning the admiration of reporters than by flattering them in this way. Indeed, Palmerston was disposed to go yet further. Grant tells the story of three sessional reporters who, in search of a story, had travelled to Tiverton to report on Palmerston's re-election at their own expense, only to be disappointed to find that Palmerston had not made a speech such as they had anticipated. They therefore followed Palmerston to his hotel where they put their case before him and begged for an interview. He apologised for not having been able to oblige the reporters at the Town Hall where the election had taken place, but acceded to their requests that he give a speech now to the three reporters and two other companions of Palmerston's who were also present, talking 'at considerable length' about Reform, about which initially, it is suggested, he had told the journalists he hardly knew what it would be expedient to say on the subject. Speaking at length but committing himself to nothing specific, Palmerston in this way gave the reporters matter for an article which 'was made the subject, on the day following its publication, of leading articles in each of the journals of that day'.<sup>86</sup> Winning over individual reporters, for whom an interview with Palmerston could mean the difference between employment or otherwise was one thing, to command the loyalty of an entire newspaper was quite another. Yet, the ability to compel, even if he could not control, was a vital weapon in Palmerston's political arsenal.

Different newspapers were used in different ways. Manipulation of a particular paper did not mean control. Whereas Newcastle and his fellow Peelites

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, I, pp.207-208

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, I, pp.214-216

were able to exercise a guiding influence over the *Morning Chronicle* where ownership conferred certain rights over editorial policy, Palmerston never bought a paper and owned it in this way, although he was not averse to buying a journalist with money or favours. Proprietorship, however, was not the only way a politician could gain position with a newspaper, and by adopting different approaches, Palmerston was able to accumulate various papers under his banner, although each one fulfilled a different role. A paper such as the *Globe* placed itself so much at Palmerston's disposal that he was able to direct its articles as best suited his purposes, whilst the *Morning Post*, after 1849, though well disposed towards Palmerston, was not in his pocket in the same way and Palmerston had to earn the respect of that paper. Located somewhere between these two poles, was a paper such as the pre-Peelite *Morning Chronicle* which enjoyed close and regular communications with Palmerston but which did not hang on his every word.

Palmerston had been in close connection with the *Globe* for several years and had established with that paper a sound understanding. The *Globe* was open to his solicitations and many of its articles were written at Palmerston's initiative: in letters 'to the Globe', for instance, Palmerston is to be found requesting that a particular line be taken in the following edition.<sup>87</sup> Further, it was widely believed, and with good reason, that Palmerston also wrote directly for the *Globe* at this time. In the Broadlands Papers, a series of notes survive to which Palmerston had attached

<sup>87</sup> See, for example, Palmerston 'to the Globe', 22 Feb. 1849 and 9 July 1849, in which he urges a contradiction of articles in the *Morning Chronicle*. 'There is in todays Chronicle an abusive article about Mr Milnes & his Pamphlet which may be deserving of some notice in the Globe', he wrote on 22 February. 'You might say that The Chronicle as usual, makes up by vulgar Personalities for its utter Incapacity to deal with argument, it rails at the writer because it cannot refute what he has written'. Similarly, on 9 July he wrote: 'I should be glad if you could in Tomorrows Globe make some Remarks upon the article in the Chronicle Today upon the Trial & Acquittal of the Sicilian Deputies prosecuted by Prince Castelcicala by order, of Course, from his Government...!' (Broadlands Papers, PRE/A/11-12).

copies of articles for insertion into the *Globe* which he directed his secretary to forward to the offices of the paper. A pretence of anonymity was maintained as Palmerston instructed his clerk that an article be forwarded to Wilson 'merely saying he is requested to insert it in the *Globe* of Tomorrow, but without mentioning my name but signing your own and dating F.O.'. <sup>88</sup> The notes all deal with foreign affairs and enclose articles to be reproduced verbatim or very careful coaching of the editor about the tone of articles and supplying the information upon which to base them. <sup>89</sup>

Having established this foot-hold in the *Globe*'s office, Palmerston used his influence there not so much to effect changes in public opinion, but rather primarily as a means of correcting falsehoods and mis-representations. When in March 1848 several papers expressed concern about the departure of the Montpensiers from England, fearing that Palmerston had instructed Normanby to make apologies to the French, the *Globe* stepped in to 'deal with idle rumours on delicate subjects' and state the facts of the case since 'silence might be taken for assent of their truth'. Surely, then, it was the hand of Palmerston that allowed the *Globe* to write that it was 'happy to be able to assure our contemporary that no instructions were given to our Ambassador to offer any explanation on a subject, which he very justly states could require none'. <sup>90</sup> It was no coincidence that when this subject of Britain having afforded asylum to the royal family of France came before the House, and Palmerston was faced with questions from that chamber, the *Globe* could report that

<sup>88</sup> Note by Palmerston, 24 Dec. 1848 [to Spencer Ponsonby?], Broadlands Papers, PRE/B/138/enc.1; attached to article 'for the *Globe*' Broadlands Papers, PRE/B/138.

<sup>89</sup> Broadlands Papers, PRE/B/137-147; letters and articles 'for the *Globe*', 26 Nov. 1848-30 June 1851. The original drafts of articles and accompanying letters have become separated and the articles are no longer to be found among the Broadlands Papers. Therefore, being unable to identify the articles to which these letters refer specifically, it is difficult to know whether these articles were published according to Palmerston's directions. However, given that it has been noted pointedly on one (only) that the article was '*not inserted*' (PRE/B/147/1-2) it seems likely, and the tone of these letters confirms this, that the articles were usually published in the *Globe*.

<sup>90</sup> *Globe*, 20 March 1848

those questions, 'our readers are aware, had been answered in our columns; and Lord PALMERSTON'S replies fully confirmed the correctness of those we had given'.<sup>91</sup> Through the medium of the *Globe*, Palmerston could insert articles which would address what he regarded as false representations of his position. In the summer of 1848, for instance, the publication of another edition of the *Revue Retrospective* attracted attention in one of the *Globe's* leading articles. Concerning the Montpensier marriage of 1846, the *Revue* laid before the public fresh evidence which the *Globe* deemed worthy of note 'not only on account of their bearing upon an important and disputed point of international law, but also because they throw some light upon the spirit in which the discussion upon that point was conducted by the French government'. On this ground, the article continued,

we add a few observations upon the contents of the letters now published, not for the purpose of calling down censure upon those whose duplicity is exposed, but because we think it important that a correct judgement should be formed respecting the justice of the frequent and violent attacks made upon Lord PALMERSTON, on account of the resistance which he most properly opposed to the accomplishment of the designs of the French government.<sup>92</sup>

In 1848 Palmerston was increasingly under attack at Westminster for his conduct of foreign policy and to be able to present his case in this way was especially important. As well as retrospective justifications of policies, it was well to undermine opponents. Thus ten days after the initial mention of the *Revue Retrospective's* content, the *Globe* returned to the theme, but this time to ridicule the handling of the affair before July 1846 by the 'easy, good-natured, imbecile minister', Lord Aberdeen, who, it asserted, had been ready 'to acquiesce in every demand made on him, and to be ready on all occasions to echo the sentiments of our rivals'.<sup>93</sup> In many

<sup>91</sup> *Globe*, 22 March 1848

<sup>92</sup> *Globe*, 2 Aug. 1848

<sup>93</sup> *Globe*, 12 Aug. 1848. Contrast this with a stout defence of Palmerston over the Montpensier question in the same paper at the end of the August, in response to an article in the *Times*, in which

ways, the *Globe* was the mouthpiece of Palmerston, and though this afforded him an invaluable means of putting his case forward, it was not necessarily the most useful political support he possessed.

Whilst he had enjoyed a long connection with the *Morning Chronicle*, pre-dating even that with the *Globe*, Palmerston's treatment of this paper was noticeably different from that of the *Globe*. Letters to Easthope and Andrew Doyle from Palmerston were warm and contained much useful political intelligence, but they fell short of dictation. Information was exchanged, but as the basis for the *Chronicle's* articles and not for direct use; in a sense Palmerston was buying the editor with news, which was a valuable bargaining token given that the *Times* was the only paper with its own foreign sources, which were often more efficient than the government's own.<sup>94</sup> Unlike the *Globe*, the impression given by the correspondence between Palmerston and the *Chronicle* is one of a connection based on mutual good understanding and respect.<sup>95</sup> Thus, when an article appeared in the *Chronicle* critical of the Russell government's recent handling of domestic affairs, Palmerston clearly did not feel in a position to demand redress, only to make an appeal:

Those who manage the Chronicle must of Course be supposed to be the best Judges of the way in which they can best execute their own Intentions, and it may appear intrusive on my Part to make any suggestions on the Subject; but wishing sincerely well to the Paper, and being desirous of seeing it in a state of good Relation with the present government, I cannot refrain from expressing a Doubt whether any advantage can accrue to the Chronicle from such personal attacks on members of the Government as are contained in the article of this morning about Lord John Russell's

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the *Globe* asserted that any attacks on Palmerston's conduct were 'not only unfair, but absolutely stupid. And we trust we shall have no more of them' (*Globe*, 29 Aug. 1848).

<sup>94</sup> Clarendon complained in October 1854, for example, that whilst the 'details that come dribbling in are confirmatory' of what was already published about Eastern affairs in the *Times*, 'the absence of official news makes me very anxious' (Clarendon to Palmerston, 4 Oct. 1854, Broadlands Papers, GC/CL/577/1-3).

<sup>95</sup> Palmerston to Sir John Easthope, July-Dec. 1846, Broadlands Papers, GC/EA/49-56; Palmerston to Andrew Doyle, 16 Feb. 1846, 2 Aug. 1846, nd, Broadlands Papers, GC/DO/65, 71, 100/1

speech yesterday on the Factory Bill, and in some articles which have appeared about Mr Duncombe's motion on the subject of the Payment of Rates & Taxes as a Qualification to vote...<sup>96</sup>

Throughout Easthope's tenure of the editorship, the *Chronicle* remained generally well-disposed towards Palmerston yet within a month of its take-over by the Peelites, the tone of the paper changed markedly. Articles in this paper henceforth criticised Palmerston's diplomacy and when in the summer of 1848 the *Chronicle* lamented the lack of information forthcoming from Palmerston, in this case about the River Plate, it was as much an illustration of the severed ties between them as a criticism of his policy.<sup>97</sup>

By contrast, the *Morning Post* of the 1840s was essentially a protectionist journal quite hostile to Palmerston. His diplomatic style, the *Post* maintained, was 'offensive to foreign Governments' and failed to uphold 'the dignity of his own'; his failure to give a full account of his policy to Parliament was well-known where his or his delegates' conduct was 'sure not to cut the most decent or dignified of figures'; his policy in general appeared to have no 'other principle than that of favouring the cause of revolt all over the world', at least if that were not the case, 'he uses so much skill in its concealment that no one can make out what that other principle is'; and when called upon to defend his policy on one occasion, the *Post* found Palmerston's exposition 'unsound from beginning to end' and 'very specious'.<sup>98</sup> With the change in ownership in 1849, however, this relationship changed and Palmerston found the paper a much more sympathetic witness. As with the *Chronicle* though Palmerston could not command support, merely win it, and this he was obliged to do rapidly in order to counteract the loss of the *Chronicle*. The Borthwicks, Peter and Algernon,

<sup>96</sup> Palmerston to Andrew Doyle, 18 March 1847, Broadlands Papers, GC/DO/82/1

<sup>97</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 27 July 1848

<sup>98</sup> *Morning Post*, 17 June 1848, 24 July 1848, 12 Aug. 1848, 18 Aug. 1848

were keen to cultivate Palmerston as a source, but at the same time, were not disposed to rely on him alone for information about foreign policy. During his time as the *Post's* correspondent in Paris, Algernon sought out Normanby, British Ambassador there as an official source, but the *Post* in this way was not placing itself squarely as a Palmerstonian organ. Although it appears to have come to little, Algernon wrote to his father in May 1850 to say that he was 'delighted to find that we are to work with the *Times*'.<sup>99</sup>

The *Post* was broadly won over to the Palmerstonian line through a series of social meetings and also a frank interchange of political news between the Borthwicks and Palmerston, although there remained the possibility at least of personal advancement for a sympathetic editor.<sup>100</sup> Thus when he was dismissed from the Foreign Office in December 1851, Borthwick wrote to Palmerston with the note that 'You are entitled well to the hearty service of every Englishman and I am desirous to be a faithful servant' and he even organised a number of 'confidence meetings' for Palmerston 'to express public gratitude for your administration of foreign affairs and public admiration for your Character'.<sup>101</sup> Even more than with Easthope and the *Chronicle*, perhaps, Palmerston had won over an editor and held his loyalty through a relationship based on respect. The *Post* maintained its

<sup>99</sup> Algernon Borthwick to Peter Borthwick, 6 May 1850, Glesesk-Bathurst Papers, MS.Dep.1990/1/1082. A few months later Algernon reported that he would urge Wikoff to write up the *Post* in America as an antidote to the *Times*, and at the end of that year Peter Borthwick wrote of the battle the *Post* had with the *Times*, condemning the *Times* as a paper which 'poisoned and misled' public opinion (Algernon Borthwick to Peter Borthwick, 'Monday' [Feb. 1851], Glesesk-Bathurst Papers, MS.Dep.1990/1/1106; Peter Borthwick to Algernon Borthwick, 19 Dec. 1851, Glesesk-Bathurst Papers, MS.Dep.1990/1/1140).

<sup>100</sup> Russell wrote to Palmerston at the time of the change in the *Post's* ownership and editorship: 'I think it would be fair to say that if the Morning Post becomes gradually more favourable to the Ministry, you would give a Consulship to the present Editor when vacant. I understand from you that he is a person quite fit for employment, from education & manners' (Russell to Palmerston, 4 Aug. 1849, Broadlands Papers, GC/RU/279/1-2).

<sup>101</sup> Peter Borthwick to Palmerston, 27 Dec. 1851, Broadlands Papers, GMC/47/1-4

protectionist views throughout, yet managed to combine this with an enthusiasm for Palmerston and his foreign policy. Whilst there was not a direct correlation to be made between party allegiance and foreign politics, as suggested, it would have been easier for Palmerston to maintain friendly links with a Whig title such as the *Chronicle* (prior to 1848) than with a paper whose principles in a crucial area of domestic politics were at variance with those of the party to whom the foreign minister belonged. Allies won this way, however, were more valuable than those known to be in Palmerston's pocket. As the *Times* had observed in November 1846, the support of an independent paper which deems a statesman's policy wise and national 'is the more worth his acceptance, inasmuch as he knows it to be spontaneous and sincere; and if we are obliged to record our dissent, it may be worth while for such a statesman to ask himself which of the two conflicting lines of policy has the real support of the nation'.<sup>102</sup>

The support of the nation as a factor in foreign policy came into sharp focus as an issue over the Don Pacifico debate in the middle of 1850. This debate represents something of a turning point, not least because, as R.M. Keeling suggests, it 'is a revealing reflection of the attitudes of the British middle classes toward foreign policy'.<sup>103</sup> Palmerston's invocations of '*civis Romanus sum*' brought the question down to the basic interests of every member of the population and out of the exclusive realm of high political debate. As the *Globe* observed, 'Lord PALMERSTON, the House of Commons, and the Nation, are henceforth at one', and the question now before the country:

awoke a sentiment through the length and breadth of England, to which we have been strangers since the days of Free-trade and the

<sup>102</sup> *Times*, 25 Nov. 1846

<sup>103</sup> R. M. Keeling, 'Palmerston and the Pacifico Debate', (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Missouri, Columbia, 1968), p.iii

Reform-bill. The nation was outraged at the assumption that its contented apathy should be identified either with acquiescence in the Absolutist reaction, or indifference to the spread of German and Italian Constitutionalism. The great seats of manufacturing industry became aware that they were fighting for their own cause in supporting a Minister whose protecting arm was over every one of his countrymen, at the Court of the most arbitrary despot, or amid the mobs of the most unbridled democracy; and last night the House of Commons worthily answered the call of its constituents, by a vote which has silenced and shattered all the elaborate intrigues of these foreign exiles and their English confederates.<sup>104</sup>

Palmerstonian journals took up this sentiment and followed the Foreign Secretary's course as he sought victory for a moral cause. As the *Economist* argued, it was undoubtedly true that Don Pacifico's claims upon the Greek government were exaggerated, but nonetheless they were valid in principle and it was important that Palmerston campaign for redress of grievances for a British subject who was the victim of a 'popular prejudice'.<sup>105</sup> It was also, according to the *Globe*, something of a judgement on Palmerston. The debate, that paper argued, confirmed the 'the national affection and respect' which Palmerston had earned, but stressed also the extent to which it had demonstrated that he was the country's ablest foreign minister, not only on account of his popularity abroad, but also in uniting 'the classes which carried Free-trade', who had 'unmistakeably [sic] shown that they are determined to hold fast by their love of liberal institutions in foreign as well as in domestic politics'.<sup>106</sup> It applauded the strong-arm approach of Palmerston as a welcome counterpoint to the 'remplissage for blue books' of what it derided as 'menacing Aberdonian notes'.<sup>107</sup>

There was another aspect to the debate, however. The *Morning Post* touched upon it in a leading article which praised Palmerston's handling of the affair. The real object of the opposition assault on Palmerston, it contended, was the restoration

<sup>104</sup> *Globe*, 29 June 1850

<sup>105</sup> *Economist*, 16 March 1850, 15 June 1850

<sup>106</sup> *Globe*, 26 June 1850

<sup>107</sup> *Globe*, 27 June 1850

to office of leading Peelites in alliance with as many Protectionists as could be persuaded to join them. This manoeuvre, however, the *Post* regarded as a most unfortunate piece of intrigue: not only did it offend the *Post's* protectionist sympathies as a strategy likely to damage rather than enhance the chances of the installation of a protectionist ministry in Britain, but it represented intolerable cynicism on the part of the protagonists in their use of this issue for other ends. It was beyond the comprehension of the *Post* that the principles which had guided Palmerston's handling of Don Pacifico's claims could legitimately be questioned.<sup>108</sup>

On the other side of the political debate, the moral right of Palmerston's course was not so readily recognised. The *Times* had taken the inflated nature of Don Pacifico's claims as reason enough to undermine his case, and in May expressed doubts about the willingness of the country to follow Palmerston in his cause - he had after all, shown 'so little confidence' in it himself it claimed - particularly if it led (as it surely could) to war.<sup>109</sup> To speak in June of Palmerston as having a paramount claim to be regarded as 'English Minister' who had 'represented with unrivalled spirit and success the interests and the opinions of this country' struck the *Times* as ridiculous. He was above all a statesman of the utmost inconsistency, 'for although there is no constituted authority in Europe with which Lord PALMERSTON has not quarrelled, there is no insurrection that he has not betrayed'.<sup>110</sup>

The debate in June 1850 seemed to the *Morning Chronicle* too broad to serve any useful purpose. Whilst Palmerston's answers had been unsatisfactory, the subject had become obscured anyway: 'the Government, or their advocates,' it wrote, 'have preferred to change the issue, and to enlarge it to a compass which compels

<sup>108</sup> *Morning Post*, 27 June 1850

<sup>109</sup> *Times*, 22 Feb. 1850, 20 May 1850

<sup>110</sup> *Times*, 22 June 1850

their adversaries to prove a great deal, at the risk of now seeming to prove nothing'.<sup>111</sup> The only conclusion was that the Whigs were seeking to fudge the issue and their real goal was to win a vote over Palmerston's foreign policy in order to bolster the ministry and keep Russell in office.<sup>112</sup> This provides an interesting contrast with the argument of the *Morning Post*, illustrating the concern on both sides of the debate with the party political implications of the affair.

In the face of Palmerston's victory, narrow as it might have been, yet still presented as popular, his antagonists contented themselves with issuing a warning to the 'triumphant' Whigs. It fell to the rest of the Cabinet to rein in Palmerston at the Foreign Office; to exercise 'discretion and prudence' in the management of foreign affairs which the *Chronicle* felt had been 'deplorably deficient' under Palmerston and, the *Times* urged, in the correspondence of that department 'to renounce its unbecoming acerbity of tone'.<sup>113</sup> They had made a faulty attack, however, confusing what was presented as a moral question with one of party political intrigue. Palmerston had won a popular victory, charmed the so-called middle classes with his patriotic rhetoric, and those who had focused on the Peelite-Russell angle were obliged in the end to acknowledge, however grudgingly, Palmerston's enhanced standing. With an ever broader popular base of support and a reputation forged in a field which stood to some extent above party intrigue, Palmerston's policies were not to be used to contest party disputes. In December 1851, when he was expelled from office, the same mistake was not made again and newspapers across the political spectrum focused on Palmerston first and party interest second.

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<sup>111</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 27 June 1850

<sup>112</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 29 June 1850

<sup>113</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 1 July 1850; *Times*, 1 July 1850

Palmerston's dismissal occasioned such outrage at the *Morning Post* that the subject was the main leader article every day from 25 December 1851 until 2 January 1852. The loss, in the 'present critical state of European affairs', of the services of a minister whom, the *Post* believed, history would accord a place 'in the very highest ranks of statesmanship' was a setback at both the domestic and international level.<sup>114</sup> The *Post* was greatly troubled that the explanation for this loss was that, in effect, Palmerston was too unpopular abroad. 'Public opinion will not be satisfied with light explanations of so great a misfortune;' an article observed, 'still less with explanations which attribute the result to unworthy or discreditable causes', more especially since it was Palmerston above all others to whom the longevity of the Russell government ought to be attributed.<sup>115</sup> To remove a politician whose only fault was 'that he loves his country so well, and serves his SOVEREIGN so faithfully, that he prefers the independence of the one and the dignity of the other to the good or ill pleasure of certain foreign politicians', was unjust indeed.<sup>116</sup>

Significantly, it was not only the Palmerstonian papers that expressed such sentiments. Both the *Times* and the *Morning Chronicle* rued Palmerston's dismissal. Whilst adhering to the ministerial line, which the *Times* had been charged with presenting to the public, that paper set aside the belief that Palmerston's removal was almost certainly in the country's best interests, and focused on the abilities thus lost. In the article which first announced the Foreign Secretary's fall, the *Times* wrote of Palmerston (suspecting it had seen the last of him in office) commending his industry, courage and charm and steadfastly refrained from repeating the charges

<sup>114</sup> *Morning Post*, 25 Dec. 1851

<sup>115</sup> *Morning Post*, 26 Dec. 1851

<sup>116</sup> *Morning Post*, 30 Dec. 1851

previously made against his foreign policy.<sup>117</sup> The *Morning Chronicle*, too, was sorry to lose the services of Palmerston. In an article on Christmas Day 1851, it chastised the Russell Cabinet for its inconsistency in dropping a Minister whom the government had heretofore defended stoically, and described his dismissal as a 'national humiliation'. Palmerston had not only been 'the keystone of the arch' for the last five-and-a-half years, but he was 'their only man of first-class ability; his policy, though dangerous always and injurious often, was at least bold, spirited, and not essentially un-English'.<sup>118</sup> The dismissal in December 1851 and the Don Pacifico debate in 1850 are undeniably different questions in terms of their ramifications and impact but, crucially, in 1851 newspapers across the political spectrum supported Palmerston, or at least regretted his loss, and implicitly recognised him as a national figure, whose fortunes and conduct ought not necessarily to be tied in with party interests; this contrasts markedly with the situation eighteen months earlier when discussion of his handling of foreign affairs was seen quite widely as having direct party political implications.

Palmerston's political force was not spent by the end of 1851. As the *Morning Post* noted of his speech on the Militia Bill which heralded the downfall of his erstwhile colleagues in February 1852, he had shown 'at once that he had sagacity to comprehend, and ability to meet, what Parliament and the public felt to be the wish of the nation, and the necessity of the time'.<sup>119</sup> The Derby government which replaced that of Russell in February sustained a precarious balancing act for the following ten months, but it was unable ever to establish itself as a sound and secure

<sup>117</sup> *Times*, 24 Dec. 1851

<sup>118</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 25 Dec. 1851

<sup>119</sup> *Morning Post*, 23 Feb. 1852

ministry.<sup>120</sup> Palmerston, meanwhile, consolidated his own position and a certain detachment from party allegiance (with whom would he have logically sided?) gave him an influential position in politics, perhaps in a sense, something of a kingmaker, if not, indeed, a future leader-in-waiting himself.<sup>121</sup> As the Derby administration stumbled to its fall in the autumn of 1852, attention in the press turned to the question of its replacement. Lord John Russell was dismissed as unfit again to become Prime Minister by the *Morning Post*: between him and that station were now 'raised up obstructions permanent and insurmountable', primarily popular and parliamentary distrust.<sup>122</sup> Palmerston, however, held a very strong hand, as one who 'in his present independent position, enjoys a wider popularity, and exercises a larger and more wholesome influence on the European mind, than any other living man'. On this ground, the *Post* argued, he need 'make no approaches to any party in the State... for to him "*Tout vient à propos*", whether he wait or not'.<sup>123</sup>

The *Globe* placed in Palmerston's hands the ability to turn out the Derby government. Alluding to an old French caricature in which Calonne offered the Assembly of Notables the choice '*Mes chers animaux, à qu'elle sauce voulez-vous*

<sup>120</sup> See above, pp.98-106

<sup>121</sup> As Algernon Borthwick wrote to his father at this time: 'Putting aside the ill-conduct question, the Russell Cabinet is evidently "done for". Stanley can't make a Cabinet and Graham can't make a Party. Coalition must be the order of the day. Now to say true, it seems to me that any Body may coalesce with any Body Else:

Stanley and Graham

Palmerston and Graham

Graham and the Radicals

Palmerston and the Radicals

Palmerston and the Protectionists:

these may all join and interjoin if it suit them - I see no Principles that stand in the way, for the truth is that no one has any, except Lord P. I see no impediment to their *all* joining him'. He also reiterated his intention that 'the *Post* will always be Palmerston's true Friend'. (Algernon Borthwick to Peter Borthwick, 13 Dec. 1852, Glenesk-Bathurst Papers, MS.Dep.1990/1/1173)

<sup>122</sup> *Morning Post*, 4 Oct. 1852

<sup>123</sup> *Morning Post*, 7 Oct. 1852. The *Morning Post*, which was publishing articles paid for by the French government, according to Malmesbury, knew that Palmerston was well regarded in Paris, and particularly when he joined the Aberdeen government Palmerston's known disposition to resort to war was a relief to Brünnow and Walewski (Lord Malmesbury, *Memoirs of an Ex-Minister, An Autobiography* 2 vols. (London, 1884), I, pp.362 (4 and 5 Nov. 1852), 402 (3 June 1853)).

*être mangés?*', the *Globe* asked the same question of the current British ministry, and helpfully outlined the options: 'The Chancellor of the Exchequer's, *à la financière?* - Mr VILLIER'S Wolverhampton? - or Lord PALMERSTON'S Tiverton sauce? It will be of little use for our poor Protective animals to reply, like CALONNE'S - "*Mais nous ne voulons pas être mangés!*"... That is a foregone conclusion'. The *Globe* believed it would be the Tiverton.<sup>124</sup> Palmerston's standing no longer depended on his day-to-day political activity. He could therefore effect a parliamentary defeat for the free traders and, though the *Globe* admitted that for this he was owed no 'gratitude for his conduct', and while there might thus be 'abundant grounds why Liberals should complain of Lord PALMERSTON', this did not mean that his contributions in the field of foreign policy to civil and religious liberty all over the world should be ignored. Indeed 'it would be a scandalous injustice to wreak our disappointment in slanders on the great achievements' of his diplomatic career.<sup>125</sup> Even the Peelite *Morning Chronicle*, once Palmerston had taken over the Home Office, acknowledged that his 'great ability and long familiarity with affairs will add authority to his office as Secretary for the Home Department, while his influence in the House will, in case of need, be available for the assistance of a body of colleagues who will only be embarrassed by the absence of competent opponents'.<sup>126</sup> Whereas Palmerston during the Russell government had been portrayed as the ministry's representative in the field of foreign affairs, admittedly a distinctive one, by 1852, he was much more widely regarded as an important figure

<sup>124</sup> *Globe*, 24 Nov. 1852. The *Globe* regarded Palmerston's role in any future political changes as vital: 'As in the calculation of mechanical forces there always occurs the question, "Have you allowed for friction?" so in the anticipation of party divisions, there will henceforth occur the question, "Have you allowed for Palmerston?"' (*Globe*, 25 Nov. 1852).

<sup>125</sup> *Globe*, 27 Nov. 1852

<sup>126</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 24 Dec. 1852

in his own right and his reputation, based as it was on foreign policy, was concerned with his own standing and personality. This change was to have important ramifications for the years of the Aberdeen government.

It took the newspapers a little while to adjust to Palmerston's new employment. As late as the summer of 1853, the *Times* still felt the need to make explicit this change and made a point of observing to its readers that 'though his heart may be on the Danube, his hand must be in the Holborn sewers'. Nonetheless, Palmerston had committed himself to numerous domestic measures which if executed with the same 'dexterity and fortune' as had characterised his foreign secretaryship, would give 'little reason for regretting the revolution which transferred such indefatigable energies to the peaceful fields of the Home-office'.<sup>127</sup> At the end of the first parliamentary session of the Aberdeen government, the early positive forecasts about the ministry's potential looked well-founded, and Palmerston's measures at the Home Office, especially those directed towards the improvement of towns and repression of crime, attracted favourable notice in certain sections of the press.<sup>128</sup>

Nevertheless, Palmerston was still seen first and foremost as a foreign minister; and there was no reason for this impression to be challenged given Palmerston's close involvement in Cabinet discussions of foreign policy from the very outset of this government.<sup>129</sup> Protectionist journals persisted in complimenting the abilities of Palmerston and suggesting that the conduct of the country's foreign

<sup>127</sup> *Times*, 26 July 1853

<sup>128</sup> See, for example, the *Economist*, 20 Aug. 1853

<sup>129</sup> The *Times*, for example, was well aware of Palmerston's involvement in the conduct of foreign policy, in no small measure due to the letters from Clarendon to Reeve (see for example, Clarendon to Reeve, 16 Dec. 1853, Clarendon Deposit, MS.Clar.dep.c.535, fols 87-88). See also J.T. Delane to G. [Dasent], 4 Oct. 1853, Delane Papers, T.N.L., 5/39

policy would have been quite different had he been re-instated in his old station. These assertions Palmerston strenuously denied in public speeches, but it is significant that in reporting one such speech, delivered in Perth, the *Economist* noted that there was no better judge of what is due to the country's honour than Palmerston, 'and he would neither continue to sit in the Cabinet, nor eulogise the Foreign Secretary, were he not perfectly convinced that the course pursued with respect to other countries is equally wise and spirited, calculated to preserve peace, ...and raise the national honour'.<sup>130</sup> Still, then, Palmerston's explicit support for Clarendon's conduct at the Foreign Office was looked for: if Palmerston was not to manage affairs himself directly, it was a source of comfort that he still watched over and approved what his successor was doing. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that when Palmerston resigned from the government, almost a year since joining, there were some voices to be heard from the press suggesting that in this, as in all matters, Palmerston's first concern was still with foreign policy and the Reform question was a mere façade.

In the first instance, however, as the *Times* originally reported, it was believed that Palmerston's resignation was wholly unconnected with the foreign policy of the government, and especially that relating to the Eastern question.<sup>131</sup> The *Economist*, the *Globe* and the *Morning Chronicle* all strenuously denied a link between the Home Secretary's action and the conduct of foreign policy. On the basis that, as the *Globe* had it, no step had been taken by the Foreign Office without Palmerston's 'previous knowledge, and perfect concurrence', it upheld the official account.<sup>132</sup> By that token the same could be said of the Reform issue up to that

<sup>130</sup> *Economist*, 1 Oct. 1853

<sup>131</sup> *Times*, 16 Dec. 1853

<sup>132</sup> *Economist*, 17 Dec. 1853; *Globe*, 16, 17 Dec. 1853 (quoted from 17 Dec.); *Morning*

point, but whether it was true or not - and the *Morning Post* maintained throughout that foreign policy disagreements were just as important as any over Reform<sup>133</sup> - there was agreement that Palmerston's membership of the government was beneficial to the effectual execution of foreign policy. Upon his return to the Cabinet, once the 'mis-understanding' had been cleared up, the *Post*, for example, saw that this would guarantee that British policy in the East would henceforth be 'of a more worthy and active nature'.<sup>134</sup> More telling still was the response of the *Morning Chronicle*. Having assured readers that reform was the only question at issue, the *Chronicle* welcomed his return and couched this relief exclusively in terms of its implications for foreign affairs. That the Cabinet once again appeared united at a critical juncture in European history was true enough and the value of that was not questioned, but Palmerston's renewed adherence signalled more than just domestic harmony:

To a large class of politicians, who feel rather than reason - who admire rather than understand - the name of Palmerston is a symbol of pluck and public spirit - a sort of epitome of all that is most English in the English character. It was, indeed, amusing to see the pertinacity with which, for some time after the formation of the present Government, people refused to recognise him in his new post of Home Secretary.<sup>135</sup>

No less importantly, Palmerston's return would, the *Chronicle* added, display to foreign governments, especially those of Russia and Turkey, 'his approval of the foreign policy of the Government'.<sup>136</sup> Interestingly, whilst in some quarters

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*Chronicle*, 16 Dec. 1853

<sup>133</sup> On 17 December 1853, the *Morning Post* denied that Palmerston was not a Parliamentary reformer, as the *Times* had argued, and that rather he 'has been ready to agree to a very considerable measure of Reform', although it did concede that he regarded the current proposals as going 'beyond the necessities of the time', and 'inexpedient'. There was little doubt in the minds of the *Post's* editors that it was dis-satisfaction with the government's handling of foreign affairs that caused the friction with his colleagues: 'we are convinced that Lord PALMERSTON has not approved of the sluggish policy pursued in the Eastern question,' said an article of 19 December, 'and we are certain that he is favourable to as large a measure of reform as is demanded by public opinion, and as he thinks compatible with the true interests of the country'.

<sup>134</sup> *Morning Post*, 26 Dec. 1853

<sup>135</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 26 Dec. 1853

<sup>136</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 27 Dec. 1853

Palmerston was still held up as the most able minister for the direction of British foreign policy in the East, most press attention in 1854 concerning Palmerston focused on his domestic politics and his work at the Home Office. The *Morning Post* was one of the few newspapers in this year, particularly once war had been declared by Britain, to continue to peddle the argument that a more determined and consistent Palmerstonian line from the outset would have avoided this war.<sup>137</sup>

Whatever might have been the value of Palmerston's support for the government's foreign policy, it is clear that as soon as he had been re-admitted to the Cabinet, it was to his domestic reforms that members of the press looked.<sup>138</sup> Newspaper coverage of Palmerston's political activities in 1854 was concerned primarily with domestic issues such as the work of the Board of Health; smoke abatement; the reforms of prisons, universities, and police; and town improvements such as sewage systems.<sup>139</sup> The absence of meaningful connections between Palmerston and foreign policy in newspaper articles during this year and a far greater preponderance of articles discussing his domestic undertakings is remarkable. Towards the end of the year, the *Times* observed how Palmerston was no longer at the forefront of diplomatic debates, at least those before the public gaze, and wondered at his propensity to busy himself with other issues:

So now, if people have time to look back - and the long intervals of the intelligence give us time for almost anything - it is likely the question is now and then asked, 'What is Lord PALMERSTON doing? What does he think of the war? Would he have averted it? Would he have brought it earlier to a crisis? Is he gathering friends and concerting measures with a view to his old post?' We cannot undertake to answer all those questions, but the world may see at once one thing that Lord PALMERSTON is doing. Deep in

<sup>137</sup> *Morning Post*, 3 April 1854

<sup>138</sup> See, for example, the *Globe*, 2 Feb. 1854

<sup>139</sup> See articles in: the *Globe*, 10 Mar. 1854, 3 April 1854, 11, 31 July 1854, 5 Oct. 1854, 2 Nov. 1854; *Morning Chronicle*, 7, 11 Jan. 1854, 7 Feb. 1854, 17 April 1854, 27 June 1854, 8, 13, 20 July 1854, 1, 3 Aug. 1854, 11 Sept. 1854

the heart of the country, somewhere between the New Forest and Salisbury Plain, he is presiding over innocent rustic celebrities, delivering prizes to bucolic excellence, and teaching labourers how to be happy, and merry and wise.<sup>140</sup>

Meanwhile, the debate over the correct course in the war raged on at Westminster. Crucially, however, whereas it had been Palmerston as much as, if not more so than Russell, who had challenged the Aberdonian approach, the contest was now, in 1854, presented in the press as being between Russell and Aberdeen. In the *Morning Post* an article appeared in July highly critical of the leadership of the Prime Minister, or 'Lord FEEBLEMIND' as it dubbed him. Significantly though, in discussing the merits of the Aberdonian versus the alternative policy, the *Post*, whilst accepting that many in the Cabinet were losing faith in the premier's approach (although these were not named), identified Lord John Russell and Lord Clarendon as the leading lights among those 'expressing and acting on directly opposite opinions'. In the same edition, indeed, Palmerston was mentioned in the following leading article, but solely in connection with police reform.<sup>141</sup>

Three days later the *Post* returned to its attacks on the government, this time critical of its performance in all areas of public business, condemning the ministry as susceptible to parliamentary majorities not its own, indeed majorities resulting 'from chance combinations, which appear to have been formed rather without than within the walls of Parliament'. Unacceptable by any measure of ministerial conduct, the *Post* was especially critical of this situation in the face of the current turbulent foreign context, arguing that weak government at home would send out obscure signals to foreign powers about British policy. A firm hand was required, but again, it was not Palmerston, to whom on a reading of the press prior to the beginning of

<sup>140</sup> *Times*, 2 Nov. 1854

<sup>141</sup> *Morning Post*, 21 June 1854

1854 might it have been suggested an appeal would be made. Rather, on the question of who directed policy, the *Post* asked; 'Is it the Earl of ABERDEEN or Lord JOHN RUSSELL?'.<sup>142</sup> Not that Palmerston was completely silent on the subject of the Eastern question - as the *Post* again reported, a month after this attack, Palmerston's recent speech on this subject had contained 'manly and English declarations',<sup>143</sup> - but he was not being put forward as the statesman who should be given the opportunity to take up the reins of the Foreign Office and execute his 'beau Ideal'.

Only once the war could be seen to be going badly did the press seek to tie Palmerston's fortunes in with those of his colleagues. Of a meeting at the Horn's Tavern in Kennington, in which a resolution was passed critical of Aberdeen's handling of the Eastern question and war, the *Morning Chronicle* noted that 'Lord PALMERSTON and Lord JOHN RUSSELL have been equally guilty of the "extreme folly" which is denounced; and they are equally responsible for the "alarm and disgust" which the Ministerial policy may call forth'.<sup>144</sup> It was an implicit recognition of the careful manoeuvring on the part of Palmerston which had allowed him to present himself after December 1853 as the government's ablest foreign and subsequently war minister without having to put those claims to the test, and thus the Peelite press by the end of the year was clearly concerned lest he win, by default, the credit for his wise, though unheeded, counsels in this matter.

<sup>142</sup> *Morning Post*, 24 June 1854

<sup>143</sup> *Morning Post*, 26 July 1854

<sup>144</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 7 Dec. 1854. Nevertheless, the Peelites did still see Russell as more important than Palmerston in this government's foreign policy debates, as a letter from Newcastle to Gladstone in February 1855 illustrates in which Newcastle clearly labels the anti-Aberdonian faction within the Cabinet as 'the Russell section' (Newcastle to Gladstone, 5 Feb. 1855, Newcastle Papers, NeC 10851/1/2).

By the autumn of 1854 most titles were advocating a Palmerstonian line, whether they had supported his approach from the outset or been converted by witnessing the progress of events. The *Times*, for instance, had started out at the beginning of the Aberdeen government as an Aberdonian journal, but by the end of the first year the Prime Minister was starting to lose the support of Delane and the *Times*, who, no doubt influenced by the intelligence received from Clarendon, could see the divisions which were carving up the Cabinet, and became increasingly bellicose.<sup>145</sup> The *Times* in 1854 acted increasingly independently of Aberdeen and was no longer swayed by his counsel, printing articles on a regular basis which the Prime Minister deeply regretted. But as the paper's owner, John Walter, told John Bright in March, 'when the country would go for war, it was not worth while to oppose it, hurting themselves and doing no good'.<sup>146</sup> Yet it was not a purely political decision. Delane himself visited the Crimea in August and September and foresaw the coming winter hardships which British soldiers there were about to face. When the Duke of Newcastle, at the War Department, took no notice, he became more vocal in his criticism of the government, and significantly, joined the campaign behind Palmerston.<sup>147</sup> But by now, there was no reason for Palmerston to fear that his name might be attached to the ministry's: he had made his stand, been proven 'correct' in his view of the Eastern question and had contrived to steal a march on his nearest Whig rival, Russell.

Palmerston's avoidance of the limelight during the critical months of 1854 is interesting. Clearly he did not court press attention for his opinions on foreign

<sup>145</sup> See letters from Clarendon to Reeve for 1853, Clarendon Deposit, MS.Clar.dep.c.535. Also, Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press: Vol.I*, pp.101-102

<sup>146</sup> For the changing attitudes of the *Times* in this period, see Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press: Vol.I*, pp.102-106

<sup>147</sup> L. Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Oxford, 1985), p.235

policy. Even in the *Morning Post*, 'which is notoriously his paper' Aberdeen complained in February,<sup>148</sup> Palmerston was not represented as the Cabinet's chief anti-Aberdonian - that distinction went to Russell. This was not coincidental; whether Palmerston guided this editorial policy or not, he was certainly pleased with its results. His resignation of December 1853 was in many respects, an attempt to gain political ground at Russell's expense.<sup>149</sup> He returned at the beginning of 1854 having given the impression that he disliked the government's foreign policy and that he could offer a better alternative, but for reasons of national stability and strength, he had agreed to return. He could not leave the government with any degree of credit as this act would probably cause its downfall, at least undermine its credibility, but he had brought into question his level of support. Believing the government weak, however, hopes for its long-term survival were slim and thus it was that Palmerston was presented with an opportunity of laying the foundations for his 'inevitable' accession to the premiership within a year.

He had two main tasks: firstly to undermine Russell; and secondly to secure or confirm a broad base of popular support. His letters to Russell demonstrate his desire to prevent Lord John from increasing his stock. Over Reform, Palmerston counselled caution from Russell. Not only would it be dangerous at the present moment to bring into question the future of the government, but: 'Your measure may possibly give you some small & fleeting Popularity among the lower Classes,' he wrote to his colleague,

though there seems good Reason to doubt whether the Balance of Feeling would not be against you for not giving to all that which you would grant to a few. But your intentioned Course is openly disapproved by all the intelligent & respectable Classes whose good opinion is most to be valued, & you can hardly be aware of

<sup>148</sup> Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press: Vol.I*, p.103

<sup>149</sup> See above, pp.139-146

the Feelings of personal Hostility towards you which are daily spreading through all the Party which has hitherto acknowledged you as their Leader.<sup>150</sup>

Palmerston was not seeking to assist Russell, however. At this point, Palmerston was himself ready neither to assume Russell's mantle as leader of the Whigs, nor to mount a challenge for the premiership should the government fall. Palmerston needed to re-establish his credibility with the rest of the Cabinet again, having done much in the previous December to win popular support, but also consolidate this support outside Westminster. Were Russell to gain the upper hand now by either passing Reform and winning popular acclaim, or upsetting the government, Palmerston's domestic policies were not enough to win popular support and the Eastern question was not yet far enough advanced for him to dis-associate himself from the ministry; indeed, it might still have been possible for a positive foreign policy to carry the day. The most effective way for Palmerston to 'defeat' Russell, was to wait for Russell to damage himself. If the anti-Aberdonian policy was not to gain widespread currency within the Cabinet, there seemed little prospect of a happy outcome in the war, and better then that Russell go down as the minister who compromised Aberdeen's leadership, than Palmerston. Thus, attention in the press, and especially the pro-Palmerston journals, recognised Palmerston's diplomatic ability but did not attribute to him responsibility for the current divisions: Russell was the disloyal one.

Focusing on Palmerston's domestic policies was not a wasted enterprise. The new Palmerston, socially aware, reforming, even philanthropic, was designed to appeal to the middle classes whose concerns, especially in the growing industrial regions, were heavily focused on public health and social conditions. And as the

<sup>150</sup>

Palmerston to Russell, 29 Jan. 1854, Russell Papers, PRO 30/22/11C, fols 110A-112

war, through Gladstone's budgets, imposed financially on the middle classes in particular,<sup>151</sup> it was important to be seen as their ally. Furthermore, the nature of the Eastern question, as it related to Britain, by 1854 was not exclusively a foreign policy issue. Whatever Palmerston might have said in his Cabinet memorandum outlining his 'beau Ideal', at home the Crimean war was seen as essentially a test of Britain's greatness; of British institutions faced with the despotic menace of Russian absolutism and of the fitness of the British government to execute successfully what was expected to be the first world war.<sup>152</sup> For Palmerston to be associated with these institutions, indeed as a reformer and improver of them, was no impediment to his growing popularity, indeed it was essential, however misplaced such expectations might ultimately prove to have been.<sup>153</sup>

Palmerston won his victory. The *Morning Post* observed in January 1855 that 'the people of England at this important juncture, when the fate of England and Europe hangs in the balance, require and will have for Minister the only Statesman to whose great spirit, far-seeing wisdom, and thoroughly English character, they are ready to confide their destinies, and the issue, under PROVIDENCE, of this great war. That Statesman is Lord PALMERSTON'.<sup>154</sup> The *Globe* echoed this sentiment: 'Out of doors,' it claimed, 'there is not a part of the country that has not contributed spontaneous expressions of the wish for Lord PALMERSTON to undertake [?]undertake] the chief conduct of affairs'.<sup>155</sup> Even the *Morning Chronicle* was forced to admit that, on account of the damage that would have been caused to Britain's

<sup>151</sup> H.C.G. Matthew, *Gladstone 1809-1874* (Oxford, 1986), pp.121-124

<sup>152</sup> See O. Anderson, *A Liberal State at War: English Politics and Economics during the Crimean War* (London, 1967)

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*, p.35

<sup>154</sup> *Morning Post*, 30 Jan. 1855

<sup>155</sup> *Globe*, 5 Feb. 1855

foreign relations, had Palmerston not been able to form a government, 'his failure would have been a national misfortune'.<sup>156</sup> In this sense, then, he was indeed, *l'inévitable*.

After the 1850s, as the rivalry with Russell intensified, Palmerston came to see the means by which he could secure an ascendancy over other Whigs in search of the leadership for himself were to be found in no small measure beyond Westminster. Hence his withdrawal from foreign policy debates in public in 1854: Russell, Aberdeen Clarendon *et al* were all equally equipped to fight to manipulate middle-class opinion through the press, and although even here Palmerston gained an ascendancy, it was by default, as he had expected, but nonetheless, dependent upon the failure of Aberdonian and Peelite foreign policy and the growing unpopularity of Russell. To secure a strong basis of support to underpin a premiership bid, he needed *popular* support. Thus, he set about cultivating the image of man-of-the-people, to re-affirm his liberal (and popular) reputation in the field of foreign policy, but also to challenge the view that he was the last candle of the eighteenth century and to show that he could be a popular, liberal domestic politician as well. His use of newspapers went a long way towards establishing such an image but newspapers were not read by the whole country and thus a reputation amongst members and readers of the press had little resonance among the wider population. And even amongst groups such as the Manchester commercial classes who did read the newspapers, Palmerston won support, or at least established himself as the true guardian of their interests. How he went about achieving this will be explored further in the following chapter.

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<sup>156</sup>*Morning Chronicle*, 7 Feb. 1855

**CHAPTER 5. MOST ENGLISH MINISTER OR RUSSIAN SPY?:  
EXTRA-PARLIAMENTARY INFLUENCES ON, AND PERCEPTIONS OF,  
PALMERSTON, 1846-1855**

i) Palmerston and the nation.

It had been relatively straightforward for Palmerston to court the support of the newspaper reading public in that there was, by definition, a ready and effective medium through which to communicate with them. Less obviously could he speak to the broader population. In large part, his reputation with 'the people', of whatever social class, from those deprived of the vote to the commercial middle classes, rested on the construction (and appreciation) of positive images and impressions of Palmerston and Palmerstonism, propagated variously by potent rhetorical devices invoking various characteristics of national greatness and indeed solidarity.

It has been suggested by Muriel Chamberlain that the Victorian high-political view of the people, or commonalty, was akin to that held of the Roman mob, as represented in entertainments popular during this period such as Shakespeare's tragedy of *Coriolanus*.<sup>1</sup> The allusion, indeed, is not unduly contrived and it is no coincidence that an extension of this view resulted in December 1853 with the *Press*, essentially Disraeli's newspaper at this time, ascribing to Palmerston the mantle of Coriolanus himself.<sup>2</sup> Whether or not Palmerston shared Coriolanus' dislike of the people and popular politics ('I would they would forget me like the virtues/Which

<sup>1</sup> M.E. Chamberlain, 'Who founded the Liberal Party', *Inaugural lecture delivered at the University College of Swansea, 26 November 1990* (University College of Swansea, 1991), p.5

<sup>2</sup> *Press*, 24 Dec. 1853

our divines lose by 'em') and found that only obligation caused him to solicit such support ('Why in this wolvisch toge should I stand here/To beg of Hob and Dick that does appear/Their needless vouches? Custom calls me to't'), he certainly, like his supposed literary alter-ego, heeded the advice of Menenius that he would 'mar all', if he did not speak to the people 'in wholesome manner'.<sup>3</sup>

### *The broadening political nation*

The political world was no longer defined and limited to Parliament and a metropolitan clique. By mid-century it was apparent to the astute observer that the parameters of this world had shifted, as W.R. Greg suggested in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1852:

Before the reform bill, parliament was the arena where, by the theory of the constitution, and with nominally closed doors, the affairs of the nation were discussed and settled - it was the body to which the people delegated the task of thinking and acting for them in all political concerns....

But now all this has changed... Parliament is no longer the only, nor the chief arena for political debate. Public meetings and the press are fast encroaching upon and superseding its original exclusive functions. Every man has become a politician.... The country often takes precedence of the Legislature, both in the discussion and decision of public affairs. Public opinion is formed out of doors; and is only revised, ratified and embodied within.... The functions of parliament are no longer *initiary*.... The independent thinker originates; the Country listens, disputes, sifts, ripens; the Parliament revises and enacts....<sup>4</sup>

The early nineteenth century had witnessed a politicisation of the lower classes which was to have far-reaching ramifications in the politics of the post-1832 period. As Margot Finn observes, 'although local patriotisms continued to flourish beyond the eighteenth century, their grip on even plebeian culture was increasingly tempered

<sup>3</sup> Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* (Oxford, 1994 edn.), 2.3.55-6; 2.3.111-113; 2.3.57-59.

<sup>4</sup> W.R. Greg, 'The expected reform bill', *Edinburgh Review*, Jan. 1852, quoted P. Hollis, 'Pressure from Without: an introduction', in P. Hollis (ed.), *Pressure from Without in early Victorian England* (London, 1974), pp.25-26

by the wider claims of the nation', yet Finn herself perpetuates an Anglo-centric view of this period by identifying these local patriotisms within an *English* national identity.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, this phenomenon, the product of cultural, technological and economic influences, tended to the emergence of a national identity in Britain in advance of other European countries, and external affairs and warfare were essential means by which this identity was consolidated. As Linda Colley has argued, only since the Act of Union of 1707 which linked Scotland to England and Wales does a notion of 'Britishness' have any resonance, and this derives largely from a negative impetus to define 'Britain' and 'Britishness' by reference to 'the Other'.<sup>6</sup> During the eighteenth century this meant that Britain came to be defined largely in terms of what the nation's chief enemy, France, was not: thus Protestant Britain stood as a natural counter-point to Catholic France.<sup>7</sup> France could be represented as inferior to Britain in terms of civilisation and freedom, thereby assuaging envious feelings about French high culture and military prowess and offering therein grounds to rally around a notion of Britishness if only to emphasise this superiority.<sup>8</sup>

Whilst 'Britishness' did not supplant internal differences - the notion of a 'blended' modern British identity which had currency in the nineteenth century still speaks of a mix or amalgam comprising the original ingredients of 'Englishness' and 'Scottishness' and (although rarely meriting specific contemporary mention),

<sup>5</sup> M.C. Finn, *After Chartism: Class and Nation in English Radical Politics, 1848-1874* (Cambridge, 1993), p.22

<sup>6</sup> See L. Colley, 'Britishness and Otherness: An Argument', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol.31, no.4 (1992), 309-329 and L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London, 1996 edn.)

<sup>7</sup> Colley, *Britons*, pp.3, 5-6, 19

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p.36. For example, this British verse from the mid-eighteenth century:

Let France grow proud, beneath the tyrant's lust,  
While the rack'd people crawl, and lick the dust:  
The manly genius of this isle disdains  
All tinsel slavery, or golden chains.

'Welshness'<sup>9</sup> - a collective identity was to some extent superimposed over this array of internal divisions, if only gathering together the component parts of the one other crucial factor separating Britain from its rivals, that of being an island.<sup>10</sup> It has been suggested recently that Colley has overstated the importance of Protestantism as a common bond amongst Britons,<sup>11</sup> but as Colley argues, whilst there were indeed profound divisions within the Protestant Church, Protestantism as a supposed national characteristic went beyond theological disputes and took on more overtly secular connotations. Thus: 'the Protestant world-view was so ingrained in this culture that it influenced people's thinking irrespective of whether they went to church or not, whether they read the Bible or not, or whether, indeed, they were capable of reading anything at all'.<sup>12</sup> Despite the ultimate artificiality of this concept of a national identity founded on a common Protestantism, rhetorically it was a powerful image and certainly contributed to the evolution of a 'Victorian world picture' in which 'a national pecking order for European countries', according to David Newsome, placed Germany at the top, Switzerland and the Low Countries 'in the second rank', and Latin nations at the bottom, clearly symbolic of this supposed overarching Protestant outlook, though not necessarily accurate.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See K. Robbins, *Nineteenth-Century Britain: Integration and Diversity* (Oxford, 1988), pp.2, 5

<sup>10</sup> Colley, *Britons*, pp.6, 18

<sup>11</sup> L. Brockliss and D. Eastwood, 'Introduction: A Union of multiple identities', pp.1-8 in L. Brockliss and D. Eastwood (eds), *A Union of Multiple Identities: The British Isles, c.1750-1850* (Manchester, 1997); D. Eastwood, L. Brockliss and M. John, 'Conclusion: From dynastic union to unitary State: the European experience', *ibid*, pp.193-212. These writers agree with Colley that the idea of Britain was forged during the eighteenth century largely by reference to France, but they argue that there were other factors at work (p.3). Crucially, they highlight the importance and persistence of religious diversity. From the Act of Union of 1800 the 'religious culture of the new State was already diverse and became still more heterogeneous' (p.1). By 1851 the religious census revealed that the country was reconciled to religious pluralism (p.194). See also K. Robbins, *Great Britain: Ideas, Institutions and the Idea of Britishness* (Harlow, 1998) and J. Cannon, 'A nation unforged', *Times Literary Supplement*, 17 April 1998, p.10

<sup>12</sup> Colley, *Britons*, p.32

<sup>13</sup> D. Newsome, *The Victorian World Picture: Perceptions and Introspections in an Age of Change* (London, 1997), p.94

Inevitably, a growing sense of national identity and belonging brought within the political realm social classes officially excluded from that domain. Consequently it was important for a statesman such as Palmerston concerned with foreign affairs to consider these sections of society. The working classes, whilst generally displaying more interest in cheap and sensationalist stories than in domestic political news did, nevertheless, want to read about foreign affairs in the newspapers. As Virginia Berridge has observed, there was 'a noticeable amount of working class concern', inspired in no small measure by a sympathy for continental struggles of the 1830s and 1840s (especially Belgium in 1830; significantly a cause with which Palmerston was closely identified), which it was felt were not unconnected with the history of an English liberal tradition. Thus it was reported to the Newspaper Stamp Committee in 1851 that 'foreign news is as attractive as any other matter' that appeared in the papers read among the working classes.<sup>14</sup> Debates conducted at the Hope and Anchor Inn, a public house in Birmingham, for example, in the years following the repeal of the stamp duty on newspapers point to a working class concern with foreign affairs above all other issues, energised perhaps by the greater availability of information after 1855.<sup>15</sup>

The impetus for this search for a national identity came from within, it rested on an idea of English history since the sixteenth century, but it was perpetuated by constant references to foreign identities and interests. Concomitant with this

<sup>14</sup> V.S. Berridge, 'Popular Journalism and Working Class Attitudes, 1854-1886: a Study of Reynolds Newspaper, Lloyds Weekly Newspaper and the Weekly Times', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1976), pp.36-37, 285-286.

<sup>15</sup> See A. Jones, *Powers of the Press: Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth-Century England* (Aldershot, 1996), p.198: 'Numbers and categories of subjects debated at the Hope and Anchor Inn, Birmingham, January 1858 to December 1862'. The *approximate* figures (derived from Jones' histogram) are: The arts: 9; British politics: 31; Economic policy: 12; Foreign affairs: 61; Local politics: 12; Military: 5; Moral issues: 14; The press: 3; Religion: 21; Science: 4; Social policy: 47; Other: 4.

developing sense of nation, was a growing perception among all classes of the potential and indeed necessity of combined action. In the lower classes, this naturally led to a greater belief in their political influence. In 1834, for instance, a working class socialist proclaimed: 'Those who call themselves the liberal statesmen of the present day, must go progressively with the people; but in the word PEOPLE ...they must, brethren, include us, the productive labourers, for what are the people without us?'. But as the writer also observed, 'while we work not for ourselves, but for the capitalists and profit-mongers, we can hardly rank with the people'.<sup>16</sup>

Few mid-century politicians would have disagreed with Richard Cobden when, in advocating a broadening of the political nation, he spoke of 'the middle and industrious classes' as 'the people'.<sup>17</sup> In domestic politics, such a view was certainly widespread, but in the field of foreign affairs - where questions might boil down to ones of peace or war - the nation, on whose behalf a Foreign Secretary spoke, comprised all members of the population, high and low. In this sense, whilst still remaining beyond the pale of the constitution in any official capacity, a wide spectrum of the population was given a role in political life through the Coriolanean approach of a figure such as Palmerston. Palmerston was favoured by a fortunate coincidence of circumstances, but he played his hand with great care and skill.

Alongside the growing confidence of the lower classes, important shifts in intellectual life were occurring during this period. In publishing *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* in 1841, Thomas Carlyle to some extent captured the spirit of the early to mid-nineteenth century. Among the educated classes, Romantic influences and the effects of the late-eighteenth century Hellenic

<sup>16</sup> 'Senex', *Pioneer*, 28 June 1834, quoted P. Hollis, 'Pressure from Without: an introduction', p.18, n.55

<sup>17</sup> Speeches of Richard Cobden, 26 Nov. 1849, quoted *ibid*, p.18

revival inspired Victorians with 'the power to see man as a hero and the heart to respond with the appropriate worship'.<sup>18</sup> Heroic imagery from Scott and Byron, and from the Napoleonic Wars (Nelson and Wellington) abounded in Victorian culture. Thus, enthusiasm and a disposition to acknowledge 'the superior being', infused nineteenth century life with a tendency to hero-worship, and as Walter Houghton has suggested, this tradition was nourished and thrived in such conditions: 'For it answered, or it promised to answer, some of the deepest needs and problems of the age. In the fifty years after 1830 the worship of the hero was a major factor in English culture'.<sup>19</sup>

There are many different types of hero. One of the most significant, and certainly in the context of Palmerston and foreign policy, most pertinent, is that of the patriot. Patriotism had been used throughout English history to mark out the characteristics of the hero, and figures such as Hampden, Sydney and Cromwell all loomed large in such works.<sup>20</sup> A member of Palmerston's own constituency, Tiverton, indeed, made just such an association in writing to Palmerston in 1848 urging the Foreign Secretary to use his influence to secure religious liberty and self-government in Europe. 'And what cannot you now do in Italy & Spain!', he wrote, adding: 'Old Cromwell would not let such an opportunity pass and I trust your Lordship will not do less'.<sup>21</sup> Cromwell, however, as an essentially non-conformist 'hero', inspired only limited reverence in an age of significant religious differences - however effectively a British national identity might be couched in terms of

<sup>18</sup> W.E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (New Haven, 1957), pp.306-307

<sup>19</sup> Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, p.310

<sup>20</sup> See P. Karsten, *Patriot Heroes in England and America. Political Symbolism and Changing Values over Three Centuries* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1978), esp. pp.110-164

<sup>21</sup> Ambrose Brewin to Palmerston, 6 March 1848, Broadlands Papers, Southampton University Library, GC/BR/35

reference to Catholic forces abroad, domestic religious tensions within the national Church, continued to plague the country<sup>22</sup> - and Palmerston, whilst he might thus win particular non-conformist support, had to establish his popularity in a much broader context and exploit the unifying properties of a being a 'national' minister. Victorians imbued patriotism with notions of virtue and godliness; the embodiment of national greatness. According to Houghton, then, 'the nationalistic and the moralistic functions of patriotic hero worship tended to merge, and in the concreteness of experience a great soldier or statesman was an inspiration to a noble life - for the glory of England'.<sup>23</sup> Heroism and hero-worship, therefore, acquired above all a political significance, and something of a unifying strand in Victorian political life: to refer to Houghton once more, 'it exorcises the antisocial forces of personal or class ambition, bred by the doctrines of liberty and equality, and in their place calls forth the uniting emotions of loyalty and reverence for one great man who is our common leader'.<sup>24</sup> For the anti-democrats the hero-governor would stem the tide of popular politics; for the democrat he would draw the nation together - in some respects a natural corollary of democratic government. Yet in a heterogeneous and disparate state, such a common leader had to court a wide range of popular feelings and sentiments.

Radical politics in mid-century are commonly seen to have suffered a blow with the supposed failure of Chartism in 1848, and the decades between the late 1840s and the emergence of socialism in Britain in the 1870s are widely held to have represented a caesura in British lower and middle-class political life. Recent studies

<sup>22</sup> Witness, for example, the controversy over the omission of Cromwell when statues of past British sovereigns were installed at the new Houses of Parliament in 1845. See Karsten, *Patriot Heroes in England and America*, pp.144-145, 156

<sup>23</sup> Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, p.325

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p.330

have acknowledged this impression, but have sought not simply to consign the history of the middle decades of the nineteenth century to a closed file labelled 'age of equipoise', and have tried, rather, to establish the meaning and importance this period inevitably represents. According to Margot Finn, radicals, and particularly Chartists, focused on the national aspect of their liberalising course, relegating notions of class conflict to a secondary position. Having embraced the revolutions of 1848 in terms of a class issue, wherein the 'Chartist internationalists wilfully ignored distinctions between national and economic liberation', in the aftermath of these revolutions attention turned to the common ties between working and middle class interests. There were similarities to be drawn between the Chartist movement and the European upheavals from which there emerged a fear of perpetual class conflict which might be engendered in Britain. Thus was the emphasis laid upon notions of national identity, a community of interests, which would bind the country together. It was at this time, therefore, that Harriet Martineau, the well-known advocate of political economy and middle class improver of the lower orders, and the Chartist Charles Knight, launched *Voice of the People* in which they sought to down-play the vitality of class differences: 'The "Populus" of the Romans, the "People" of the French, the "People" of the English, each, in the broad and comprehensive sense of the term, means the whole community - the nation', they asserted.<sup>25</sup>

As a corrective to such interpretations - regarding the shift to liberalism 'not as a political development, but as a retrograde step in class-consciousness' - Miles Taylor has argued that taken from a longer perspective, the developments of the

<sup>25</sup> Finn, *After Chartism*, pp.67, 79-80. *The Voice of the People: A Supplement to All Newspapers*, 22 April 1848, quoted p.80

1850s acquire a different significance. Changes in the political landscape since the Reform Act of 1832, granting radicals a much greater influence at Westminster, had eroded much of the *raison-d'être* of radical politics whilst the changing realities of international as well as domestic politics contributed to the shaping of British liberalism during these years in advance of the Gladstonian influences of the 1860s.<sup>26</sup> Whatever the differences in interpretation between Taylor and Finn, it is striking that they both focus on the importance of nation, patriotism and notions of British politics being crafted by reference to international (primarily European) developments.

It was against this background - of radical politics focusing more emphatically on the significance of the nation, of the appeal of hero worship, or at least the disposition in Victorian society to such elevation of the individual, and to the perhaps fortuitous coincidence of European revolution and consequent challenge to the *status quo* - that Palmerston was able to build a rapport with the people, but more than that, with the nation, in order to strengthen his hand at Westminster. He was the natural candidate in mid-century for the title of Patriot Minister and came in many ways to embody the very essence of 'Englishness'.

To the reform-minded and radical members of the House of Commons, Palmerston came to be seen very much as the Patriot Minister in the aftermath of the revolutions of 1848 and 1849. As Miles Taylor has demonstrated, the close of the parliamentary session of 1849 saw the radical members of the House 'in a hiatus'.<sup>27</sup> Financial reform and Irish relief, for instance, elicited from within the Reform party different and conflicting strategies, while the Whig ministry, and especially its

<sup>26</sup> M. Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847-1860* (Oxford, 1995), pp.2-3

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p.149

supposedly most reform-minded members, Russell and Wood, was proving to be a great disappointment. Thus, partly in consequence of this fissuring of the radical movement, Taylor argues, members of the Reform party turned to Palmerston, and gave their support to his foreign policy, notably that concerning Hungary, when it went before the House in the summer of 1849. Palmerston, at least, demonstrated 'purpose' (if nothing else) and ultimately, 'his popularity arose from his patriotism - but a patriotism which had more in common with eighteenth-century constitutionalism than bombastic nationalism'.<sup>28</sup>

From the Palmerstonian perspective, the nation, clearly, as any perceptive political observer was aware, was becoming increasingly important to political life; in the arena of foreign affairs it was vital, and it encompassed people from all social classes. Palmerston found that, like Canning, his foreign policy carried more weight when invested with what was termed vaguely 'popular support', and by mid-century the conditions were ripe for a populist, liberal, national and purposeful policy to elicit a broad demonstration of approbation. Yet Palmerston was not to win popular acclaim with a monolithic approach: his appeal was manifold and his characterisation as the Minister of England is as much a symbol of his ability to bridge the differences inherent within the nation as about his bellicose defence of national interests overseas.

By the early nineteenth century comprehensive military defeat of France in 1815 and emancipation of Catholics in Britain in 1829 had to some extent undermined the usefulness of Protestantism as a cement in British society. Whilst there was a certain residual Protestant feeling which Palmerston was still able to

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p.150 For details about the 'Reform party' and Taylor's interpretation of this group, see pp.19-60

exploit, as will be seen, he needed some other rhetorical device if he was to secure popular support for his policies. Palmerston himself failed to appreciate, or rather did not see any distinctions between 'British' and 'English' and used the latter term as synonymous with the former.<sup>29</sup> This in itself was not necessarily inconsistent with English contemporary usage, as a ballad entitled 'The Englishman' demonstrates:

The Briton may traverse the pole or zone,  
 And boldly claim his right;  
 For he calls such a vast domain his own,  
 That the sun never sets on his might.  
 Let the haughty stranger seek to know  
 The place of his home and birth.  
 And the flush will spread from cheek to brow,  
 As he tells of his native earth.  
 'Tis a glorious charter deny it who can!  
 That's breathed in the words 'I'm an Englishman'.<sup>30</sup>

'Englishness' to Palmerston meant certain values, applicable to the whole of Britain and not England exclusively. In place of a rigid anti-Catholic prejudice, though not to its complete eradication, a national consciousness could now be forged more simply by representing Britain as more liberal, tolerant and wealthy than continental rivals. Thus Palmerston's support for the abolition of the slave trade, for example, was not just a humanitarian impulse, but also an implicit demonstration of the moral legitimacy of a *pax Britannica*. When he heard of slave-trade atrocities in Zanzibar in 1846 Palmerston did not hesitate to declare that 'the nations of Europe are destined to put an end to the African slave trade and that Great Britain is the main instrument in the hands of Providence for the accomplishment of this purpose'.<sup>31</sup> Still therefore, there was the construction of a national consciousness which was defined by reference to external factors. The continued deployment of rhetoric which invoked religious concepts allowed all social classes to share in this sense of

<sup>29</sup> Colley, *Britons*, p.174

<sup>30</sup> 'The Englishman', Harding Collection, Bodleian Library, Oxford, B.11 (1080)

<sup>31</sup> Quoted Colley, *Britons*, p.380

the national character. Palmerston was writing to the local British consul about the grievances in Zanzibar, but the sense of British liberalism and freedom which lay behind Palmerston's declaration found echoes elsewhere in society. Significantly, in Dicken's *Little Dorrit*, which was published in the mid-1850s, the inhabitants of Bleeding Heart Yard, by common agreement, 'poor', 'hard-up', earthy and coarse, continued to regard the foreigner as inferior to an Englishman. It was, in such places, regarded as 'a sort of Divine visitation upon a foreigner that he was not an Englishman, and that all kinds of calamities happened to his country because it did things that England did not, and did not do things that England did'. Furthermore:

They believed that foreigners were always badly off; and though they were as ill off themselves as they could desire to be, that did not diminish the force of the objection. They believed that foreigners were dragooned and bayoneted; and though they certainly got their own skulls promptly fractured if they showed any ill humour, still it was with a blunt instrument, and that didn't count. They believed that foreigners were always immoral; and though they had an occasional assize at home, and now and then a divorce case or so, that had nothing to do with it.<sup>32</sup>

The failure to recognise or acknowledge the inherent contradictions in their own position was something Palmerston could play upon. He need not advocate far-reaching domestic reform, since British (or English) liberties were not thus defined. It was therefore not inconsistent for an 'Edinburgh Elector' to urge resistance to Lord John Russell's proposed Reform bill in 1852 in favour of Palmerston's advocacy of liberty and freedom for oppressed nationalities abroad (at the expense of overt domestic reforms).<sup>33</sup> Concerning itself exclusively with foreign affairs and defining itself purely by reference to nationalisms that were less liberal,

<sup>32</sup> C. Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (1857; Oxford, 1982 edn), pp.112-113, 119, 254-255. *Little Dorrit* was first published monthly between December 1855 and June 1857

<sup>33</sup> See below, p.254

free and providentially favoured, a broad-based national identity for Britain was thus fostered and consolidated.

### *Commerce and patriotism*

To the commercial middle classes, Palmerston's appeal was not simply that of a minister with some degree of dynamism. By the 1850s, the radical politicians through whom they had typically expressed their interests were failing. Manchester School philosophies seemed by mid-century to be flawed and a new darling of the industrial classes was sought to replace Cobden. Palmerston again offered the required alliance. According to V.A.C. Gatrell, the cause of free trade, embodied most visibly in the Cobdenite, or Manchester School, campaign for repeal of the Corn Laws, ushered in a decline in the fortunes of the commercial classes and caused them to re-evaluate their political sympathies. It has been demonstrated, however, that the economic crisis of 1847, the effects of which were felt in the economy until 1849, was a relatively short-lived one in which downward cyclical trends in textiles and railways, alongside increased speculation in food prices and a credit crisis all exacerbated a downward spiral. Certainly an unfavourable balance of payments situation, particularly over corn imports, lay at the heart of this crisis, yet it was the instability of 1848 and the external disruption of markets and confidence that did as much to prolong the depression as any domestic commercial policy.<sup>34</sup> Thus whilst it appeared, according to Gatrell, that the diagnoses of the Anti-Corn Law League regarding the economy 'were indeed at fault', and Manchester's commercial classes, the bedrock constituency of the Cobdenite school,

<sup>34</sup> H.M. Boot, *The Commercial Crisis of 1847* (University of Hull Occasional Papers in Economic and Social History, no.11, Hull, 1984)

were gradually 'emancipated... from their respect for the League's efficiency in the 1840s, and tacitly justified their political realignment in favour of the foreign policies of the Manchester School's arch-enemy Palmerston',<sup>35</sup> it is significant that the Manchester industrial output, particularly the dominant textile produce, relied on many markets beyond the relative safety and familiarity of the European continent. It was a dependence on these markets 'which were most vulnerable to the incursions of diplomatic, commercial and if need be naval pressure, by which Palmerstonian policy was to be characterised' that allowed Palmerstonian policy to gain an ascendancy.<sup>36</sup> Free trade and Cobdenite doctrines were not necessarily moribund, but it could not be denied that Palmerston's gun-boat diplomacy, a cliché though it might be, was a potent image and offered reassurance to cotton merchants with interests in far-off markets.

Integral to this is what Linda Colley has called a 'cult of commerce', in which 'stout-hearted commercial activity and ideal patriotism were one and the same'. Patriotism was not simply something orchestrated from above, but something that was expected to generate profits for all.<sup>37</sup> Romantic images contributed as much as economic realities to a Palmerstonian ascendancy amongst the commercial classes. Cobdenite critiques remained persuasive explanations of the declining fortunes of the later 1840s, and the widespread continental sympathy for Cobdenite policies demonstrates the continued popularity of this creed in the face of Palmerstonian

<sup>35</sup> V.A.C. Gatrell, 'The Commercial Middle Class in Manchester, c.1820-1857', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1971), pp.382-383. As Gatrell demonstrates the markets for Manchester produce plummeted in the free-trade environment from about 1846 until the early 1850s. Export prices, domestic consumption (estimated value and value per capita) all fell between 1844 and 1851, improving only in the returns for 1854-56, according to Gatrell's calculations (p.387). Thus, he concludes, 'there was little in the state of the domestic market to enforce among home traders any real gratitude to the League'.

<sup>36</sup> Gatrell, 'The Commercial Middle Class in Manchester', pp.403-404

<sup>37</sup> Colley, *Britons*, pp.61-62, 391

bluster.<sup>38</sup> The textile élite of Manchester by mid-century were growing weary of questions concerned with domestic reform and turned their attentions more frequently towards Europe. As Anthony Howe has argued, 'Palmerston's policy in Europe which brought him most criticism from his fellow aristocrats, mirrored, in some ways, the international concerns of the liberal bourgeoisie', concerns which were motivated less by conceptions of vested interests and more as a reflection of important middle class attitudes. Support for Italy mobilised a latent Protestantism within the English middle class, whilst simultaneously standing as a model for the working classes in their search for political emancipation.<sup>39</sup>

In turn, this faith in mercantile interests impacted on the political centre. As Professor Searle confirms, under these circumstances, 'Cobdenite cosmopolitan pacifism seemed economically irrational, as well as politically unacceptable, whereas Palmerston's foreign policy had much more to offer'.<sup>40</sup> For Palmerston, such a shift was significant indeed. Harold Perkin has argued that it was the entrepreneurial class which held the balance of power in Victorian politics during this period: this class, he argues, 'ruled, as it were, by, remote control, through the power of its ideal over the ostensible ruling class, the landed aristocracy which continued to occupy the main positions of power down to the 1880s and beyond'.<sup>41</sup> It was the fulfilment of Marx's claim that the British middle class was content to entrust government to the great Whig families, to act as the '*aristocratic representatives* of the bourgeoisie'.<sup>42</sup> This was not mere hyperbole, for as Perkin

<sup>38</sup> On the popular reception of Cobden and his free trade principles on the continent in the late 1840s, see A. Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England, 1846-1946* (Oxford, 1997), pp.73-86

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.240-241

<sup>40</sup> G.R. Searle, *Entrepreneurial Politics in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 1993), p.12

<sup>41</sup> H. Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880* (London, 1969; 1985 edn.), pp.271-272. Searle quotes this argument approvingly, *Entrepreneurial Politics in Mid-Victorian Britain*, pp.14-15

<sup>42</sup> See Searle, *Entrepreneurial Politics in Mid-Victorian Britain*, p.15

asserts, in accepting Repeal in 1845, the aristocratic or ruling class had, in effect, accepted the middle class view of national interest - whereby the needs of consumers and the prosperity of producers were placed before the unearned incomes of the landlords. Maybe this was, as Kitson Clark maintained, the 'Indian summer of the British aristocracy', but nevertheless, what emerges is a sense that it was the entrepreneurial spirit that now held considerable sway over the government.<sup>43</sup> Thus, Palmerston, the advocate of free trade which as he told an audience at Tiverton in 1851 he regarded as 'that system which is for the benefit of all classes of the community',<sup>44</sup> became the new hero of the Manchester School entrepreneurial class.

Palmerston's appeal, however, went deeper than his declared political faith. In attracting popular support outside parliament from radical and working classes, he relied as much upon his reputation and charisma, as he did on support for his political beliefs. He might have been one of the aristocratic representatives of the bourgeoisie, but he was also the aristocrat with whom the greatest number of the people could identify.

Palmerstonianism, according to Antony Taylor, 'acted as the main mode of mass political expression prior to the emergence of the movements for parliamentary reform in the middle 1860s',<sup>45</sup> which perhaps held true following the demise of Chartism. Not only was attention increasingly being paid to international affairs, whilst domestic politics appeared relatively quiet by comparison, but Palmerston himself demonstrated qualities with which working classes could identify. His love

<sup>43</sup> Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society*, p.373; G.S.R. Kitson Clark, 'The Repeal of the Corn Laws and the Politics of the Forties', *Economic History Review*, 4 (1951-52), p.13; Searle, *Entrepreneurial Politics in Mid-Victorian Britain*, p.44.

<sup>44</sup> *Economist*, 27 Sept. 1851

<sup>45</sup> A.D. Taylor, 'Modes of Political Expression and Working Class Radicalism, 1848-1874: the London and Manchester Examples', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 1992), p.249

of boxing and reputed sexual prowess as they became enshrined in popular folklore and through the medium of the popular press, endeared him to the people at street level, Taylor argues, and 'his image as the "bucolic squire", and his inveterate gambling and womanizing earned him the affectionate sobriquet of "Lord Cupid" and reinforced his identification with the outward excesses of popular culture'.<sup>46</sup> In his treatment of the Haynau affair in 1850 and his determination to receive Kossuth the following year, Palmerston did much to appeal to radicals and Chartists<sup>47</sup> To the working classes and radicals Palmerston embodied European liberty and defence of constitutionalism. To middle class educated and entrepreneurial classes, he represented a particular form of patriotic heroism, a just and honourable crusader in the national interest. He was able to latch on to the classically inspired search for a hero and to supply the leadership, or focus, for the radical campaign for nation and defence of liberty. The search for a figurehead to represent interests was a pan-class phenomenon and Palmerston, forging his reputation in the field of foreign affairs was able to exploit this. Whether or not he was by 1855 *l'inévitable*, he was during the preceding decade widely regarded as the Minister of England, and for now that was good enough.

## ii) Palmerston and extra-parliamentary opinion, 1846-1852

The worlds of high and low politics came together at elections and it was here that a politician could most clearly demonstrate his view of the value and role of the people, both members of the electorate and the disenfranchised masses whose place

<sup>46</sup> A. Taylor, 'Palmerston and Radicalism, 1847-1865', *Journal of British Studies* Vol.33, No.2 (April 1994), pp.160-161

<sup>47</sup> See *ibid*, p.162

in the constitution was ill-defined but nevertheless important. Here symbolism had a key role to play in politics during the Victorian period. Whilst it was no easier for a disenfranchised citizen to secure a place in the official political nation, it was increasingly being recognised by those at the centre of political life that ceremonies and symbolic practices were important means by which to allow such people to participate in the theatre of politics. Not least, this legitimised the prevailing power balance and symbolic practices and ceremonies, according to James Vernon, were 'used to "convey and reaffirm the legitimacy of governing in thousands of unspoken ways"'.<sup>48</sup>

At an election the presence of the candidate could be just as important as what was said. From the very beginning of the process, with the first entry of the candidates into a town, the play began. The public, enfranchised and otherwise, would commonly turn out by way of demonstrating their gratitude for the candidate's decision to contest the seat on their behalf, whilst for the candidate this was an early opportunity 'to project the romantic image of themselves as the people's choice, bravely battling on their behalf'.<sup>49</sup> Often, indeed, such was the superficial nature of the event, Vernon suggests, that just 'a sight of a candidate seems to have been enough to create that fiction of personal familiarity which was so important'.<sup>50</sup> Yet, the nomination ceremony and hustings contests were vitally important aspects to an election. The approbation of the disenfranchised members of the audience, which could be demonstrated though a show of hands, was a crucial demonstration of moral support for a candidate but these public demonstrations of political sparring

<sup>48</sup> J. Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, c.1815-1867* (Cambridge, 1993), p.48. For a full discussion of what Vernon terms 'power imagined', see pp.48-104

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p.85

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, pp.86-87

were also one of the few opportunities the disenfranchised had to challenge a member of the ruling class, a means by which they could 'avenge themselves upon the official political arena and to assert their right to be included within the story the local political community was telling itself'.<sup>51</sup> Palmerston himself recognised this, as he told a meeting in Glasgow when receiving the freedom of that city. 'It is, gentlemen,' he said:

the privilege of the people of a free country, thus in public meetings to express their opinion of the conduct of those whose lot it may have been, in any capacity, high or less exalted, to serve their country. In countries where the Governments are unfortunately framed upon a different model, public opinion is gagged, and expresses itself only in ways which do not often conduce to public tranquility [sic] or to the general welfare; but it is the privilege and the good fortune of constitutional countries that public men are there enabled from time to time to have as their guide the expression of public opinion; and when they are fortunate enough to obtain, as I have now the honour to obtain the approbation of their countrymen, they receive the greatest reward for their past conduct, and the most ample encouragement to pursue that course which they have thought for the benefit of the country. (Loud cheers).<sup>52</sup>

For a politician such as Palmerston an election was an ideal opportunity to assess his standing with the people and add more grist to his mill for the coming contests at Westminster and within the Cabinet. At the general election of 1847, he was given the opportunity to test his popularity with the people of Tiverton in the face of the famous challenge laid down before him by the Chartist George Julian Harney, although at first the challenge appeared to Palmerston a weak one. 'I have been so little with my Constituents of late', he told Russell, 'that I am advised to make a personal Canvass although I have no opponent but a certain Mr Harney a Chartist who announces his Intention of proving on the Hustings that I am not, and that he is,

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p.91

<sup>52</sup> Newspaper cutting from the *Glasgow Constitutional* reporting a speech of Lord Palmerston in the City Hall, Glasgow, September 1853, Broadlands Papers, SP/B/3/2

a fit Person to represent Tiverton. Such a Contest is more likely to be amusing than dangerous'.<sup>53</sup>

Harney ventured down to Tiverton with no more object than to 'get at' Palmerston. Arriving three days before the nomination was due, Harney attempted to whip up the electors with Chartist speeches and charges against Palmerston. By the third and final speech, he had succeeded, it seemed, in winning the popular support of the people of 'Palmerston's Borough': 'The town was now in a very lively state; some thousands were at the meeting, and the enthusiasm of the Chartists rose to the highest pitch when Mr Harney concluded a lengthy and impassioned appeal with the somewhat grandiloquent sentence - "Tonight we sleep upon our arms; to-morrow we march to battle and victory!".<sup>54</sup> The main theme of Harney's orations by this point, however, was the discreditable conduct of Lord Palmerston. Chartist principles were admired, but it was the assaults on Palmerston which won the applause. At the hustings, Harney promised, 'I will prove him to be devoid of true patriotism, a breaker of pledges, and a foe to the liberties of the people, whose dearest rights he will trample in the dust', and his promises were met with 'tremendous cheering'.<sup>55</sup> These were the very basics of Palmerston's appeal: honest, true, liberal patriot. It was not the policies which Palmerston represented that Harney sought to attack, but the image of Palmerston the popular hero.

Harney ranged over the whole of Palmerston's ministerial career and endeavoured at first to damn him by association with the governments headed by Spencer Perceval ('a constitutional tyrant'), Canning ('a clever jester, a talented

<sup>53</sup> Palmerston to Russell, 25 July 1847, Russell Papers, Public Record Office, PRO 30/22/6D, fols 199-200

<sup>54</sup> F.J. Snell, *Palmerston's Borough: A Budget of Electioneering Anecdotes, Squibs and Speeches* (Tiverton, 1894), p.84

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, p.78

buffoon, the able and brilliant flunkey of the aristocracy'), Wellington (the ally 'of despotism'), Melbourne (leader of 'the profligate Whig Government'), before entering into a careful and minute criticism of Palmerston's foreign policy, country by country.<sup>56</sup> Contrary to custom, Palmerston had waived his right to speak before Harney, preferring to make his defence in answer to charges actually made rather than assaults anticipated. There was a logic to this, clearly, but Palmerston was also aware that the theatrical nature of the platform addresses favoured the most recent speaker. Since all arguments appeared to be well received with cheering, the advantage lay with the candidate who was heard last. It is instructive to consider the grounds upon which Palmerston made his counter-attack.

Harney's speech, Palmerston declared, was in many respects unobjectionable, but there were grounds upon which he took exception. Firstly, he sought to remedy a mis-representation: Palmerston was stung by the accusation that 'I displayed a want of due feeling and sympathy for the misfortunes of the lower classes' in the House of Commons. Harney, he claimed, 'knows that what he has stated is not true (cries of "Oh, oh," and "Hear, hear")', given the approaching close of the parliamentary session when the subject was raised. Against the other charges made by Harney, Palmerston defended himself. He denied that his Irish estates yielded increased incomes, despite his attempts to improve them; he asserted that he was 'a decided advocate of reform', but that he wished to see it introduced 'by agitation of mind, and not by the agitation of physical force'; he acknowledged his political debt to Canning, but stressed the 'honour to his country' of Canning's conduct; he declared that he drew no distinction between Ireland and England nor Irish and English and

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<sup>56</sup>

Ibid, pp.79-80, 85-86

fully supported attempts to relieve the distress caused by the famine; and he identified himself as a champion of factory, health and educational reform.<sup>57</sup>

Knowing, perhaps the weakness of these claims, if pressed too far, Palmerston focused for the rest of his speech on foreign policy, his acknowledged specialism:

Now, when I say that he knows nothing of the matters he has been talking of, all I mean is, that he appears to me to have got by rote a certain number of empty declamatory phrases (great laughter and interruption), a jargon and jingle of words - (Renewed laughter and loud cheers) - which have no reference to facts, which have no bearing upon anything that has happened, and that his statements are founded on a total misconception of the history of the last twelve or fourteen years. Mr Harney is of opinion that the great object and the grand result of my foreign policy has been the establishment of tyranny and despotism all over the world - (A voice, "So it has," and laughter) - and the suppression of the liberties of the people.

This Palmerston found amusing and ridiculous, since, as he continued, 'I have been accused all over Europe of being the great instigator of revolution - (Laughter) - the friend and champion of all popular insurrections, the enemy of all constituted authorities', and this opinion, he said, was founded on 'matters which are not really matters of opinion'. Like his opponent, Palmerston retired from the front of the husting at the end of his speech, 'amid loud and prolonged cheering'.<sup>58</sup> It seems incongruous that two opposing arguments should have elicited the same response if the substance of the propositions were attended to. Harney might have won a show-of-hands poll on the day with a majority support of two-thirds of the audience, but until put to the test of an official ballot, which Harney declined to contest, the victory was somewhat illusory. Perhaps the show of hands demonstrated a ground swell of support among the disenfranchised, but it was from this same body that Palmerston also received loud and prolonged cheers. Harney may have seemed

<sup>57</sup> *Speech of Lord Viscount Palmerston, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to the Electors of Tiverton, on the 31st July 1847* (London, 2nd edn, 1847), pp.3-16

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, pp.22-23, 38

plausible as 'the friend of the people' which his proposer Mr Rowcliffe had promised, but Palmerston, too, could offer similar rhetorical assurances, and crucially, he could also offer more convincing leadership. He was the gentleman leader, not *of* the people, but certainly *for* them. And as Vernon explains, the 'narratives of leadership may have played upon the melodramatic imagination of struggle and conflict, but these tensions were primarily moral and political in nature, the social languages of class being conspicuously absent'.<sup>59</sup>

Certainly Harney's charges of illiberal and unpatriotic conduct did not stick, and even though doubts may have been expressed in certain middle class, educated circles about his sincerity,<sup>60</sup> Palmerston continued to flatter his audiences and exploit the need for strong-willed leadership, to be, as Carlyle would have had it, a great man. Thus, when in the autumn of 1851 Palmerston 'availed himself of the leisure of the recess to pay his constituents a visit', he carefully canvassed their support for measures which would win popular liberal support. He opened his speech by referring to subjects regarding some of which his sympathy was surely questionable, and over which his responsibility was negligible, but which were undoubtedly intended to add to his reputation. 'This country,' he told his listeners,

not long ago, had to contend with great difficulties at home, and we have had to witness terrible convulsions abroad. Those domestic difficulties, by the blessing of Providence, have, to a

<sup>59</sup> Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p.290

<sup>60</sup> A pamphlet, published pseudonymously, which claimed to be taking a position between the people and the rulers in order to raise thereby important considerations, took up Palmerston's claims in his speech at Tiverton in 1847 that he adhered to 'truth' and 'justice'. 'Weigh well their import!', instructed the pamphlet, 'To sacrifice the interests of one half of a nation to advance the interests of the other half, does not in my mind come up to their meaning. To bring forward measures founded on *Equity*, and afterwards to abandon them, through the opposition of a party who have an interest that justice should not be done, is still more removed from their import. The patriotic minister should be prepared to resign his place, or appeal to the country, sooner than yield to clamour, and "got up" public meetings'. When it came to governing the people, the pamphlet concluded: 'La force d'un homme d'état, c'est son caractère, *une seule complaisance* envers les factions est un *indispensable engagement* avec elles. Quand on à consenti à être leur instrument, on peut devenir leur idole, et leur victime, jamais leur maître"...'. Snooks (pseud.), *A letter to Lord Palmerston, on the "Condition of England Question," elicited by his speech to the electors of Tiverton*. (London, 1847), pp.25-26

certain degree, passed away - the convulsions abroad have, for the present, ceased. (Cheers.) And not only this, but that dreadful scourge, the scourge of famine, which ravaged so large a portion of the sister isle, has, if not entirely disappeared, been substantially diminished.

He was not above flattering his listeners, reporting to them that he had great pleasure in telling foreigners who expressed an interest in the subject that the 'admirable order which our population preserves', was owing 'in the first place to the great good sense, the goodness of heart, and the noble qualities which belong to the British nation', and that these noble qualities, finding expression in public opinion, exercised a positive influence over political life. But he reserved questions of foreign policy for his closest attention. In this department, Palmerston could emphasise the qualities which underpinned his popular appeal, and he contrasted the illiberal tendencies of other, primarily southern, European countries with the liberal and constitutionalist tendencies of Britain.<sup>61</sup>

These sentiments struck a chord at all levels of society and he found various and diverse confirmations of the positive effects of such images with regard to his own popularity and standing. In June 1848 'A Constituent', who had been an elector for the University of Cambridge when Palmerston had represented that particular seat, wrote to the Foreign Secretary noting that he found that 'in every part of Europe, that you were the Representative of my inviolability and dignity as an Englishman' (an interesting prologue to Palmerston's *civis Romanus sum* speech of two years later). Significantly, the anonymous correspondent, assuring Palmerston of his political impartiality and desirous of apprising the Foreign Secretary of reliable intelligence, proceeded to make the following observations:

First as to yourself. The English People trouble themselves very little about foreign politics. This arises partly from the low

<sup>61</sup>

*Illustrated London News*, 27 Sept. 1851

estimation in which they hold all Foreigners; but principally from the neglected state of general Education. The masses know so little of the geographical division of Europe, that the great majority of them might reverse the position of the Alps and the Pyrenees, or annex Spain to Italy or Germany. So they wisely avoid discussions of these subjects. Yet they fully recognize in you the Protector of constitutional Freedom on the Continent; and they consider England's honour and interests safe in your hands.<sup>62</sup>

It might have been true, as this writer asserted, that some of the English People were critical of certain aspects of Palmerston's Spanish policy, but essentially Palmerston had won more than just support for his political conduct, he had gone some way towards fashioning himself as 'England's Protector'. Other letters from members of the public echoed this impression. In May 1850 'A Commercial Traveller' wrote from Portsmouth seeking to reassure Palmerston as the Greek question brought foreign policy to the fore and the Don Pacifico debate loomed:

I think it only right that you should know the feeling of the people generally of this country toward you at such a time as this & more particularly when the leading paper of the day is so mis-representing every thing connected with the Foreign Policy of the Country. Sensible Englishmen are proud My lord to think they have so experienced & excellent a statesman filling the office you now do - you may depend you have their entire confidence. I visit many Towns & converse with numbers & I can safely say My Lord your Foreign Policy is approved by the very great majority & we all trust (as we feel sure) you will for many many years continue to serve the Country in your present official situation. The Times paper perhaps in the pay of the Despots does not represent the opinions of the people of this country on Foreign questions.<sup>63</sup>

A newspaper editor, James Birch of the *World*, was also keen to redress the false impression given in certain quarters, notably the *Times*, of the state of Palmerston's standing in the country at large:

It is impossible now to penetrate into any circle - high or low - to travel by land or water - whether you enter the aristocratic Club - or the humble free and easy or *sans souce* [sic] of the artisan - the mart of commerce - or the threepenny omnibus - without hearing the policy of Lord Palmerston discussed - and as much as it is

<sup>62</sup> 'A Constituent' to Palmerston, June 1848, Broadlands Papers, MPC/1523

<sup>63</sup> 'A Commercial Traveller' to Palmerston, 22 May 1850, Broadlands Papers, MPC/1538

discussed - warmly applauded. Your Lordship I do believe is now one of the most popular Ministers that ever swayed the destiny of affairs in England.<sup>64</sup>

Such, then, was the reported state of feeling when Palmerston was called to account by the House of Commons after a defeat for the government in the Lords over his handling of the affairs of Greece and of Don Pacifico in particular. Riding the wave of popular enthusiasm, Palmerston, whom the editor of the *Sun* in a letter to a Colonel Freeston described as 'one of the manliest intellects in England; one of the noblest statesmen in all Europe, perhaps the wisest and certainly the most accomplished diplomatist who ever directed the foreign affairs of our Country', did indeed appear to carry with him 'the hearty sympathies of the people'.<sup>65</sup> Allusions to Palmerston's manliness and Englishness were common affirmations of his popular standing as the strong, true patriot of the nation. Masculinity itself became an important aspect of British political identity, grounded in no small degree in the public school system which emphasised the importance of 'manly', physical demonstrations of strength. As W. Turley wrote in 1872, 'a nation of effeminate enfeebled bookworms scarcely forms the most effective bulwark of a nation's liberties'.<sup>66</sup> Even at Rugby, under Dr Arnold supposedly more liberal than other schools,<sup>67</sup> the bookish George Arthur of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* ends his school career triumphantly scoring runs for the first eleven and agreeing with Tom Brown that cricket, 'more than a game ...an institution', was still, 'the birthright of British boys old and young, as *habeas corpus* and trial by jury are of British men'.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>64</sup> James Birch to Palmerston, 13 June 1850, Broadlands Papers, MPC/1539

<sup>65</sup> Editor of the *Sun* to Col. Freeston, 30 May 1850 (Copy), Broadlands Papers, MM/GR/38

<sup>66</sup> W. Turley, writing in the journal *The Dark Blue* in 1872, quoted P. Dodd, 'Englishness and the National Culture', in R. Colls and P. Dodd (eds.), *Englishness: Politics and Culture, 1880-1920* (London, 1986), pp.5-6

<sup>67</sup> See the essay on 'Dr Arnold' in L. Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (London, 1986 edn.), pp.163-188

<sup>68</sup> T. Hughes, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (Harmondsworth, 1983 edn.), p.271

Palmerston's own sporting interests allied him closely with such an institutional national identity.

Thus it was that the Foreign Secretary did not find allies wanting at this time and declarations of support came in from all over the country, offering on occasion practical assistance, such as from James Aspinall who wrote from Bawtry in Yorkshire enclosing a copy of the *Albion*, a Liverpool newspaper which had printed a very hostile account of the Lords' censure of Palmerston's foreign policy, criticising Stanley's laboured and insulting speech, and observing further that 'of the Earl of Aberdeen's twaddling mediocrity in this debate it would be a waste of words to speak', whilst concluding that the end result was that 'Lord Palmerston stands higher than ever in the estimation of his countrymen'. 'I believe that I can induce many of the liberal papers in this district to adopt the same tone', promised Aspinall.<sup>69</sup> On the day of Palmerston's contribution to the debate in the Commons, he found his arrival at the House warmly cheered and when finally he had delivered his speech applause once more rang out, this time from the public gallery and later outside once again.<sup>70</sup>

To some, Palmerston had made a poor job of defending himself, however. In a letter to Palmerston published as a pamphlet, 'a Greek Gentleman', who had hitherto been disposed to regard Palmerston as 'the Ulysses of the Foreign Office - versatile, plausible, ingenious, and acute', found now these qualities wanting: 'It was a wonderful performance,' he acknowledged, 'and had an astonishing effect. You touched the sublime of clap-trap, and roused an accompanying enthusiasm'. Palmerston's employment of the principle of citizenship the writer found questionable and he charged the Foreign Secretary with possessing a very thin

<sup>69</sup> James Aspinall to Palmerston, 26 June 1850, Broadlands Papers, MM/GR/47; *Albion*, 24 June 1850, Broadlands Papers, MM/GR/47/enc.1

<sup>70</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 29 June 1850

understanding of the true state of affairs in Greece. Other abuses committed by the Greek government Palmerston had paid little attention to and now, in the case of Don Pacifico, such was Palmerston's acquaintance 'with the details of the reasons for which you have gone to the extent of endangering the peace of Europe, that *there is no such case whatsoever* in the list of claims'.<sup>71</sup> Whilst this pamphleteer might have grasped the essence of the debate, he had missed its point. Few observers were particularly concerned with the rights or wrongs of Don Pacifico's case or the legitimacy of his claims. It was, being a debate about the relative constitutional positions of the Lords and Commons in the sense that the question was whether or not the Lords had the authority to effect the dismissal of a minister or indeed a government, by extension a debate about Palmerston's continued tenure of the Foreign Office. Thus, as Keeling has observed, Palmerston strove to present the attack on his foreign policy as a conspiracy against him personally.<sup>72</sup>

In the aftermath of the debate, Palmerston's victory was applauded widely throughout the country. Local newspapers such as the *Renfrewshire Reformer* and *Glasgow Saturday Post* made sure that Palmerston was acquainted with their approval of his conduct by sending him cuttings, whilst the *Sligo Champion*, an Irish

<sup>71</sup> *On the Speech of Her Majesty's Foreign Secretary, delivered in the House of Commons June 25, 1850. A letter to the Right Hon. Viscount Palmerston, in reference to the Greek Question, exclusive of His Lordship's general foreign policy. By a Greek Gentleman* (London, 1850), pp.5, 6-8, 35

<sup>72</sup> See R. M. Keeling, 'Palmerston and the Pacifico Debate', (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Missouri, Columbia, 1968), ch.4. Contrast this with the broader implications of the debate as demonstrated by H. Winston Barron in his *Address to the Electors of Waterford* of 11 July 1850. Having voted against Palmerston and the government in the debate, Barron explained that whilst he had a high regard for Palmerston, who, he said, was 'justly popular', he had taken the opportunity to make a point about Irish affairs: 'On Irish questions we are powerless; our only remedy is to show that, in great difficulties, the Minister must not count on our votes. The only great difficulty of the Session was the question of foreign policy. I had no other opportunity of showing my strong objection to the neglect of Irish interests. I was placed in the most painful position.... But I voted against my personal feelings, - against the interests of those dearest to me, - but, as I conscientiously believe, for the interests of the Irish people of all classes, without reference to party'. (Broadlands Papers, MM/GR/55). Barron was a Catholic 'Whig' dependent on regaining some Protestant support in his struggle with the nationalists.

Tory paper, reiterated the perception of Palmerston as the patriot hero by describing him as 'a second Chatham - one equal to him in vigour of mind - in perspicacity, brilliancy and strength'.<sup>73</sup> From other quarters, tributes to his manly conduct and 'noble generous and patriotic course' confirmed the impression that Palmerston had done much to consolidate, even enhance, his popular image of the masculine English minister.<sup>74</sup> Popularly, at least it seemed, Palmerston had convinced certain numbers amongst the British people that he was their ablest minister. His appeal went beyond the political appeal of nationalist interest and won admiration from other quarters too, as Edwin Budell, author of a hand-book, *The British Tariff, 1850-51*, observed in a letter to the Foreign Secretary:

Your Lordship has indeed heard the triumphant cheers of the senate and of the club, but not less grateful would it have been to your Lordship to have heard, as day by day I have heard, from men of various shades of political opinion, and of all grades of mercantile pursuits, the most emphatic expressions of admiration and delight, in reference to Your Lordship's memorable speech - which contained an exposition of policy that made many Converts, by its eloquent force & conclusive argument.<sup>75</sup>

The mercantile classes, already growing disenchanted with the shortcomings of Cobdenite policies and sensing that financial reform was all but exhausted, looked ever more favourably on the promise of Palmerstonian force to defend commercial interests and thus found in the Don Pacifico debate an early vindication of their

<sup>73</sup> John Henderson [editor of the *Renfrewshire Reformer and Glasgow Saturday Post*] to Palmerston, 30 June 1850, Broadlands Papers, MM/GR/49, enclosing a copy of the paper. *Sligo Champion*, June 1850, Broadlands Papers, MM/GR/50. It is interesting to note also that the *Sligo Champion* concluded its leading article thus: 'Honor [sic] where honor is due - honor to Lord Palmerston. Proud are we, indeed, that he is connected with Sligo by property; it gives us a kind of claim to him - imaginary it may be - but still it is gratifying to know that the Mind which governs the Foreign policy of the world some times thinks of our poor locality. That he has a wish to serve it we can readily believe, and we hope the time may come when he will have an opportunity of doing so'. It is surely significant thus to witness Irish torism buying into Palmerstonism.

<sup>74</sup> R.O. Warwick [Pensioner of Greenwich Hospital] to Palmerston, 2 July 1850 refers to the way Palmerston has 'manfully... like the Old Champions of old, stood forward for the Honour and Welfare, of the British nation, and the just rights of her subjects at Home and Abroad' (Broadlands Papers, MM/GR/52); Abraham Jones Le Gras[?] to Palmerston, 8 July 1850, Broadlands Papers, MM/GR/54

<sup>75</sup> Edwin Budell to Palmerston, 24 July 1850, Broadlands Papers, MM/GR/59/1

defection.<sup>76</sup> As the *Manchester Guardian*, mouthpiece of the Manchester entrepreneurial classes observed:

The merchants of this neighbourhood are largely embarked in foreign commerce, and have numerous establishments scattered over the world, in countries under every variety of government, and in every stage of civilisation. We imagine they will not hear with much satisfaction that, in the deliberate opinion of the British house of lords, they are entitled to, and must expect to receive, no other protection, in their persons or their property, than that which they can obtain from a due enforcement of whatever law may happen to exist for the time in the country in which their establishments are.<sup>77</sup>

Palmerston's speech demonstrated, if nothing else, the *Guardian* maintained, that there were two discernible principles of British foreign policy: political freedom and freedom of trade. 'In this point of view', ran a leading article four days after the close of the debate, 'we consider that the rights of individual and of nations, are the same; and though either may erroneously exercise those rights, there can be no more doubt of their existence in the one case, than in the other'.<sup>78</sup> Palmerston promised thus to protect commercial interests, which was more than could be said for the mercantile classes' erstwhile figureheads, Cobden, and, to a lesser extent, Bright. The *Guardian* was highly critical of the opposition from Cobden and Bright to Roebuck's motion upon which the Don Pacifico debate was founded suggesting that the failure of the motion and the implicit censure of Palmerstonian foreign policy 'would have blighted their most cherished policy at home, and endangered the progress of all they profess to hold dear in the condition of European states'.<sup>79</sup> The *Guardian's* readers appeared to agree and letters to that paper confirmed the popular approval of

<sup>76</sup> See Gatrell, 'The Commercial Middle Class in Manchester', pp.448-450 for discussion of this 'accord between Palmerston's view of the world and that of the anti-Cobdenite opposition in Manchester'.

<sup>77</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 29 June 1850

<sup>78</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 3 July 1850

<sup>79</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 3 July 1850

Palmerston's course and simultaneously expressed dissatisfaction with the position taken up by Cobden and Bright.<sup>80</sup> The effects of this demonstration of typical Palmerstonian determination were still felt in the early years of Palmerston's own premiership: his stature into the late 1850s amongst the Manchester business community, Gatrell asserts, 'rested in large measure on the fact that he had guaranteed that protection without equivocation'.<sup>81</sup> He had shown himself to be unswerving in the pursuit of British interests and had managed to tie that in with a demonstration of sympathy towards liberalism across Europe. He won the approval of people across the social and political spectrum.

It is not surprising, then, that when Palmerston was dismissed in December 1851, his going was deeply regretted. As with the national newspapers, which had failed to acknowledge the force of Palmerston's personal popularity in 1850 at the time of the Pacifico debate, his fall in December 1851 was seen widely in terms of a personal loss, the loss of the English minister. Apprehensive that the Foreign Secretary might be pushed out in favour of a Grey or a Peelite, *Bell's Life in London*, a sporting paper, warned in early December:

No, Lord John Russell, you had better get rid of *twenty Lord Grey's* [Palmerston's emphasis], and preserve the respect, obedience and loyalty of the Colonies, than sacrifice one Lord Palmerston, and with him sacrifice the sense of England's national independence. There is in England, and in such as are worthy of the name of Englishmen (the intriguers who are trying to coerce Lord John on this point are not worthy of it), no inclination to truckle to foreign domination of any kind.<sup>82</sup>

Palmerston collected a variety of newspaper cuttings from this period, and not surprisingly, they are all from articles displaying a sympathy for his cause, but it is

<sup>80</sup> See Keeling, 'Palmerston and the Pacifico Debate', pp.180-181

<sup>81</sup> Gatrell, 'The Commercial Middle Class in Manchester', p.450

<sup>82</sup> *Bell's Life in London*, 7 Dec. 1851: Press cutting kept and annotated by Palmerston, Broadlands Papers, GMC/49

interesting to note the diversity of their origins, and the uniformity of their sentiments. The *Dundee Courier* was alarmed to witness the ill-treatment of Palmerston, suggesting that the real causes of his removal were being masked and the Foreign Secretary's policy was not so out of line with the sentiments expressed in other parts of the government. In Dublin, the *Warder*, an Orange newspaper clearly concerned about France and the renewed threat posed by Catholicism, regarded the events of December as 'the most unseasonable exhibition of "the white feather," as of the most calamitous augury for the ultimate interests of peace', whilst from London the *Morning Advertiser*, originally a publican's paper, though by this time much more widely read, asked: 'Will Englishmen submit to this?', doubting surely that they would acquiesce in the sacrifice of 'the most *English* Minister' ever to hold the seals of the Foreign Office being "'basely" sacrificed to the despotic Courts of the Continent'. A letter to the *Lincolnshire Times* of February 1852 suggested that perhaps they would not.<sup>83</sup>

Letters of support emphasised three crucial reasons for bemoaning Palmerston's removal: the threat to national honour, the ill-treatment of the people's hero, and the precarious state of European affairs. His claims to represent England were unquestionable, as a former Cambridge contemporary observed,<sup>84</sup> whilst the 'People's Minister' (as the Mayor of Southampton described him) was the one upon whom 'the people' relied above all others.<sup>85</sup> As far as Europe was concerned, such a

<sup>83</sup> *Dundee Courier*, Feb. 1852, Broadlands Papers, GMC/54/1-2; *Warder*, 26 Dec. 1851, Broadlands Papers, GMC/50; *Morning Advertiser*, 31 Dec. 1851, Broadlands Papers, GMC/51; *Lincolnshire Times*, Feb. 1852 (letter dated 20 Feb. 1852), Broadlands Papers, GMC/53.

<sup>84</sup> R. Alston to Palmerston, 27 Dec. 1851, Broadlands Papers, GMC/51

<sup>85</sup> R. Andrews to Palmerston, 26 Jan. 1852, Broadlands Papers, GMC/106. In a similar vein, also: Henry Berkeley [MP for Bristol] to Palmerston, 27 Dec. 1851, Broadlands Papers, GMC/65; George Coles [of Tiverton] to Palmerston, 2 Jan. 1852, Broadlands Papers, GMC/73; Edward Dawes [MP for the Isle of Wight] to Palmerston, 13 Jan. 1852, Broadlands Papers, GMC/77

veteran diplomat could scarcely be spared at this moment.<sup>86</sup> Patriotism by the late 1840s no longer stood so clearly for opposition to government, as it had at the end of the eighteenth century, but it did, amongst the radicals, encapsulate a certain sense of fraternal internationalism.<sup>87</sup> In this sense could Britain, the home of freedom, be regarded as the natural defender of liberties abroad.

Onwards again on the glad path of duty,  
 Onwards a joy and a blessing to be;  
 And blest be the spirit, the patriot spirit,  
 That snapt our fetters and bade us go free.<sup>88</sup>

On this basis Palmerston could invert the traditional antagonism towards France - and in December 1851 the return of a Bonaparte to the head of the French government was viewed widely with suspicion and unease - and be held up as the defender of liberty and peace. Having established himself, rhetorically, as the defender of these principles, public opinion had grounds upon which to believe that, however much the spectre of earlier Napoleonic menace might now be resurrected, Palmerston still stood as the defender of the national interest.

Having seen the Foreign Secretary dismissed, not all was despair, however. The *Leicestershire Mercury* hoped that in time Palmerston's 'brilliancy' and 'genius' would once again be recognised and that 'then shall we speedily see his lordship carried back to office on the shoulders of the people'.<sup>89</sup> The *Morning Advertiser* suggested that the people of the City of London now had a duty to demonstrate their

<sup>86</sup> See J Davidson, *The Fall of the Pope, and the Fate of the French President* (London and Aberdeen, 1852), which concludes: 'But, whatever be the cause [of Palmerston's resignation], never could the Queen's government less spare the veteran diplomatist than at this juncture in Foreign affairs. The continent of Europe is now in such a precarious condition, that the "war of opinion" predicted by Mr Canning, may suddenly burst forth - a conflict more terrific than any of the great battles fought from Marathon to Waterloo' (p.7). Davidson sent this pamphlet to Palmerston on 17 Jan. 1852, (Broadlands Papers, GMC/76; GMC/76/enc.1) Clearly in any 'war of opinion', it was necessary to have at the helm a statesman who was well versed in such popular politics.

<sup>87</sup> H. Cunningham, 'The Language of Patriotism, 1750-1914', *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (1981), pp.20-22

<sup>88</sup> 'The Patriot Spirit', Harding Collection, B.11 (809)

<sup>89</sup> *Leicestershire Mercury*, 24 Jan. 1852, Broadlands Papers, GMC/52

dissatisfaction with the current representative of that parliamentary seat, Russell, by replacing him with Palmerston.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, Palmerston had already been approached by the City of London Tradesman's Club who had just such an objective in view, as did Henry Berkeley, the liberal MP for the City of Bristol when he asked Palmerston to join him in the next contest as a second liberal member for that constituency, and Mr A. Drummond who wrote inviting Palmerston to stand for the liberal interest for the City of Glasgow at the next election. To each of these requests, Palmerston gratefully acknowledged the honour of being approached, but answered that loyalty to the electors of Tiverton, with whom he enjoyed an intimate and friendly connection, prevented him accepting what would otherwise be a very tempting offer.<sup>91</sup>

Soon the shock wore off, and Palmerston's supporters began to hope for more than to secure his services as their new representative. Eager to portray events in the best possible light, and recognising that this was an opportunity to undermine the Russell group in the Whig party, they began to see Palmerston's departure from the Cabinet not as a dismissal, rather as a liberation. The members of the Working Men's Institution of Leamington Priors in Warwickshire congratulated Palmerston on his 'withdrawal' from the government and a London correspondent acquainted with that town's civic leaders observed that, less than a week after the news of his removal became known, all over the city, and especially in the Lord Mayor's house, Palmerston's name was widely mentioned ("Long live Palmerston", "Palmerston for

<sup>90</sup> *Morning Advertiser*, 7 Feb. 1852

<sup>91</sup> Mr Shaw (Honorary Secretary of the City of London Tradesman's Club) to Palmerston, 24 Jan. 1852, (with a copy of Palmerston's reply) Broadlands Papers, GMC/58; Henry Berkeley to Palmerston, 6 Jan. 1852 (with a copy of Palmerston's reply), Broadlands Papers, GMC/66; A. Drummond to Palmerston, 1 Jan. 1852 (with a copy of Palmerston's reply), Broadlands Papers, GMC/79

ever" - "Vive Palmerston" -') and it was felt that it would not be long before Palmerston headed his own ministry.<sup>92</sup>

The Sheffield branch of the Rational Society welcomed Palmerston's dismissal on just these grounds. At a general meeting in January 1852, the Society rejoiced 'in the liberation of Lord Palmerston from the thralldom of office', whilst Ambrose Brewin wrote again from Tiverton, this time to express the hope that 'a little cessation of intense labour will give you fresh strength and recruit the effect of past toils'.<sup>93</sup> There was a sense that Palmerston was being fêted as the saviour-in-waiting of his country. From Kent the Reverend Clotworthy Gillmor wrote to say that he believed that 'the talent, the energy, & the Protestantism of Lord Palmerston ...[will] come to the rescue of England', and another correspondent hoped that although he had 'only the Ace (the People) and Knave of Trumps in hand', he would be able to return to office as 'the Guardian of the Protestant Religion and the freedom of England'.<sup>94</sup> Here is a very clear invocation of the very essence of the patriotic hero: godly and determined in the maintenance of liberty and freedom. Clearly there was still a latent Protestant feeling into which Palmerston, or Palmerstonism, could tap. The Reverend Gillmor almost certainly was excited by the concern over 'papal aggression' which since about 1850 had threatened to re-establish the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Britain and which signalled absolutism and an end of religious liberty.<sup>95</sup> Anti-papist feeling was still apparently widespread

<sup>92</sup> Address by the Members of the Working Men's Institution of Leamington Priors, Warwickshire, 1 Jan. 1852, Broadlands Papers, GMC/92/enc.1; A. Kirkaldy to Palmerston, 29 Dec. 1851, Broadlands Papers, GMC/97

<sup>93</sup> Wm. Lawton (Secretary of the Sheffield Rational Society) to Palmerston, 7 Jan. 1852, Broadlands Papers, GMC/57; Ambrose Brewin to Palmerston, 6 Jan. 1852, Broadlands Papers, GMC/70

<sup>94</sup> Rev. Clotworthy Gillmor to Palmerston, 6 Jan. 1852, Broadlands Papers, GMC/85; John Wallis to Palmerston, 5 Jan. 1852, Broadlands Papers, GMC/122

<sup>95</sup> See D.E.D Beales, *England and Italy, 1859-60* (London, 1961), pp.14, 19-20

in the 1850s and so there was still a keen disposition within certain sections of society to celebrate the Protestantism of Britain over the popery of the continent.<sup>96</sup> It is significant, then, that in a street ballad proclaiming 'The Political Alphabet for 1855', 'P':

Stands for Palmerstone [sic],  
Who will his duty do,  
Kill Puseyites and Jackabites [sic],  
And all the Russian crew.<sup>97</sup>

This prematurely raises the issue of Palmerston as Prime Minister, yet in early 1852, there were already voices advocating just such a role for Palmerston. And in championing the cause of Palmerston's claims for the premiership, supporters were urged to discount Palmerston's supposed anti-reform (anti-democratic?) tendencies and focus instead on the potential he promised for uniting the nation: in the shape of a hero-governor, such as Prime Minister Palmerston, national greatness and honour would be assured and the tacit and symbolic inclusion of the disenfranchised 'people' would more than compensate for any perceived lack of political reform. Indeed, would not the nation be freer under such a ruler? As 'an Edinburgh Elector' warned in a letter to the *Edinburgh News*:

Thus the *Daily News* writes - 'Lord John Russell promises us a new reform Bill. Let us see what it will be like before we try to upset him in favour of one whose opinions on reform are far less known than those of the present Premier.'

<sup>96</sup> Geoffrey Best cites the reminiscences of Edmund Gosse as evidence of such sentiments. Gosse had been brought up part of the Plymouth Brethren and was therefore not a moderate witness, but, according to Best his views on this topic were typical of many (though clearly not all) across the social classes. Gosse wrote in the 1850s for example: 'As a little boy, when I thought, with intense vagueness, of the Pope, I used to shut my eyes tight and clench my fists. We welcomed any social disorder in any part of Italy, as likely to be annoying to the Papacy. If there was a custom-house officer stabbed in a fracas at Sassari, we gave loud thanks that liberty and light were breaking in upon Sardinia. If there was an unsuccessful attempt to murder the Grand Duke, we lifted up our voices to celebrate the faith and sufferings of the dear persecuted Tuscans, and the record of some apocryphal monstrosity in Naples would only reveal to us a glorious opening for Gospel energy....' (G.F.A. Best, 'Popular Protestantism in Victorian Britain', in R. Robson (ed.), *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain* (London, 1967), p.119).

<sup>97</sup> 'The Political Alphabet for 1855', Harding Collection, B.14 (355)

Electors, and people of Britain, beware of this piece of cunning and carry back Lord Palmerston as Premier to the Councils of Her Majesty and of the nation in favour of Kossuth, down-trodden nationalities, and the independence of this land from foreign dictation.<sup>98</sup>

Not everyone shared in these hearty aspirations for Palmerston's future career, however. The *Manchester Guardian's* immediate reaction was one of 'regret if not alarm', and the leading article which first considered Palmerston's resignation declared that 'nothing but the triumph of principle can reconcile us to his loss'.<sup>99</sup> Upon more mature reflection though, the *Guardian* tempered this view with the suggestion that Palmerston, aware of his great popularity in the nation at large, was perhaps becoming something of a liability: 'A long series of great successes', a leading article noted, 'had undoubtedly given to Lord PALMERSTON a confidence which, to say the least, was dangerous, in so delicate a matter as foreign diplomacy'.<sup>100</sup> The re-alignment in Manchester politics towards Palmerston was clearly a more gradual process than Gatrell's thesis allows. Nevertheless, even those elements which saw some good in Palmerston's removal - with the exception of the more extreme interests such as the republican movement led by figures such as William James Linton<sup>101</sup> - still expected great things from Palmerston in the future.

<sup>98</sup> Letter 'To the Editor of the *Edinburgh News* from an Edinburgh Elector', 6 Jan. 1852, cut from the newspaper, with the quote from the *Daily News* highlighted [by Palmerston's pen?], Broadlands Papers, GMC/86/enc.2

<sup>99</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 27 Dec. 1851

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 31 Dec. 1851

<sup>101</sup> The *English Republic*, a relatively short-lived republican paper under the editorship of Linton lamented the fall of France, but hoped that in the new year 1852, with Palmerston out, there were better prospects of England 'coming to the rescue' of the French (Vol.2 (1852/1853), 1852, p.4). What is interesting to note, is that in rallying republican hearts to the cause, Linton uses just the sort of language that Palmerston himself might have employed to underpin his own popularity: 'The English People must fight. But at how fearful a disadvantage, united only by a common danger, untrained, undisciplined, unused to arms. Yet they must fight, even in despair, even though kindling the heroic-fire of patriotism (so long extinct) from the ashes of the pillaged land. They will fight. And when arms are in their hands, let them not lay them down till they have rid their country not only of the invaders but of the home-tyrants also; till upon the funeral-pyre of Tyranny they have lit such a beacon flame in England as shall warm the hearts of patriots in the farthest European corner!' (Vol.2 (1852/1853), 1852, p.19).

In the same article which criticised the over-confidence of the displaced minister, the *Guardian* concluded that: 'Lord PALMERSTON has acted with many sets of politicians; but there is one uniform characteristic of all his changes;- he always went forward;- he never took a step backward, and he will not do so now'. There was no reason to expect him to desert his principles and erstwhile sympathies - 'all of the most liberal kind' - and thus his contribution to parliament would still be a force for good.<sup>102</sup>

iii) "The coming man" in the legislature': Palmerston and extra-parliamentary opinion, 1852-1855

The *Times* might have believed that Palmerston's political force was spent by December 1851,<sup>103</sup> but that was not a view widely held in the country, and with little grounds for justification once Palmerston had returned to the ministerial fold in December 1852. Little matter that he now served under Lord Aberdeen, as Home Secretary: foreign affairs, and particularly the Eastern question, were coming to the boil and it was Palmerston whom many clearly hoped would take a lead. When, by the summer, Palmerston still seemed to be playing second-fiddle to the leadership of Aberdeen and Russell and relinquishing claims to the Foreign Office in favour of Clarendon, one anonymous correspondent asked:

What can have become of you? Your friends say that you are frightened at Nicholas. Your Enemies, that you have sold the Liberties of Europe to him and are preparing to become a Cossack.

I try to reassure both - that you are biding your time and may shortly be expected to flash out as of yore....

Oh, my Lord,! I did ever hope better Things of you and that whilst you bind [?] Europe would not verify Napoleon's Prediction

<sup>102</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 31 Dec. 1851

<sup>103</sup> See above, p.202

by becoming a Cossack. But it is a sad Condition that you are placed in! And you friends sorrowfully pray that you could emancipate yourself from the tame elephants.<sup>104</sup>

Whilst Palmerston may have been making progress in his domestic reforms, attracting 'a new and widely extended public attention to the subject' of smoke abatement, as Edwin Chadwick noted,<sup>105</sup> chief among his identifiable characteristics was his association with foreign policy. In September 1853 he received honours from two sources in Scotland. The Guild Incorporation of Perth bestowed the freedom of the Corporation on Palmerston in recognition 'particularly of the firm, manly, independent and truly British spirit uniformly displayed by his Lordship, more especially when in the management of the foreign relations of the United Kingdom'.<sup>106</sup> Still prominent too are the symbolic images of heroic leadership: strong-willed, manly and in the interests of the nation; and significantly, given the common feeling that the main challenge of the Crimean War was as a test of the abilities of the traditional ruling class to *manage* the war *efficiently* (these terms are important),<sup>107</sup> Palmerston's standing as no less an able manager than he was a member of the aristocratic élite is important.

These sentiments were echoed at the same time in Glasgow where Palmerston was granted the more prestigious honour of the freedom of the City. In his formal speech presenting Palmerston with the freedom, the Lord Provost referred

<sup>104</sup> 'Cadux' to Palmerston, 12 July 1853, Broadlands Papers, MPC/1554

<sup>105</sup> Edwin Chadwick to Palmerston, 3 Dec. 1853, Broadlands Papers, GC/CH/51. Chadwick added that it had been noticed how the offenders in smoke pollution, the 'Smutty Kings' as he dubbed them, were becoming increasingly concerned: 'Now there seems to be a little "Fashion" to think that Lord Palmerston is in earnest about it and therefore they are all stirring - because they expect him to go to this as he does to most other things - vigorously and efficiently'.

<sup>106</sup> David Ross (Dean of the Guild Incorporation of Perth) to Palmerston, 21 Sept. 1853, Broadlands Papers, GC/RO/20

<sup>107</sup> See O. Anderson, *A Liberal State at War: English Politics and Economics during the Crimean War* (London, 1967), pp.23-24. As Anderson demonstrates throughout this book, the war represented an important test of the British system of government and the sense of a premature and inconclusive peace settlement, imposed on Britain by the determination of France, prevented the complete fulfilment of this promise (see esp. pp.275-283)

to Palmerston being 'considered by your countrymen as the greatest statesman of the age, and the most distinguished public man of your day. (Loud cheers)' and highlighted 'the courage and determination you have so often displayed in protecting the interests and the privileges of your countrymen abroad - (loud cheers) - or the manner in which you have upheld the honour and maintained the dignity of your Sovereign and your country. (Loud cheers)'. Even the one reference made to Palmerston's current tenure of the Home Office was vague and emphasised still the national character of the value to the country of Palmerston still serving 'in so prominent place in her Majesty's Councils'.

In his acceptance speech, Palmerston praised the virtues of an enlightened and civilised society in which such honours as he was now in receipt of were all the more valuable, and then turned to Lord John Russell and Thomas Babington Macaulay whom, as the Lord Provost had boasted in his speech, had also been similarly honoured. It perhaps jarred with Palmerston to be thus compared with Lord John, but he took advantage of the situation and it is interesting to consider the qualities which he perceived he and Lord John shared. He described Lord John as 'the most energetic, the most consistent, the most persevering champion of the cause of civil and religious liberty in every quarter of the world'. On this basis, it was probably true that holding the freedom of the city in common with Russell added to the satisfaction of that honour. Likewise, Palmerston praised Macaulay's 'rare faculty of combining in his person the sagacity, the wisdom, and the practical experience of a statesman, with that intellectual distinction which qualifies him to be one of the greatest historians this country has ever produced'. By implication therefore, Palmerston was underlining his own libertarian and wise and sagacious

conduct; appropriating the finer attributes of those with whom he was compared for his own self-enhancement. In common with the bestowers of the honour, Palmerston spoke primarily of his record in foreign affairs, and also made a good deal of his attempts to suppress the slave trade, which he surely knew would gratify non-conformist consciences with its moralistic overtones and more than that, reinforce the notion that, as Colley puts it, 'Great Britain was still Israel, and its crusade against slavery was just one more vital proof and guarantee of its supremacy among the nations'.<sup>108</sup> He reiterated his belief in the principles which had underpinned the famous '*civis Romanus sum*' speech and talked of the responsibility he had felt to promote free and constitutional government throughout the world. By contrast, of his present employment he said simply: 'I can only say, in regard to the department which is now committed to my charge, that I shall always be thankful to any one who may suggest improvements, pointing out what may in their opinion be wrong, and enabling me to set that which is wrong right'.<sup>109</sup> Here was no pro-active manifesto: Palmerston it seemed had learned the value of courting popular support for his foreign policy and now sought also popular guidance for his domestic policy. It was, perhaps, a tacit admission that he had neither the desire nor the foresight to propose a grand scheme of domestic reforms.

Palmerston's real vision and grandiloquence, which swayed his extra-parliamentary audiences, found their expression in the domain of foreign affairs only. However sincere Palmerston might have been in the reforms he pursued at the Home Office it was still with foreign affairs that people most readily associated him and it was in this respect that, primarily, Palmerston regarded

<sup>108</sup> Colley, *Britons*, p.380

<sup>109</sup> The presentation of the freedom of the city of Glasgow and the associated speeches reported in the *Glasgow Constitutional*, and kept by Palmerston, Broadlands Papers, SP/B/3/1-4

himself. Even when Palmerston offended Protestant feeling in his domestic measures - refusing, for example, to sanction a day of fast and prayer in the face of a request from Edinburgh presbyters concerned about the threat of cholera in October 1853, and, the following year, actually pleading for the pay of Roman Catholic Chaplains<sup>110</sup> - he continued to stand, in many ways, as an important counter-point to a Catholic alternative, as a Protestant guardian of the nation.

### *War in the Crimea*

For the working classes foreign events which were most likely to attract their attention were those with militaristic or sensationalist aspects. Thus the diplomatic implications of the Crimean War were not analysed but as a war involving British interests, it was soon boiled down to a conflict between good (liberalism as embodied by Palmerston and, somewhat ironically, the Sultan) and bad (Tsarist reaction and Prince Albert).<sup>111</sup> Here, then, support for Palmerston was easily won.

For Radicals, the issues were more complicated. As Miles Taylor has shown, allegiances were not determined so readily. The very nature of the dispute - extra-European - was an initial problem and was not alleviated by the view that this was a conflict between two different types of absolutism: the Mahommedian (essentially 'un-European') illiberal and moribund Ottoman empire versus the

<sup>110</sup> D. Roberts, 'Lord Palmerston at the Home Office', *The Historian*, XXI, No.1 (1958), pp.71, 78. For contemporary arguments addressed to Palmerston on the subject of Catholic freedoms, and in particular religious freedom for Catholic prisoners, see Frederick Oakley, *The Religious Disabilities of our Catholic Prisoners Considered, with a view to their removal, in a letter to the Viscount Palmerston, M.P., &c, &c, &c* (London, 1854) which advocated religious freedom on moral grounds but which was heartily contradicted by Joseph Kingsmill, *Roman Catholic Chaplains to Gaols. A letter to the Rt. Hon. Viscount Palmerston, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department, on this Subject; occasioned by a letter of the Rev. Frederick Oakley, M.A., entitled, 'The Religious Disabilities of our Catholic Prisoners considered, with a view to their removal'* (London, 1854)

<sup>111</sup> V.S. Berridge, 'Popular Journalism and Working Class Attitudes, 1854-1886: a Study of Reynolds Newspaper, Lloyds Weekly Newspaper and the Weekly Times', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1976), pp.293-294

aggression of the absolutist Tsar. But as accounts of Russian barbarism became more widely known, and sympathy for Greek Christians who were portrayed as victims of religious intolerance took hold (emphasising thereby the inconsistencies in the logic which determined allegiances over this question), 'the threat posed by an empire in the ascendant was far more menacing than that of an empire in decline', Taylor suggests.<sup>112</sup> With little effort, Turkey could be portrayed as the ally of European liberalism: the country which had offered sanctuary to Kossuth in 1849, for example. Sympathy for Russian satellites such as Poland and Hungary, also fuelled latent Russophobia.<sup>113</sup> So much so, indeed, that an alliance with France for the purposes of having 'a go in at the old Russian bear' seemed quite natural.<sup>114</sup> The marrying of the working and radical classes' support for the war found its logical expression then in ballads such as 'John Bull and the Russians' which appeared at street level:

The Russian's pride must be brought down, in  
 spite of his imperial crown,  
 For England fears no tyrant's frown, her sons  
 are born to freedom.  
 He robbed poor Poland of her rights, though  
 she sustained a hundred fights,  
 Now let him try his boasted might against our  
 British cannon....  
 The Hungarians felt the tyrant's screw, when he

<sup>112</sup> Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism*, pp.224-229. Quotation from p.229

<sup>113</sup> Taylor, 'Palmerston and Radicalism, 1847-1865', p.165.

<sup>114</sup> 'England and France must Conquer the Russians' [1854], John Johnson Collection, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Box 4, item 496. This street ballad echoed a similar sentiment of one entitled 'God defend the Right', which presumably dates from c.1839-1840 when concerns over Syria were at their height and which clearly indicates the impression that whatever the conflicts and tensions between Catholic France and Protestant Britain, a common antagonism towards the Eastern powers was strong enough to overcome these differences:

On, onward, then for Syria!,  
 List Russia, to this song;  
 Right cheerily the trumpet's blast  
 Is echoed by the throng:  
 One cry doth France and England share  
 When girding for the fight-  
 If war must be, then let it come,  
 And "God defend the right!"... (Harding Collection, B.11 (3342)).

pinched the aged nobles through,  
 And flogged the backs of women, too, but,  
 now now [sic] he'll pay the piper.<sup>115</sup>

With the exception of Bronterre O'Brien, all Chartist leaders found themselves joining other radicals in support for Palmerstonian approaches to the Eastern question in the early 1850s.<sup>116</sup> Palmerston was the one statesman who was believed to be capable of standing above faction and preventing the administration of the war 'falling into the chicanery and secrecy of the Foreign Office'.<sup>117</sup>

Whether or not it was connected, when Palmerston resigned from the Cabinet in December 1853, he did so in the knowledge that outside Parliament he was still widely apprehended as the government's ablest manager of foreign policy, particularly significant at a time when the country appeared to be on the point of going to war in the East. Concurrently, he was, as certain sources within Parliament attested at this time, riding high at Westminster. C.H. Frewen, an independent Member of Parliament, suggested that seven eighths of the Conservative party in the Commons and many independents such as himself, would support Palmerston as Prime Minister.<sup>118</sup> Throughout 1854 indeed, whilst the talk around the Cabinet table might have been about replacing Newcastle with Palmerston as War Secretary, outside those closed quarters the debate was whether (perhaps even when) Palmerston should become the Prime Minister. Certainly there was little regard for Aberdeen's 'unstatesman-like views' among the 'Inhabitants of London' who had addressed a protest to the Lord Mayor about Aberdeen's speech in the House of Lords of 19 June 1854 which, they felt, stood in stark contrast to the 'manly and truly

<sup>115</sup> 'John Bull and the Russians', John Johnson Collection, Box 4, item 529

<sup>116</sup> Taylor, 'Modes of Political Expression and Working Class Radicalism', p.253

<sup>117</sup> Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847-1860*, p.234

<sup>118</sup> C.H. Frewen to Palmerston, 19 Dec. 1853, Broadlands Papers, GC/FR/7

British declarations' of the Cabinet's anti-Aberdonians, Russell and Clarendon.<sup>119</sup> In September 1854 E. Davies sent Palmerston a letter enclosing a copy of a pen portrait which he had composed and published in an un-named London weekly journal. The sketch of Palmerston's character acknowledged the difficulty in seeking to label Palmerston's political affiliations (without engaging in the debate) and praised his abilities and his industry. 'His importance is felt so much in the whole kingdom, by almost all parties,' it continued, 'that he is looked upon as the only one to be an efficient English premier'. He was free from party ties (though able to unite a broad spectrum of opinion), his character 'peculiarly masculine' and English, and his habits gentlemanly. 'The country expects much from him', the article concluded: 'We believe that he is "the coming man" in the legislature. It is possible that circumstances may shortly bring about such changes as to place him where he ought to be, in the government of this great country'.<sup>120</sup> When John Bright needed a police escort to defend him against protesters in his own Manchester constituency angry at his anti-interventionist stance, it was only further evidence of the extent to which Palmerston had secured the support of the Manchester commercial classes.<sup>121</sup>

<sup>119</sup> Letter 'To the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor of the City of London', from 'Inhabitants of London'. A copy of this letter was sent to Aberdeen on 23 June 1854 by Russell who had received it himself on 22 June. Russell's note to the Prime Minister observes: 'It is right that you should know what is going on. The position of the Govt has become very precarious' (Aberdeen Papers, British Library, Add.Mss. 43068).

<sup>120</sup> E. Davies to Palmerston, 16 Sept. 1854, Broadlands Papers, MPC/1561, enclosing newspaper cutting entitled 'Portrait Gallery of Eminent Living Men. Lord Palmerston, MP', Broadlands Papers, MPC/1561/enc.1

<sup>121</sup> J.W. Hudson to Palmerston, 23 Dec. 1854, Broadlands Papers, GC/HU/53. A. Taylor asserts that the 'body of disenfranchised in Manchester was not renowned for its positive level of commitment to the war effort', although the old ACLL was now solidly pro-Palmerston. Thus, the opposition to Palmerston (or at least lack of positive support) which Taylor identifies in Manchester was not the most visible, and winning over the commercial classes was far more valuable (Taylor, 'Modes of Political Expression and Working Class Radicalism', pp.267-70, quotation from p.268). The problem for those opposing Palmerstonian approaches was that in London, where the debate was liveliest, opposition was weakest (see rest of this chapter).

*'The Captain of Shams': Extra-parliamentary criticism of Palmerston*

There was criticism of Palmerston, however. A pamphlet published in 1854 entitled *Palmerston for Premier!* set about testing the validity of claims for just such a campaign. In a systematic destruction of Palmerston's record on questions of foreign policy tracing his career through the history of his diplomatic engagements and dealings with questions relating to Persia, Poland, Cracow, Greece, China, *The Vixen* (a British schooner confiscated by a Russian man-of-war in 1836), Don Pacifico and the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi, the un-named author concluded that the charges laid down by David Urquhart should not be dismissed as mere Russophobia and that rather Palmerston should accurately be seen as responsible for engineering 'the union of England and Russia'. Russia, it continued, 'now believes that the time has arrived for the accomplishment of the will of Peter the Great, and she is about to strike her grand blow for universal empire!'; this was not the time, then, to install Palmerston, whose past policies had 'mainly contributed to make Russia what she is at the present day', as Prime Minister.<sup>122</sup> A similar approach was taken by Washington Wilks in a pamphlet entitled *Palmerston in Three Epochs*. After detailing Palmerston's misdeeds, Wilks too urged that Palmerston's claims be passed over:

His brilliant tongue might continue to conceal an un-English policy, until, the victim of his own false Liberalism, he involved himself in ruin by involving the country in an irretrievable calamity. Better, better far, to await the advent from amidst the strife of emulative patriots, of a true embodiment of English force and honesty, - than again expose ourselves to disasters which we cannot bear alone, and yet on none can shift the blame. In the commencement of a contest of terrible realities, it will be the best augury of victory that we have dismissed a 'Captain of Shams' into the limbo of exploded reputations.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>122</sup> [Anon], *Palmerston for Premier! The claims of Lord Palmerston to fill the post of Prime Minister of England considered* (London, 1854), pp.42-42. For details of the charges made against Palmerston indicated, see esp. pp.6-37

<sup>123</sup> Washington Wilks, *Palmerston in Three Epochs: a comparison of facts with opinions* (London, 1854), pp.62-63

It is significant that a large proportion of the pamphlet literature concerning Palmerston for the decade under review, and especially that for the 1850s, in any discussion of foreign policy identifies David Urquhart as his chief antagonist.

Urquhart was a curious political force in the mid-nineteenth century, a former diplomat whose subsequent career, superficially at least, seemed concerned primarily with pursuing Palmerston and charging him with being a Russian spy.<sup>124</sup> Over the Crimean War he was an early and vociferous opponent of British intervention on behalf of Turkey and in September and October of 1853 he began delivering a series of speeches around the country calling for a greater involvement of 'the people' in foreign affairs. He couched his attacks on the government in terms of challenging the evil of 'secret diplomacy', but he meant to condemn the whole of the Cabinet for going to war with Russia with a Russian agent in their midst.

The logic of Urquhart's attacks was tortuous, but in the event this was perhaps of little consequence. His oratorical skills were very poor and it is reported, for instance, that at a meeting at the London Tavern the man who rose to second Urquhart's resolution admitted that he could not understand the second part of it and when this particular meeting moved its resolutions it was remarkable that amongst the names most loudly cheered was that of Palmerston.<sup>125</sup> This is a most important example, which partly explains why Palmerston was able to overcome opposition to his policies at the grass roots level. For whilst politics was increasingly a subject

<sup>124</sup> For background on Urquhart see: M.H. Jenks, 'The Activities and Influence of David Urquhart, 1833-56, with special reference to the affairs of the Near East', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1964); R. Shannon, 'David Urquhart and the Foreign Affairs Committees', in P. Hollis (ed.), *Pressure from Without in early Victorian England* (London, 1974); M. Taylor, 'The Old Radicalism and the New: David Urquhart and the Politics of Opposition, 1832-1867', in E.F. Biagini and A.J. Reid (eds.), *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organised Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850-1914* (Cambridge 1991), 23-43; C. Webster, 'Urquhart, Ponsonby and Palmerston', *English Historical Review*, LXII (1947); A.J.P. Taylor, *The Trouble Makers* (London, 1985 edn.), pp.40-67

<sup>125</sup> Jenks, 'The Activities and Influence of David Urquhart', pp.301-302

with national implications, and whilst Palmerston was keen to win over provincial interests such as the Manchester commercial classes, the debate over key questions, such as foreign policy and especially in the case of the Crimean situation in 1853 and 1854 was London-centric. As Antony Taylor has demonstrated, pro-Palmerston feeling was particularly strong in London, if only because the opposition there was so weak.<sup>126</sup> Urquhart might have courted popular support all over the country, but the foundation of his support was pre-eminently northern,<sup>127</sup> and in terms of popular politics, relying on strong oratorical performances and wide-ranging reporting of the same, the bias was definitely towards the capital, where significantly, non-conformity was also at its weakest.

Yet the very core of Urquhart's supposed support has rightly come into question recently. Miles Taylor has suggested that Urquhart's closest allies were not the working classes Urquhart himself liked to claim he represented, but in fact were much more middle class figures such as Charles Attwood, George Crawshay and Isaac Ironside - three of Urquhart's 'staunchest colleagues' - who had 'inherited the manufacturing and mercantile wealth of their fathers, and Stewart Rolland who was a newspaper proprietor.<sup>128</sup> Letters from Urquhart's friends and agents around the country suggest even more clearly the mis-direction (or mis-interpretation) of Urquhart's social targets. In Manchester, Langley told Urquhart, there was a lack of direction and 'I am every day more and more convinced that a meeting here got up merely by a few working men would be damaging'.<sup>129</sup> Indeed, the potential of the

<sup>126</sup> Taylor, 'Palmerston and Radicalism, 1847-1865', pp.167-168

<sup>127</sup> See, for example, the 'List of Addresses of the Foreign Affairs Committees' which dates from the late 1850s but which demonstrates a clear north of England bias in the geographical distribution of Urquhartite support, David Urquhart Papers, Balliol College Library, Oxford, I:G25

<sup>128</sup> M. Taylor, 'The Old Radicalism and the New: David Urquhart and the Politics of Opposition, 1832-1867', in E.F. Biagini and A.J. Reid (eds.), *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism. Organised Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850-1914* (Cambridge 1991), p.26

<sup>129</sup> S. Langley to David Urquhart, 25 Oct. [?1853], Urquhart Papers I:E3

working classes in Manchester seemed especially poor: 'For twenty years there has been a political organisation here,' wrote Langley again, but, 'during the last two years it has disappeared and nearly every leading man amongst the working classes, disgusted at the apathy and ingratitude of those for whom he had laboured has retired altogether from public life'.<sup>130</sup> Elsewhere, the prospects of rousing support seemed just as bleak. In Wolverhampton and Birmingham, reported William Peplow, 'there is no life in those towns' and on behalf of Urquhart, Peplow wrote to an un-named source to ask if 'you cannot do something in Macclesfield towards arousing the nation to a sense of its Duty at this important crisis, while the honour & the Dearest interests of it are being swamped by a Corrupt and imbecile Govt!'.<sup>131</sup> According to Taylor, Urquhartism was not a movement concerned with activating the working classes, nor indeed was it primarily concerned with foreign policy. Free trade liberalism, Taylor argues, was a key feature of Urquhart's programme and it was this that particularly attracted the radicals. Commerce, Urquhart had stressed throughout, should be a major determinant of British external policy: peace and retrenchment were the ideals Urquhart promoted and in this, then, he was courting the commercial classes in the manufacturing districts he visited and not the working classes.<sup>132</sup> Thus his antagonism towards Palmerston was largely personal (perhaps he was still bitter about his treatment when a diplomat under an earlier period of Palmerstonian management of the Foreign Office) and served as a conduit for more serious complaints about executive influence and secret diplomacy. Ironically, and as far as Urquhart was concerned, unfortunately, it was Palmerston whom radicals

<sup>130</sup> S. Langley to David Urquhart, 26 Oct. [?1853], Urquhart Papers I:E3

<sup>131</sup> William Peplow to David Urquhart, 'Friday night' [?1853]; William Peplow to ?, 11 Oct. 1853, Urquhart Papers I:E3

<sup>132</sup> Taylor, 'The Old Radicalism and the New: David Urquhart and the Politics of Opposition, 1832-1867', pp.26, 31, 32

saw as best able to guarantee and upright and true foreign policy, making him, as Taylor illustrates, the chief beneficiary of the reform movement's anxieties about secret diplomacy as Urquhart portrayed them.

In fact it was Louis Kossuth who charmed the people whom Urquhart sought to win over and in meetings across the midlands and in London he consistently overshadowed Urquhart's earlier performances in those districts.<sup>133</sup> And as Kossuth's speeches demonstrate, it was Palmerstonian interventionism that enjoyed the broadest popular support at this time:

I am led to believe that, as well from a natural sympathy for liberty, justice and right, as also from the instinctive knowledge of the fact that the welfare, interest, and honour of England go all that way, the people did and does not shrink from all the dangers and sacrifices of a great war, by the only reason, because it means to fight for freedom; because it believes that a real advantage to the cause of oppressed nationalities will be the issue. I am led to believe that it is by this reason, that the war is popular with the people of England. Is it so, or is it not so? Please answer me. Am I right or am I wrong in my supposition? (Cries of "yes")... How is it that England is leaning just the other way, and her statesmen straining every diplomatic nerve to ally despotic Austria to you? Why, it is simply because the people of England has not pronounced its will until now. Let that will be spoken, and, I trust, there shall not be wanting good and true men in Parliament to represent it, and to make the people's will efficient.<sup>134</sup>

It was Palmerston who sought and, it was hoped, would make this will efficient. It was important that he should exploit such extra-parliamentary support, or sympathy as it was here that opposition to him was weakest. It was within Parliament that he found his antagonists most forceful and vociferous. Here could dissentient voices such as Cobden's and Urquhart's, whose views were not ultimately dissimilar, at least in their common suspicion of Palmerston,<sup>135</sup> be most effectively expressed.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, p.35

<sup>134</sup> *Authentic Report of Kossuth's Speeches on the War in the East and the Alliance with Austria, at Sheffield, June 5, and at Nottingham, June 12, 1854. Published by Himself.* (London, 1854), p.5

<sup>135</sup> Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England*, p.71

Here Palmerston's successful cultivation of the role of 'Minister of England' and his 'triumph' amongst former Cobdenites, stood him in good stead. The value of a popular groundswell of support was felt beyond the confines of the Cabinet, where, undoubtedly, such impressions did represent a significant and persuasive force, as has been seen in discussion of high political manoeuvring, but also in the wider context of Westminster politics, this backing was not without consequence.

However successfully Palmerston had used the organs of the press to fight his political battles by proxy and sway extra-parliamentary opinion, and however well he had instilled in the country at large the idea of him as the defender of national interests and the protector of liberties, he was still obliged to defend himself in Parliament. It was still important to defend policies against parliamentary opposition which to some extent, and particularly during the government's of Russell and Aberdeen which never commanded large majorities, held the fortunes of the ministry in its hands. Whatever strength Palmerston derived from beyond Westminster, he could not dominate parliamentary contests on the back of that alone.

**CHAPTER 6. NO ETERNAL ALLIES AND NO PERPETUAL ENEMIES:  
PALMERSTON AND PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION, 1846-1855**

i) The parliamentary arena: Lords and Commons

'The supposed political invincibility of Palmerston in 1855-6 had some reality outside Parliament,' says John Vincent, 'but little inside Parliament where it mattered'.<sup>1</sup> This is certainly a valid argument, but it is questionable whether the implication that extra-parliamentary support did not matter is sustainable. As the previous chapter illustrated, Palmerston's support in the country at large was broad and not inconsequential when it came to affecting the political beliefs and inclinations of politicians. However, Vincent is right to point out that both as Prime Minister and before, Palmerston could not manipulate opinion at Westminster as effectively as he could that outside. It was in Parliament that opposition to his policies and criticism of his conduct found their most meaningful voices. It was in this arena that he was called upon to make his stoutest defences.

Despite the general acceptance that in the wake of the repeal of the Corn Laws there was less ground separating political parties, in the House of Lords, party was still a potent notion. The majority of peers remained loyal to a party (or political group) and demonstrated a high degree of party consistency.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Earl Grey,

<sup>1</sup> J.R. Vincent, 'The Parliamentary Dimension of the Crimean War', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th Series, Vol.31 (1981), p.37

<sup>2</sup> J. Hogan, 'Party Management in the House of Lords, 1846-1865', *Parliamentary History*, Vol.10, pt.1 (1991), p.124

Palmerston's long-standing political adversary publicly suppressed his continuing hostility towards Palmerston's foreign policy in the interests of Whig unity after 1845. On 5 May 1848, for example, Grey recorded in his journal that Stanley had given notice that he intended to move in the Lords for the recent correspondence between Bulwer and the Duke of Sotomayer to be laid before parliament. 'He did so accordingly this ev'g', noted Grey, '& made a very severe speech against Palmerston but I am sorry to say his censure was quite as just as it was severe'.<sup>3</sup> Two days later he admitted that, this attack had caused a 'very great sensation in the political world' which he hoped would lead to Palmerston's enforced retirement.<sup>4</sup> Yet, despite such hostility towards Palmerston's foreign policy, even Grey felt obliged to desist from making such sentiments public. When the Sicilian guns issue became known in early 1849, Grey was persuaded that Palmerston's position at the Foreign Office had become untenable. He told Sir Charles Wood that this must be impressed upon Russell and he would have done it himself had it 'not been for what happened in Dec/45',<sup>5</sup> but when he actually came to discuss the matter with the Prime Minister he adopted a different tone:

At 11 I went to Ld John's we had much conversat[io]n about the posit[io]n in which we are placed by this affair of the guns furnished to Sicily wh ended in my saying that while I disapproved of the course determined upon I will acquiesce in it rather than take upon myself the responsibility of perhaps breaking up the Govt. It was however clearly understood that I am not to be expected to defend the proceeding in the Lds and Ld J admitted that he thought it wd very likely lead to the defeat of the Govt in both Houses.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Third Earl Grey, Journal, 5 May 1848, Grey Papers (3rd Earl), Durham University Library, C3/14

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 7 May 1848, Grey Papers (3rd Earl), C3/14

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 16 Jan. 1849, Grey Papers (3rd Earl), C3/14

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 25 Jan. 1849, Grey Papers (3rd Earl), C3/14

For Grey at least, political differences were not necessarily to be allowed to translate into partisan political conflicts for their own sake.

Whilst the Protectionists remained throughout this period the single largest party in the Lords, during the Russell government of 1846-1852, ministers won 64 of the 82 divisions they faced in the Lords on government bills or opposition resolutions and censure motions.<sup>7</sup> Significantly, however, one of those defeats was over a question of foreign policy in the attack on Palmerston's and the government's handling of the Don Pacifico affair.

In June 1850 Lord Stanley introduced a motion censuring the government's handling of claims against the Greek government, claims which, he maintained, were of a dubious and exaggerated nature and the pursuit of which could, and indeed had, damaged British relations with other great powers.<sup>8</sup> Palmerston, he said, was a private friend, but this was no cause for leniency: 'I am bound here to speak, not of the man, but of the Minister; and thus feeling and regarding him as a man, I must, in this case, express my deep regret at the conduct which, as a Minister, he has felt it his duty to pursue, and call upon your Lordships to recollect that this is no case in which personal feelings ought to be indulged'.<sup>9</sup> In reply, Lord Lansdowne, leader of the government in the Lords, rose to rebut these charges. He was well acquainted with the ministry's foreign affairs, and found himself frequently in accord with Palmerston and found no great difficulty in dismissing Stanley's allegations. Palmerston, Lansdowne declared, enjoyed the general support of the House of Commons, an assembly, he asserted, in which 'the mercantile and manufacturing

<sup>7</sup> J. Hogan, 'Party Management in the House of Lords, 1846-1865', *Parliamentary History*, Vol.10, pt.1 (1991), p.125

<sup>8</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser., CXI, 1293-1332 (17 June 1850)

<sup>9</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXI, 1332 (17 June 1850)

interests of the country and of the world are adequately represented', and in which 'there is a party which has adopted for its standard and watchword the preservation of peace', and in which 'there has not, up to this moment, been one single intimation of an intention to bring these transactions into question; but that the questions that have been put upon this affair, when subjected to the test of fact and truth, have vanished into air, and there has been left behind no recorded intimation of the intention ever again to renew them'.<sup>10</sup> The principle which underpinned the government's policy, namely the right of subjects to demand protection abroad, was legitimate, Lansdowne argued; indeed the enforcement of such rights, by force if necessary, was not without precedent and not only had Britain adopted such a policy, but so too, in the past, had France and the United States. If the current employment of the principle had 'clouded' Britain's relations with any other power, that was temporary and not cause of grave concern.<sup>11</sup>

At the end of the debate, in which the motion was carried by a majority of 37 against the government, it is not surprising to find Lansdowne's name in the list of Non-Contents; it is perhaps a little more interesting to find also Earl Grey's name there.<sup>12</sup> At a Cabinet meeting held to discuss the government's response to this defeat, Grey opposed an attempt to secure a counter vote in the Commons and advocated simply a declaration that British subjects abroad would continue to receive support from the British government, clearly acknowledging the force of the Lords' censure. He allowed himself to be carried by the rest of the Cabinet, however, and rather than pressing for a ministerial resignation, he ultimately

<sup>10</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXI, 1333 (17 June 1850)

<sup>11</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXI, 1333-1350 (17 June 1850)

<sup>12</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXI, 1401-1403 (17 June 1850). The voting figures for this debate were: Contents 169, Non-Contents, 132.

accepted the party line that there should be no resignation and that the government should seek a counter vote in the lower House, even though this determination, he recorded in his diary, 'I have since seen reason to regard as a great error'.<sup>13</sup>

Parliamentary opposition in the House of Lords was certainly not inconsequential. However, whilst it was possible for the government to suffer defeats, careful party management and the development of more sophisticated whipping procedures<sup>14</sup> meant that much of what was transacted in the upper House was somewhat theatrical. Indeed, ever since the passing of the 1832 Reform Act, according to G.H.L. Le May, the upper house had ceased to dominate the legislative process. Melbourne, Le May observes, ostentatiously refused to be undermined by an adverse vote in the Lords whilst his ministry continued to enjoy the support of the Commons and, significantly, the Crown, as he demonstrated in 1839 when the Lords expressed no confidence in the government's Irish policy.<sup>15</sup>

Even when the Lords did successfully censure the government, as over the Don Pacifico affair, a successful counter vote in the House of Commons was sufficient to overcome the effects of such a set-back. Thus in many ways the House of Commons was the key arena for parliamentary debates over foreign policy during this period, if only because more of its members were directly involved or interested in such questions.

There were, arguably, three main types of opposition in the House of Commons to Palmerston's policies during the decade under review. Each sought to bring him to book before Parliament, but each was inspired and driven by different

<sup>13</sup> Grey, Journal, 18 June 1850, Grey Papers (3rd Earl), C3/15

<sup>14</sup> See J. Hogan, 'Party Management in the House of Lords', esp. pp. 127-149

<sup>15</sup> G.H.L. Le May, *The Victorian Constitution: Conventions, Usages and Contingencies* (London, 1979), p.131

aims and objectives. And whilst each failed to upset his inexorable rise to the premiership, they failed because of peculiar inherent weaknesses as much as through specific defeat at the hands of Palmerston. There was, firstly, the hostility to Palmerston's foreign policy and management of the Foreign Office that was of an essentially personal character, as typified by David Urquhart, which failed to undermine Palmerston from without, tried from within and, failing there also, sought once again to win converts beyond Westminster. Secondly there was the party-political opposition, from the Conservatives, which was weakened by the sympathy for Palmerstonianism from one of its chief protagonists, Benjamin Disraeli, and from the factional nature of opposition politics. Finally, there was the opposition from particular interest groups, most visibly in this period the Manchester School, voiced especially by figures such as Cobden. This latter was perhaps the most effective opposition in the sense that it was the most consistent - elevating this opposition into a system, Cobdenism - but it was ultimately undermined by circumstances (primarily the Crimean War). Palmerston by 1855 was not invincible within Parliament, but no-one had really found his Achilles' heel.

#### ii) The Urquhartite challenge

Urquhartism was one of the longest standing and bitterest campaigns against Palmerston, yet whilst on occasion Urquhart and his acolytes might have had justified grounds of complaint against Palmerston, they rarely, as the previous chapter suggested, succeeded in making an accurate and impressive attack. David Urquhart was, by profession, a diplomat. He had served at the Constantinople

Embassy in the early 1830s, whilst Palmerston was at the Foreign Office, and secured the support and even admiration of the Foreign Secretary whilst he served there. Lord Ponsonby, the British Ambassador to the Porte, wrote to Palmerston about Urquhart in the most glowing terms in 1834 and Urquhart was accorded a relatively free rein in the discharge of his duties.<sup>16</sup> Urquhart's letters to Palmerston for 1836 and 1837 demonstrate a professional correspondence and a generally sympathetic disposition on Palmerston's part in his treatment of Urquhart as a member of the diplomatic staff.<sup>17</sup> Even when Urquhart's handling of the negotiations for a commercial convention between Britain and Turkey began to irritate Palmerston, he still regarded Urquhart as the man best suited to bring the negotiations to a satisfactory conclusion, even if this was, as Jenks suggests, because Palmerston little understood the intricacies of these commercial affairs.<sup>18</sup> Urquhart himself insisted that his conduct was always consistent with British policy, although there are signs, by the summer of 1837, of the rift between Urquhart and the Foreign Office developing which Urquhart initially attributed to the malign influence of Lord Ponsonby.<sup>19</sup>

Since 1835, however, Urquhart had been editing a polemical periodical, the *Portfolio*, in which he published and discussed documents relating to foreign policy. The tone of this journalism caused some consternation within government given Urquhart's official connection with the Foreign Office, and by the late 1830s,

<sup>16</sup> Ponsonby to Palmerston, 25 Nov. 1834 (rec'd 21 Jan. 1835), Broadlands Papers, Southampton University Library, FO/H/1/enc.1

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Urquhart to Palmerston 1 Jan. 1836, Broadlands Papers, GC/UR/1; 26 May 1836 (GC/UR/2); 4/29 April 1836 (GC/UR/3)

<sup>18</sup> M.H. Jenks, 'The Activities and Influence of David Urquhart, 1833-56, with special reference to the affairs of the Near East', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1964), pp.56-82

<sup>19</sup> Urquhart to Palmerston, 20 July 1837, Broadlands Papers, GC/UR/4; 5 Aug. 1837 (GC/UR/5); 8 Dec. 1837 (GC/UR/6)

Palmerston was keen not to confer upon Urquhart any official recognition. He told his private secretary, Strangeways, late in 1837, that if Urquhart again called for an interview, as he had arranged to do, and if Strangeways persisted in wishing to receive him, 'pray tell him it is as Strangeways & not as Under Secy'.<sup>20</sup> Evidently Strangeways took Palmerston at his word and was known to Palmerston to be 'in the habit of holding intimate communication' with Urquhart, but still refrained from doing so in any official capacity.<sup>21</sup> The Foreign Secretary's course appeared judicious when in the aftermath of Urquhart's removal from his diplomatic post, the character of his journalism became ever more extreme and poisoned against Palmerston.<sup>22</sup> Increasingly after 1840, Urquhart's attacks on Palmerston spoke of treason and sought to portray him as a Russian agent. Only such an explanation could account for Palmerston's failure to help Turkey in 1833, or his refraining from challenging Russia over the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi, or, far that matter, his decision to recall Urquhart himself.<sup>23</sup>

It became Urquhart's life mission to establish these beliefs as truths, and he sought, initially, to solicit support from among his fellow countrymen. He fell in, to

<sup>20</sup> Palmerston to Strangeways, 18 Dec. 1837, BP: FO/H/61. Contrast this with Palmerston's reception of Kossuth in December 1851. Palmerston it seems, sincerely believed that it was perfectly possible and consistent for a public figure to behave simultaneously as a public and a private person and this perhaps suggests that his reception of Kossuth was not quite so much deliberately provocative as simply ill-advised.

<sup>21</sup> See Palmerston's discussion of Strangeways, Urquhart and the *Portfolio* in his Commons speech of 1 March 1848, *Hansard*, 3rd ser., XCVII, 106-109, (quote from 108).

<sup>22</sup> Not only had Palmerston advised Strangeways to exercise discretion in his dealings with Urquhart but had himself rejected Urquhart's appeals for assistance with the expenses of the *Portfolio* when in its infancy (see Urquhart to Palmerston, 25 Dec. 1837, Broadlands Papers, GC/UR/7).

<sup>23</sup> Jenks, 'The Activities and Influence of David Urquhart', p.205. In fact, Palmerston's decision to recall Urquhart had been based on Urquhart's deviation from the line of British policy, as Palmerston explained to Urquhart in the spring of 1837: 'It appears by that letter [from Urquhart to Strangeways of 7 Dec. 1836] that you took steps with respect to Mr Bell's voyage in the Vixen, which I regret to say were in my opinion wholly incompatible with your public duty as a diplomatic servant of the Crown; & I should not think myself properly performing my own Duty if after a knowledge of such a circumstance I were to continue you in the situation which you now hold' (Palmerston to Urquhart, 10 March 1837 (Copy), Broadlands Papers, GC/UR/8).

some extent, with the Chartists in the 1840s, but it was an uncomfortable alliance as Urquhart saw even in Chartist uprisings evidence of Russian designs. Failing to convince Chartist leaders of this danger, he settled for using Chartism as a platform for attacking Palmerston and his foreign policy. It was a reasonably efficient platform, however, as the Chartists for the time being adopted many of Urquhart's views on foreign affairs, despite what Urquhart perceived as the Russianism of their outlook (although he failed to illustrate this tendency effectively). As John Salt has demonstrated, in a town like Sheffield Urquhart's views attracted considerable support, although it is significant that his chief apologists there were figures such as Isaac Ironside who admired what he saw as the essentially anti-governmental aspects of Urquhart's system. Ironside, who provided Urquhart with an important medium to propound his views in his paper the *Sheffield Free Press*, found in Urquhartism the ultimate expression of his Chartist suspicion of local government.<sup>24</sup> The system of local administration which Urquhart expounded found a natural accommodation in radical circles such as these.<sup>25</sup>

It was around this time, however, that Urquhart looked for potentially more effective allies and struck up a connection with Disraeli, which Urquhart clearly hoped would prove to be a channel through which his extra-parliamentary agitation would find a parliamentary voice. The relationship between the two was never in fact anything more than that of acquaintance, but Disraeli certainly saw in Urquhart a valuable source of intelligence about foreign affairs.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> J. Salt, 'Local Manifestations of the Urquhartite Movement', *International Review of Social History*, 13 (1968), pp.353-355

<sup>25</sup> See below, pp.281-282

<sup>26</sup> See below, pp.288-292

Meanwhile, as extra-parliamentary pressure seemed to be having comparatively little impact, Urquhart sought a parliamentary role for himself. He contested and secured the parliamentary seat for Stafford in the general election of 1847 standing as a Tory, but winning his seat with some Chartist support and later showing himself sympathetic to certain non-protectionist principles. Once in Parliament, he found in Thomas Anstey a recent but committed addition to the Urquhartite movement.<sup>27</sup> Anstey, a barrister and a Catholic, was, during this parliament, the MP for Youghal and whilst described as a Liberal, his political career appears somewhat erratic and inconsistent. Having acted alongside Urquhart in the later 1840s, Anstey was easily won over to Palmerston a decade later by means of a little Palmerstonian flattery.<sup>28</sup> Anstey's Urquhartism of the late 1840s speaks of little more than a temporary commitment, one which, nevertheless, promised at this time to be a useful source of Urquhartite strength which was still pre-eminently extra-parliamentary.

As Miles Taylor argues, Urquhart actually shared many radical concerns over questions of national expenditure (particularly the increasing army and navy estimates since 1835) and a commitment to free trade, which, along with his supposed Russophobia, underpinned much of his criticism of Whig foreign policy.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, Palmerston was not to be let off the hook: Urquhart was not to be distracted by sympathy for other radical causes from pursuing the treacherous Russian in the Cabinet who held the seals of the country's Foreign Office. In February 1848 he persuaded Anstey to introduce a motion in the House of Commons

<sup>27</sup> See Jenks, 'The Activities and Influence of David Urquhart', pp.262-263

<sup>28</sup> J. Ridley, *Lord Palmerston* (London, 1970), pp.334, 524-525

<sup>29</sup> M. Taylor, 'The Old Radicalism and the New: David Urquhart and the Politics of Opposition, 1832-1867', in E.F. Biagini and A.J. Reid (eds.), *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism. Organised Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850-1914* (Cambridge 1991), pp.30-31

for the production of papers relating to British foreign policy since 1830 as a preliminary to an impeachment of Palmerston.<sup>30</sup>

On 1 March Palmerston came before the House to defend his record and delivered a speech which deflected the assault made by Anstey (but with which there was certainly much wider sympathy) and which has gone down as a defining exposition of Palmerstonian politics. Anstey made a multi-headed charge against Palmerston, in fact the motion comprised forty points of criticism, but as the Foreign Secretary observed at the outset, he had 'skipped about from transaction to transaction, and jumbled the various matters adverted to in his notice in such a manner, that the topics of his speech might be likened to the confused mass of luggage brought to the Custom-house by some of the continental steamboats, when no man knows where he is to find his own'.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, Palmerston proceeded to address, as best he could, the charges point by point.<sup>32</sup> In defence of a certain degree of secrecy in diplomatic business, he argued that the competence of the Foreign Secretary would be undermined if all of his transactions were made public (although if the House wished to appoint a secret committee to go through the 2,775 volumes of documents, he wished 'them joy of their task'). He claimed that Anstey's arguments about the Treaty of Adrianople were ill-informed and charges against the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi failed to appreciate the considerations by which it was necessary to balance steadfast defence of minute details against a desire to go to war. Palmerston acknowledged Urquhart's own role in helping to frame the Treaty of Commerce of 1838, but pointed out that this did not give Urquhart a direct say in the conduct of foreign policy and any belief that he had been wronged by the Foreign

<sup>30</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., XCVI, 291, 1132, (Feb. 1848)

<sup>31</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., XCVII, 67, (1 Mar. 1848)

<sup>32</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., XCVII, 66-123, (1 Mar. 1848)

Secretary demonstrated a misunderstanding on the part of the Urquhartites of the constitutional position of a Secretary to an Embassy.<sup>33</sup> On the Treaty of 1840 and other questions, Palmerston was adamant that enough information had already been laid before Parliament and whilst happy to contest points, he felt confident that his conduct would be borne out by the balance of information available. Many of the charges were in some way designed to prove Palmerston's duplicitous connection with the Russian court. This general charge Palmerston refuted directly:

...what then becomes of the charge which the hon. and learned member makes against me of being such a determined instrument in the hands of Russia? He says from 1830 to 1839, during the nine years in which I was in the office I have now the honour to hold, there had been such mutual distrust between the English and the Russian Governments that it was necessary Baron Brunnow should be sent as Ambassador to represent the real views of the Emperor, in order to remove that distrust. I am satisfied with that statement, which is likely to be true.<sup>34</sup>

Palmerston defended his conduct and handling of various affairs against such charges and presented his policy as either misunderstood by Anstey, or as acquiring validity through popular approval as in the case of the Treaty of Nankin, or in the case of a genuine infringement of British interests or failure to fulfil obligations (as it was perceived was the case with regard to Polish struggles against Russia), the weighing of interests did not justify war. He concluded with the famous peroration that Britain had no eternal allies and no perpetual enemies, only interests that were eternal and perpetual, and in a catch-all defence of his career to date he finished by saying: 'And if I might be allowed to express in one sentence the principle which I think ought to guide an English Minister, I would adopt the expression of Canning,

<sup>33</sup> This was ironic given that, as Asa Briggs has noted, in his Foreign Affairs Committees, Urquhart directed that amongst the subjects for study were 'the Constitution of England: what it is', the Privy Council, 'the necessity of Impeachment', 'why the law is the safeguard of our liberties' and, most significantly, 'Ambassadors and their Use'. See A. Briggs, 'David Urquhart and the West Riding foreign affairs committees', *Bradford Antiquary*, 39 (1958), p.204

<sup>34</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., XCVII, 80, (1 Mar. 1848)

and say that with every British Minister the interests of England ought to be the shibboleth of his policy'.<sup>35</sup>

Palmerston effectively crushed this Urquhartite assault with his grandiloquence and confident manner. It was also both the first and last significant attempt by the Urquhartites to effect a parliamentary defeat on Palmerston by direct means. They had found little support for their course in the newspapers and within Parliament, and both Anstey and Urquhart found their stock much diminished. Jenks has written of the way in which any further parliamentary efforts of Urquhart's were ridiculed, that is when they were listened to at all, for as is also noted, whenever he attempted to speak there was often either a 'general exodus' or 'obvious impatience, occasionally amounting to uproar'.<sup>36</sup> Urquhart continued to make regular contributions to parliamentary debates throughout the session of 1849, but his failure to make any meaningful impression - an increasingly acute problem - led to a developing sense of disillusionment with parliamentary opposition. Indeed, Urquhart's attendance at the House grew less frequent after 1849 and he did not stand for re-election in 1852. Even when he did again attempt to stand for Parliament, opposing Russell's re-election for the City of London in the summer of 1854 on the grounds that the Cabinet was employed in carrying out the designs of Russia, he could not even find a proposer for his nomination.<sup>37</sup>

Certainly, as Miles Taylor suggests, ill health and personal impecuniosity 'may have taxed his enthusiasm', but it was the demise of the independent opposition which coincided with, and, it seems, impacted upon, his sense of disappointment. With Peelites, protectionists and radicals all drawing together to challenge Whig

<sup>35</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., XCVII, 123, (1 Mar. 1848)

<sup>36</sup> Jenks, 'The Activities and Influence of David Urquhart, 1833-56', pp.269-271, 272

<sup>37</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 15 June 1854

financial policy, the place of the independent voice seemed ambiguous, if not wholly obscured.<sup>38</sup> It was a significant blow to Urquhartite hopes. One of his parliamentary ambitions had been to redress the wrongs of executive authority - which he claimed had been compromised by the system of William of Orange - through the re-introduction of traditional forms of local administration and government which harked back to a non-specific golden age, extolling a certain romantic Tory ideal, and the resumption by the privy council of its full rights and powers as a corrective to the illegitimate construct, the Cabinet.<sup>39</sup> He had hoped that Parliament would execute this remedy, but as his own experience had sharply demonstrated, such expectations were misplaced. Parliament, he later declared, was a 'bastard imposition', undermining popular organisation and the council of the king.<sup>40</sup> Parliamentary reform seemed henceforth to be a waste of time.

It was this sense of disappointment and failure which caused Urquhart to look once more to extra-parliamentary forms of opposition, and hence his concern with activating the interest and support of 'the people', most obviously through the Foreign Affairs Committees, but also variously and in a less structured manner, as the previous chapter illustrated. Corruption at the heart of political life, Urquhart felt, meant that the nation was 'perishing through Faction'; only those untainted by privilege were 'exempt from defilement' and henceforth, Urquhartite initiatives were to be aimed at 'the more simple and unperverted' working men.<sup>41</sup> Yet, as Richard Shannon has shown, here again Urquhart's hopes were disappointed. Even at its

<sup>38</sup> Taylor, 'The Old Radicalism and the New: David Urquhart and the Politics of Opposition, 1832-1867', p.31

<sup>39</sup> See R. Shannon, 'David Urquhart and the Foreign Affairs Committees', in P. Hollis (ed.), *Pressure from Without in early Victorian England* (London, 1974), p.242

<sup>40</sup> Newcastle Foreign Affairs Committee, *Limitation of the Supply of Grain. Constitutional Remedies. Evidence of Mr Urquhart before the Above Committee* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1855), p.25; quoted *ibid*, pp.242-243

<sup>41</sup> *Address of the Men of Birmingham to the People of England* (1855), p.4, quoted *ibid*, p.250

height, the Urquhartite movement's hold over the hearts of the working classes was thin, and it does not appear to have established any meaningful sense of solidarity with the constituency it aimed at and thus failed to negate a feeling of middle class patronage of the workers.<sup>42</sup> 'We do not disparage what you have done for us,' wrote

Michael Rafferty from Birmingham:

your efforts for our improvement we appreciate, your labour to impress us with a knowledge of our duties we applaud; for the books and documents, from which we learned much we thank you and for your own elucidations we are grateful. But Sir for the 'means' which sets us free from the pressure of hourly toil, recoils about us and glaringly stamps us as subsidised Working men, of which the majority of our Committee is formed, and poor as we are and though perhaps we may be consigned to incessant bodily labour, yet we would rather have remained ignorant of ministerial treachery, and the wiles of diplomacy, together with Russian aggression and Turkish subjection, Danish succession and Austrian duplicity, than be branded as subsidists. Better by far had you contented yourself with giving us instruction after our hours of labour, than caused us to abstain from our usual occupation and thereby left us open to the charge of paid tools bribed agents and hired politicians. You will perhaps say, 'You should have seen that at the time'. But how could we when judicial blindness obscured our eyes, and occult propositions darkened our view.<sup>43</sup>

Urquhart's main fault, or obstacle, was that the issues with which he dealt were often too complicated for the average working man to comprehend. Without ready (or indeed any) access to information and leisure to consider the questions raised by British foreign policy, attempts to dissect that policy were doomed from the outset. Although the Russophobia which underpinned most of Urquhart's charges was easily grasped, Urquhart's assaults upon Palmerston were in fact so obscure and contrived in their logic that they were unlikely to appeal to those without the facilities to

<sup>42</sup> Shannon, 'David Urquhart and the Foreign Affairs Committees', pp.252-253, 255.

Consider also, for example, an extract from one of Urquhart's pamphlets which appears somewhat lofty and arrogant and lacking in a sense of common interest: 'People of England, your Ministers tell you that they have been credulous - cannot you suspect that you are so? I have now completed my task. I have shown you the road to safety; warned you of the certainty of ruin. There is something more at stake between us than my foreknowledge and your infatuation...' (David Urquhart, *The War of Ignorance: A Prognostication* (London, 1854), p.31)

<sup>43</sup> M. Rafferty to David Urquhart, 16 June 1856, Urquhart Papers, I:G

follow the argument closely. As a chairman of one of the Committees advised an Urquhartite pamphleteer in 1856, there was little point assuming a comparable level of knowledge in his readers as he himself possessed. Rather, he suggested, the 'most easy mode of reaching them is by taking up matters from the point of view of *character* alone & doing this frequently. If there were *no Russia* our acts are not the less wicked'.<sup>44</sup> If they were to have any force at all, challenges to Palmerston's foreign policy needed to be addressed to audiences with the means of efficiently testing and evaluating them.

Palmerston's own extra-parliamentary speeches were littered with very simple and easily grasped rhetorical turns: Englishness, nation and freedom. By contrast, whilst simple accusations could be levelled against Palmerston - that he was un-English, unpatriotic, a Russian agent - they carried little force. People could not see Palmerston as such, when his actions in support of European constitutional government and liberty were much more visible. Only once Palmerston had assumed responsibility for the course of the war on becoming Prime Minister in 1855 did he become a legitimate working class target. Heretofore the demands of the Urquhartite leadership were unduly onerous for a burdened working class, but with the outbreak of war, foreign policy came to have a direct and material impact on the lives of those recruited to execute the war and consequently awoke a more vehement Urquhartite agitation.<sup>45</sup> Urquhart's intricate charges against Palmerston, then, made little impression on the majority of the working classes, but as a Committee member explained in 1859, the working classes to whom Urquhart appealed were 'not of this or that class, party or faction', but were interested simply

<sup>44</sup> Crawshay to ?, 13 Sept. 1856, Urquhart Papers, I:G

<sup>45</sup> J. Salt, 'Local Manifestations of the Urquhartite Movement', pp.350-351

in 'the salvation of their country'. Only when the Crimean War revealed '*Treachery* at home and the extravagant and lawless *waste* of *blood* and *Treasure* abroad' did an Urquhartite critique gain currency.<sup>46</sup>

Charges against Palmerston were more complicated and more subtle than the hustings and out-of-doors speechifying could accommodate and such arguments found their expression much more logically in Parliament where a debate could be sustained for several days and where those with a professional (rather than a passing or sensationalist) interest in the issues, namely politicians and to a lesser extent perhaps political journalists, could deliberate on the evidence. Richard Cobden, for example, acknowledged that Palmerston enjoyed widespread popular support, but in a speech at Manchester in 1851 he appealed to his audience that if, 'notwithstanding you have an impression in favour of Lord Palmerston, your Members come to a different conclusion, why, give them credit for the same honesty of purpose and intelligence with yourselves; and bear in mind, that they have the better opportunity of forming an opinion than yourselves'.<sup>47</sup> He saw no reason to apologise for this attitude, telling the House of Commons in a speech of February 1854 for example, 'I would sooner address this audience than any other with which I am acquainted upon the important and serious question which we have now before us; because I do not believe that there is in the Kingdom an assembly more deeply impressed with the gravity and importance of the question, or more disposed to approach its discussion with that earnest consideration which its magnitude demands'.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Letter by John Wilson of Cononley, a local committee leader, to *The Craven Pioneer*, 23 Sept. 1859, quoted A. Briggs, 'David Urquhart and the West Riding foreign affairs committees', pp.198-199

<sup>47</sup> Speech on the 'Policy of the Whig Government', Manchester, 23 Jan. 1851, in J. Bright and J.E. Thorold Rogers (eds.), *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy by Richard Cobden, M.P.* (London, 1880), p.537

<sup>48</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXXX, 917, (20 Feb. 1854)

Those seeking to challenge and discredit Palmerston outside Parliament faced an uphill struggle, as has been demonstrated above. Palmerston's hold on the popular imagination and mood was strong, and thus Parliament, where debate could be more reasoned, was the place for consciences to be exercised and (sometimes unpopular) challenges made. As John Bright admitted in 1854: 'For myself, I do not trouble myself whether my conduct in Parliament is popular or not. I care only that it shall be wise and just as regards the permanent interests of my country'.<sup>49</sup>

Parliamentary debates were seen as somehow nobler or more worthy than extra-parliamentary ones in such circles. Not necessarily more important, but certainly more valuable in themselves as expositions of policy. As John Delane wrote approvingly to Disraeli in the autumn of 1853 when affairs in the East were dominating political discussion: 'I have no doubt you are right to reserve your speech for an audience more worthy than your Aylesbury constituents. Brilliant speeches addressed to dull farmers were very well in '40 and '41 but the science of agitation is too well understood now not to make the contrast between the speaker and his audience somewhat ridiculous'.<sup>50</sup>

Urquhart's ability to influence affairs in Parliament did not correlate with his membership of the House, if anything, the reverse. Indirectly his agitation and arguments made a far greater impression on parliamentary politics than did his own contributions to debates. As a pamphlet written in 1846, before Urquhart entered Parliament, suggests, Urquhart may not have always won clear adherents, but his constant haranguing of Palmerston may have planted seeds of doubt and concern in certain quarters. Had Urquhart and his writing in the *Portfolio*, wrote a 'Free Trader',

<sup>49</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXXXII, 267, (31 Mar. 1854)

<sup>50</sup> J.T. Delane to Disraeli, 13 Sept. 1853, Hughenden Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford, dep. Hughenden 124/2, fols 199-200

contributed to Earl Grey's determination not to serve with Palmerston in December 1845? Grey might well not have ever read anything by Urquhart :

But the vague knowledge, which has been forced on most public men, may and ought to have had its weight; and the fact that such accusers are, that such works are written - this fact barely known, was perfectly entitled to give the edge to personal observation, and to screw wavering courage up to the sticking point for the late energetic act, which has provoked your passing anger and my enduring gratitude.<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, the Chartist Washington Wilks, had used the denunciations levelled at Palmerston by Urquhart as the means of measuring Palmerston's right to be regarded as the 'English Minister', as Russell had described him previously.<sup>52</sup>

Urquhart seems to have exercised some degree of influence over many important politicians of this period, or at least been to them a source of information. Gladstone, Disraeli and Cobden, for instance, all at one time or another, took notice of Urquhart's knowledge of foreign affairs.<sup>53</sup>

This contact was the most striking with Benjamin Disraeli. In the late 1830s Disraeli had sought Urquhart's counsel, seeing in the disenchanted diplomat a valuable source of advice and potential political support.

<sup>51</sup> Lord Grey and Lord Palmerston. *A letter addressed to the Right Honourable T.B. Macaulay, M.P. on the occasion of his letter to Mr M'Farlane, from a Free Trader* (London, 1846), p.25-26

<sup>52</sup> W. Wilks, *Palmerston in Three Epochs: a comparison of facts with opinions* (London, 1854), esp. pp.51-56. Discussion of policy through pamphlets was a curious feature of the period. As well as being a medium for *post-facto* justifications of policy and for extra-parliamentary writers to address questions and raise points with ministers, even those with direct access to ministers in Parliament, such as the MP Sir Harry Verney, who had in 1846 sought employment in the diplomatic corps under Palmerston (Sir H. Verney to Palmerston, 17 Nov. 1846, Broadlands Papers, GC/VE/1), published a pamphlet addressed to Palmerston for the purpose of laying before him certain observations about German affairs (Sir Harry Verney, *Some Observations on the affairs of Germany, in a letter addressed to the Right Hon. Viscount Palmerston* (London, 1849)). Perhaps Verney simply hoped to influence educated readers outside parliament, but he acknowledged himself that it was not within his power to guide British public opinion, in this case in favour of German unity (Verney, *Some Observations on the affairs of Germany*, p.9). Rather, it would seem, parliamentary debates were dominated by a relatively small clique of senior political figures and it was to this group that Urquhart directed much of his attention once he had entered Parliament.

<sup>53</sup> Jenks, 'The Activities and Influence of David Urquhart', pp.237-49, 251. A.J.P. Taylor, *The Trouble Makers*, p.50. Cobden, says Taylor, was actually first drawn to thinking about foreign affairs by Urquhart.

If ever we meet, I will confer with you in a spirit of the utmost candor [sic] on the grave matter of your observations. I entirely concur with them. As regards the trammels of party, I believe there is not a man in the house, whose seat renders him more independent of them, than my own. As regards my own views, I have no other impulse than a fair love of fame, & a deep interest in the glory of my country; but for my capacity, I can say nothing; except that I believe I cd do justice to a subject of which I was master.<sup>54</sup>

In a similar vein, Disraeli demonstrated his faith in Urquhart's abilities and sagacious perception of foreign affairs describing in 1841 a recently published dissertation of Urquhart's as 'unquestionably one of the most important & interesting of modern contributions to Diplomatic Literature', it was, he continued, 'original, profound, & luminous', and concluded by saying that 'I look forward with extreme satisfaction to cultivating the acquaintance of its author'.<sup>55</sup> It seems, however, that Urquhart and Disraeli were already acquainted with each other. A letter from Urquhart written in 1839 spoke of disappointment 'at not seeing or hearing from you this morning' as he had some important matters to discuss with Disraeli regarding Palmerston's handling of the 'N.A. Boundary'. 'On this subject', he told Disraeli, 'I wish to speak with you and I think you will think it of sufficient importance to make some sacrifice of time or arrangements in order that we may meet as early as possible'.<sup>56</sup> Further, in 1841, at the time that Disraeli was praising Urquhart's pamphlet and seeking to make his acquaintance, Urquhart wrote to Disraeli enclosing some materials relating to

<sup>54</sup> Disraeli to David Urquhart, 23 March [1839?], Urquhart Papers, I:J1a. Neither Disraeli nor Urquhart noted the year, although Urquhart's wife has returned to these papers at some point and minuted 'year about 1838, HAU'. According to more recent sources, however, this letter seems more probably to have been a reply to Urquhart's of 25 Feb. 1839: *Benjamin Disraeli Letters* (vols.III-V (1838-1841; 1842-1847; 1848-1851), ed. M.G. Wiebe, J.B. Conacher, J. Matthews and M.S. Millar (Toronto, 1987; 1989; 1993); vol.VI (1852-1856), ed. M.G. Wiebe, M.S. Millar and A.P. Robson (Toronto, 1997)), III, 908 & n.1

<sup>55</sup> Disraeli to Urquhart, 26 April, 1841, Urquhart Papers, I:J1a

<sup>56</sup> Urquhart to Disraeli, 'Saturday Evg, 24th' [?1839], Hughenden Papers, dep. Hughenden 146/1, fols 5-6. This letter is almost certainly 24 Aug. 1839 when (according to *Disraeli Letters*, III, 994 n.3) Urquhart had written to Disraeli on behalf of the 'N.A. Association' to ask him to present 'a Petition praying for the appointment of a committee for enquiry into Ld Pn's conduct in reference to the N.A. Boundary...'. Disraeli duly acceded to this request on 26 August 1839.

Persian affairs and extending an invitation to Disraeli to visit Urquhart at his home, Bitterne Manor, if he wished to discuss the matter. Significantly, he saw his role not to rouse Disraeli, but rather to make sure that Disraeli was well prepared to fulfil his obligations. 'My object in writing this', Urquhart said, 'is not to ask your care or attention to that which it is your duty (not the less so because you live amongst such men) to know and which it is a shame & a crime to neglect - but to place at your disposal whatever is within my reach supposing that you desired to avail yourself of it'. Disraeli was Urquhart's chosen advocate because he had, so Urquhart believed, the 'powers of mind & the daring of spirit' to effect important changes.<sup>57</sup>

There was, perhaps, a natural basis for a connection between these two figures beyond their shared Tory romanticism. Unlike other politicians, and critics (or potential critics) of Palmerstonian foreign policy, Disraeli 'was sufficiently unorthodox not to be completely alienated by Urquhart's eccentricity'; there may be something in this, but Disraeli never made any great show of his connection with Urquhart.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, their interests did overlap noticeably. Over the Schleswig-Holstein question in the late 1840s, Disraeli and Urquhart were both deeply interested in Danish affairs, speaking regularly on such matters in the House, and when the situation there escalated into war, it was Disraeli and Urquhart who emerged as the leading speakers on the subject in parliament, vehemently opposing the German arguments.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, this was to be an example of parliamentary pressure forcing Palmerston's hand: he sided with the majority pro-Danish view,

<sup>57</sup> Urquhart to Disraeli, 24 March 1841, Hughenden Papers, dep. Hughenden 146/1, fols 8-9

<sup>58</sup> See Jenks, 'The Activities and Influence of David Urquhart', pp.250-251

<sup>59</sup> S.H. Short, 'British Attitudes to the Schleswig-Holstein Question, 1848-50', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1969), pp. 77-81; 226. Palmerston recognised Disraeli's keen interest in this question, and when peace was established he was quick to apprise Disraeli of the details of the Treaty of Peace between the German Confederation and Denmark and of the date for its formal ratification (Palmerston to Disraeli, 5 July 1850, Hughenden Papers, dep. Hughenden 139/2, fols 14-15)

though it brought him into conflict with the Germanism of the Court, and despite his fears that the Danes might become 'too cock a hoop from their powerful backing and indisposed therefore to reasonable terms', he placed himself in opposition to the German, or more specifically Prussian, aggressive demands.<sup>60</sup>

By the mid-1850s Disraeli was not prepared to sever all links with the Urquhartites, but he was increasingly luke-warm in his regard for Urquhart. He told Mr Potter, secretary of one of the Foreign Affairs Committees, that he thought Urquhart was: 'a gentleman of great acquirements, ingeniousness, & energy. I am well acquainted with his works, & I have had the advantage of his conversation. I have given due consideration to both. Nevertheless, I cannot agree with the conclusions, at which he has arrived, with respect to public affairs, and the principal actors in their transaction'. Significantly, however, he did acknowledge that whatever his own opinions, he did 'respect the patriotic feeling, which has induced you, & your companions, as a matter of duty, to impress your convictions on your Countrymen'.<sup>61</sup> The trouble was that by the time of the Crimean War, Urquhart had lost a great deal of what credibility he had ever possessed. It was unfashionable to be associated with him, especially in Parliament.

Yet, there is reason to believe that Urquhart did play an important role in fashioning Disraeli's political outlook with regard to foreign affairs. Jenks might raise doubts about the coincidence of Urquhart's and Disraeli's opinions over Afghanistan in 1838-1839,<sup>62</sup> but it seems that Urquhart's influence may have been subtler than that. Reading Urquhart's pamphlets and discussing matters with him in

<sup>60</sup> H.C.F Bell, *Lord Palmerston* 2 vols. (London, 1936), II, p.10. For fuller discussion of the Schleswig-Holstein dispute at this time see either Short's thesis or Bell, *Lord Palmerston*, II, pp.6-11

<sup>61</sup> Disraeli to Potter, 5 March 1856, Urquhart Papers, I:J1a

<sup>62</sup> Jenks, 'The Activities and Influence of David Urquhart', pp.246-247

private evidently made some sort of impression on Disraeli. A letter to Urquhart which survives amongst his papers, undated and anonymous but clearly written sometime after 1846, includes a cutting from a newspaper which reads:

POOR D'ISRAELI - The *Spectator* says, - 'One of the "great" passages of the vituperative orators of 1846 has been traced, we believe, to a pamphlet by poor David Urquhart. The question is mooted, what in D'Israeli's works is D'Israeli's?'

'Is this a true bill?' asked Urquhart's correspondent: 'It amused us & perhaps you have not seen it. D'Israeli seems to have passed an Appropriation Clause in his own favour & stealing a bright thought wherever he could find one but as you are rich in such you can spare a few to such as D'Israeli'.<sup>63</sup> Certainly Urquhart was not disposed to criticise Disraeli's parliamentary performances. A speech concerned with the events in the Crimea in 1854, Urquhart said, Disraeli delivered 'in the tones of a male Sybil', which he hoped might save the nation. Urquhart had gathered together and published in a pamphlet a collection of his letters to the *Morning Advertiser* and *Morning Herald* from March 1854, and in further discussion of this speech of Disraeli's he noted:

I said, in the letter you inserted yesterday - 'If there be any member anxious for the present and careful for the future, he will at least now announce beforehand the results, and when this mighty bubble bursts, his now despised words may place him in a position of as proud and beneficial influence as has ever been achieved by man. Announced beforehand, the event, when it comes, may be understood; and the then aroused passions of the nation may not be alone poured forth on Turkey and on France.' Within twelve hours this anticipation has been realised. Mr Disraeli has realised it, not, indeed, as the leader of a party, but as an individual member of the House.<sup>64</sup>

This was a perceptive comment. Disraeli had made a useful attack on the government's foreign policy and Palmerston, but as Urquhart also noted: 'Had he

<sup>63</sup> ? to [Urquhart], 10 Dec. [?post-1846 - given nature of newspaper cutting], Urquhart Papers, I:J1a

<sup>64</sup> Appendix: 'Letter on Mr Disraeli's Speech', 21 Feb. 1854, in David Urquhart, *The War of Ignorance: A Prognostication* (London, 1854), pp.40-41

been leader of a party, most assuredly would his conclusion not have been obnoxious to the sarcasm of the Home Secretary; he would not only have concluded with a motion for with-holding the supplies, but with one for a committee of inquiry, with a view to an impeachment'.<sup>65</sup> This was essentially Disraeli's problem. He represented, in many respects, the interests of the Conservative party, as the protectionists had refashioned themselves, but he retained for himself a certain freedom of action and was often out of tune with that party's attempts to undermine Palmerston and Palmerstonism.

### iii) The shortcomings of the official opposition

As Robert Blake has suggested, after the death of Palmerston ('whose patriotism in foreign policy could hardly be challenged'), Disraeli was finally able to acquire the 'national' colours for his own party in foreign as well as domestic affairs.<sup>66</sup> More than this, indeed, throughout the 1870s, according to John Vincent, Palmerston more than any other figure, including Derby, was Disraeli's role model.<sup>67</sup> During the 1840s and 1850s, then, Disraeli was struggling in the face of Palmerston's pre-eminence to reconcile the conflict between his supposed party-political obligations and his personal faith in Palmerston, or at least Palmerstonism. He had, after all, demonstrated an early attachment to the Whig minister and an implicit approval of Palmerston's policies.

<sup>65</sup> Appendix: 'Letter on Mr Disraeli's Speech', 21 Feb. 1854, in David Urquhart, *The War of Ignorance: A Prognostication* (London, 1854), p.41

<sup>66</sup> R. Blake, *Disraeli* (New York, 1987 edn.), p.283

<sup>67</sup> J.R. Vincent, *Disraeli* (Oxford, 1990), p.12

In December 1845, Disraeli had acted as Palmerston's go-between in Paris, exploiting his contacts with the King of the French, whom he persuaded that 'all may be well' with Palmerston at the Foreign Office after all. Disraeli also indicated a sympathetic desire to assist Palmerston in the presentation of his foreign policy in the House of Commons.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, two years after the formation of the Russell government, Disraeli conceded that: 'As for Palmerston, I have not only not opposed him, but, to the occasional dissatisfaction of my comrades, have even interfered to prevent parliamentary criticism, or any concerted move, against him'.<sup>69</sup> The extent to which he was 'Palmerston's factotum' says John Vincent, cannot be ascertained, but nevertheless it was remarkable that a Tory back-bencher was working secretly for a Whig leader.<sup>70</sup> Whilst this raises questions about Disraeli's commitment to a political career versus the appeal of a literary one; more broadly it brings into question his suitability to oppose the policy of a Whig ministry in which Palmerston took a leading role. In the later 1840s, whilst Palmerston was at the Foreign Office, Vincent has suggested that Disraeli sought a diplomatic posting from Palmerston in return for the services rendered in Paris, and again in 1855 that Palmerston proposed Disraeli for the Istanbul embassy, although Vincent offers no evidence to corroborate this latter 'secret connection'.<sup>71</sup>

Such an attitude is not necessarily surprising. If nothing else, both Palmerston and Disraeli shared a certain common heritage in their reverence for George Canning. As he demonstrated in his biography of Lord George Bentinck, a

<sup>68</sup> Disraeli to Palmerston, 14 Dec. 1845, *Disraeli Letters*, IV, 1453

<sup>69</sup> Disraeli to Ponsonby, 9 July 1848, *Disraeli Letters*, V, 1664

<sup>70</sup> Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.4

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, p.32. 'Tory leaders are not often agents for Liberal Foreign Secretaries,' says Vincent, 'which is maybe why the evidence has again disappeared. But there was certainly a secret connection...'

Canningite Tory of former days, Disraeli had learned the importance of extra-parliamentary support, repeating Bentinck's judgement that once the 'people out of doors [are] with you', then 'all the rest follows'.<sup>72</sup> More explicitly, Disraeli had laid claim to a share of the Canningite legacy in 1845 when he told the Commons that the name of Canning was 'never to be mentioned, I am sure, in the House of Commons without emotion. We all admire his genius; we all, at least most of us, deplore his untimely end; and we all sympathize with him in his fierce struggle with supreme prejudice and sublime mediocrity, - with inveterate foes, and with - "candid friends"'.<sup>73</sup> According to one Conservative colleague, Disraeli's Canningite sympathies served only to weaken his position within the party. Over a dinner in May 1850, Edward Henry Stanley, later the 15th Earl of Derby, observed that Disraeli: 'wanted, like Canning, to combine Liberal ideas with Tory connections: but Canning had failed. There is certainly a very prevalent impression that Disraeli has no well-defined opinions of his own: but is content to adopt, and defend, any which may be popular with the Conservative party at the time'.<sup>74</sup> Disraeli had long maintained that in politics 'I come forward on independent grounds, & am resolved to coalesce with no one',<sup>75</sup> but it was not possible for him to remain entirely indifferent to party connection.<sup>76</sup> Hence the impression that he took up only what was popular with the Conservative party at any given moment.

<sup>72</sup> B. Disraeli, *Lord George Bentinck: A Political Biography* (London, 1905 edn.), p.376

<sup>73</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., LXXVIII, 155-156 (28 Feb. 1845)

<sup>74</sup> 25 July 1850, J.R. Vincent (ed.) *Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party: Journals and Memoirs of Edward Henry, Lord Stanley, 1849-1869* (Hassocks, 1978), p.29

<sup>75</sup> Disraeli to [Sir William Henry Fremantle?], 14 June 1847, *Disraeli Letters*, IV, 1568

<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, as Robert Stewart observes, Disraeli's lack of obvious commitment to the party was noticed and when the question of leadership arose in 1849 on the death of Bentinck, Disraeli could count on the support of only about one third of the Conservative party (R. Stewart, *The Politics of Protection: Lord Derby and the Protectionist Party, 1841-1852* (Cambridge, 1971), pp.136-138).

Not only did Disraeli share an admiration for an old political leader with Palmerston; he also looked to Palmerston himself with a good deal of approval. He warmly applauded Palmerston's speech on the Corn Laws in March 1846,<sup>77</sup> and once Palmerston had returned to the Foreign Office, Disraeli was gratified to learn from Jarnac, the French ambassador, 'that foreign affairs are all right' and that 'every thing went right betn. Palmerston & France, except the Sonderbund affair & that they were in almost hourly expectation of his acceding to the solicitation of all the other great powers under the Treaty of Vienna, for a mediation'.<sup>78</sup>

Disraeli, then, was forced into opposition to Palmerston purely by the adversarial nature of politics. Vincent suggests that Disraeli fashioned much of his political agenda before 1865 in a sort of inverse relationship to Palmerston: Palmerston represented national interests and therefore Disraeli had to look to questions of social cohesion. In the 1850s and 1860s, Vincent contends, 'Disraeli was reduced to seeking any position that was not occupied by Palmerston',<sup>79</sup> although this rule does not apply universally: over Ireland and (before 1866) Reform, for example, Vincent's argument is unconvincing. The argument of Blake, that Disraeli was 'the first statesman systematically to uphold the doctrine that it is the duty of the Opposition to oppose' seems most pertinent.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Disraeli to Palmerston, 28 March 1846, Broadlands Papers, GC/DI/136

<sup>78</sup> Disraeli to Lord John Manners, 16 Nov. 1847, 25 Nov. 1847, *Disraeli Letters*, IV, 1607, 1608

<sup>79</sup> Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.116

<sup>80</sup> Blake, *Disraeli*, p.355. Indeed, by 1872 Disraeli, however ironically, asserted that: 'I believe that, without party, parliamentary government is impossible' in a speech to the people of Manchester in April of that year (quoted A. Hawkins, "'Parliamentary Government" and Victorian Political Parties, c.1830-c.1880', *English Historical Review*, CIV (July 1989), p. 638. Hawkins asserts that this claim was 'in 1872 ironic and ambiguous, as the concepts of both party and "parliamentary government" were, at that moment, undergoing change' (p.666)).

Despite his alleged parliamentary alliance with Palmerston which he described to Ponsonby in July 1848,<sup>81</sup> Disraeli did, only a month later, sketch out the foundations of a policy contrary to that pursued by the Foreign Office. Disraeli was at this time much under the influence of Prince Metternich and the two met frequently to discuss political affairs.<sup>82</sup> It is this connection, according to Disraeli's official biographers, which served to inform the two speeches Disraeli delivered during the summer of 1848 in which he offered an alternative to the government's foreign policy.<sup>83</sup> In June, taking as his subject the dismissal of his friend Bulwer from Madrid - 'a gross outrage has been inflicted upon this country' - Disraeli set about attacking the system of a liberal foreign policy. 'My objection to liberalism is this - that it is the introduction into the practical business of life of the highest kind - namely, politics - of philosophical ideas instead of political principles', he said. Palmerston, he acknowledged, was 'the great prophet of liberalism in foreign affairs', and indeed was 'the most able expounder' of the strain of liberalism embodied in the Quadruple Alliance of 1834 'which has been the characteristic of the foreign policy of England now for too many years'. However, significantly, Disraeli blamed the Liberal ministries and not Palmerston himself for this 'sentimental' approach to politics. He further exonerated Palmerston of blame for the course of foreign relations highlighting the damaging effects caused by the Foreign Secretary's lack of Cabinet support, something particularly unsettling to the court of France he claimed. 'I am exceedingly loth to assent to any vote which singles out the noble Lord

<sup>81</sup> See above p.293

<sup>82</sup> Disraeli to Sarah Disraeli, 30 May 1848, *Disraeli Letters*, V, 1654 & n.3: Disraeli had been introduced to Metternich by Lord Londonderry on 17 May 1848 from which point they regularly met and corresponded. See also W.F. Monypenny and G.E. Buckle, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield* 6 vols (London, 1910-1920), III, pp.180-181

<sup>83</sup> Monypenny and Buckle, *Disraeli*, III, pp.181-184

[Palmerston] as a Member of the Government who has followed a policy so pernicious to this country', argued Disraeli. 'We ought to strike at the system, and not at the individual'.<sup>84</sup>

The following month, Disraeli 'crossed lances with Palmerston' in a speech which dealt with British relations with Rome, Naples, Sardinia and Austria.<sup>85</sup> He feared that 'the sentimental principle' which guided the country's foreign policy was 'to develop the principle of nationality', but this appeared to Disraeli to raise immediate contradictions regarding the plan for independence for Lombardy but not Venetia. 'If this House does not take the earliest opportunity to discourage the sentimental principle in settling the affairs of nations,' he argued, 'I am convinced that we shall be involved in difficulties which it is impossible to contemplate; for I believe that such a policy, if it be fully developed, will really resolve Europe into its original elements, and will not leave any social or political system in existence in the form which it now assumes'. It behoved the Foreign Secretary, Disraeli concluded, to demonstrate a determination to uphold 'the principles of national law'.<sup>86</sup> Palmerston, Disraeli clearly felt, was unpleasantly constrained by the over-arching principles of the government to which he belonged and which were serving to confuse and weaken the country's foreign policy. A year later Disraeli still seemed to be losing faith in the Foreign Secretary, telling Metternich that the perusal of papers relating to Italy had 'somewhat lowered my opinion of Palmerston. He has been fortunate, but he has not deserved to be *felix*'.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>84</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., XCIX, 388, 396-400 (5 June 1848)

<sup>85</sup> Disraeli to Lady Londonderry, 19 Aug. 1848, *Disraeli Letters*, V, 1690

<sup>86</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CI, 147-163 (16 Aug. 1848)

<sup>87</sup> Disraeli to Metternich, 2 Sept. 1849, *Disraeli Letters*, V, 1874

Ultimately Palmerston weathered Conservative attacks and, whether deserved or not, was *felix*. To a large extent this was due to a certain sympathy on Disraeli's part, but was also grounded in much more pragmatic political considerations. Throughout the life of the government, Russell's ministry appeared weak and there was a constant search for a replacement. Amongst the Protectionists there was a disposition in the late 1840s to seek a reunion with the Peelites, but this would have required Palmerston to be replaced at the Foreign Office with Aberdeen, assuming Palmerston would not defect from his Whig colleagues. Aberdeen, however, was not likely to accede to such a scheme even if other Peelites were and this in itself offered a insuperable obstacle to notions of a new Conservative administration. As Edward Stanley noted in May 1849, 'Lord Aberdeen's final alienation from us makes it useless to displace Palmerston'.<sup>88</sup> Such was Disraeli's disposition to believe in the Foreign Secretary that he found it difficult to condemn Palmerston's brinkmanship and audacious policies, such as that relating to Greece and more specifically, Don Pacifico, in 1850. Certainly this policy did not threaten the *status quo* in Europe as it had been feared Palmerston's Italian policy might.

Lord Stanley, who was later to serve as Prime Minister as the 14th Earl of Derby, along with Lord Aberdeen, had led the censure of the government's foreign policy in the House of Lords, but he feared that Disraeli was not to be relied upon to make a clear and firm attack against Palmerston when the debate moved to the Commons:

Forgive me [he wrote on June 22] if I impress upon you the great importance, on many accounts, of hitting hard and not sparing. Anything short of *guerre a l'outrance* would have the effect of reviving, in suspicious minds, old misconceptions, and expose you to misconstruction on the part of those who may look with envy at

<sup>88</sup> 19 May 1849, Vincent (ed.) *Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party: Journals and Memoirs of Edward Henry, Lord Stanley, 1849-1869*, p.8

your present high position. Pray excuse me for touching on such a topic, which I can have but one motive for doing.<sup>89</sup>

As Londonderry told Disraeli, 'The Protectionists rather (I hear) suspect your intimacy with Pal. & that you will not strike home when the moment occurs'.<sup>90</sup> Disraeli did not rise to make a speech until the fourth and final night of the debate (in fact he was the last person to make a speech at all), and immediately he made it clear that it was a sense of political obligation that induced him to say anything at all: 'I cannot but feel that I should be wanting in, not only in self respect but in duty to those Gentlemen with whom I have the honour and satisfaction to act in political connexion, were I to give a silent vote on this occasion'.<sup>91</sup> Rejecting claims that it was a breach of constitutional duty that Disraeli had not moved the vote of censure following the vote in the Lords, but had left that to an independent member (Roebuck), he seemed as much concerned with defending his own record as a supposed leader of the Opposition as with attacking Palmerston and the government's foreign policy.<sup>92</sup> Significantly, however, Disraeli then proceeded to acknowledge the sagacity of Aberdeen and though he claimed to have 'no political connexion' with that statesman, he did note that 'during the four years to which the observation of the noble Lord applies, I can recall no one statement of Lord Aberdeen as to our foreign affairs that was not fully justified by preceding facts; and, I might add, no judgement which subsequent events have not fully warranted'.<sup>93</sup> Disraeli concurred in the attack on the Greek policy in that he doubted the wisdom of the *civis Romanus sum* principle, but largely because he believed in the law of nations and the course of legal redress rather than aggressive military measures to

<sup>89</sup> Stanley to Disraeli, 22 June 1850, quoted Blake, *Disraeli*, p.297

<sup>90</sup> Lord Londonderry to Disraeli, 20 June 1850, *Disraeli Letters*, V, 2013 n.4

<sup>91</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXII, 720, (28 June 1850)

<sup>92</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXII, 720-721, (28 June 1850)

<sup>93</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXII, 722, (28 June 1850)

demand justice. He had no doubt that legal means could and would provide the required redress: in the case of a wrong being committed by another government (constitutional or despotic), 'the law of nations steps in to assist the municipal law that is deficient, and ...the remedy of the suffering foreigner is secured by treaty'.<sup>94</sup>

Disraeli doubted the claims of Pacifico, and those of Finlay, but believed that their cause was being exploited with a view to establishing a bigger point. Yet he drew back from censuring the Foreign Secretary directly. 'The Secretary of State', he said,

has complained that the attack on his policy has been made, both abroad and at home, a personal attack. I can assure the noble Lord he shall have no cause to make this complaint of me. I have, before this, taken the opportunity of expressing my disapprobation of a mode which has only of recent date entered onto our discussion, and that is of visiting on the head of a department the consequences of a policy for which the whole Cabinet is responsible.<sup>95</sup>

If the government believed in upholding constitutional liberty, why did its conduct not tend to the reinforcement of that belief? Disraeli found many examples of governmental betrayal of this doctrine and concluded that whilst an admirable motive for governmental activity, 'surely it would be monstrous for Parliament to vote confidence in a Government merely on account of its sentiments, and not on account of a policy which had aimed at and obtained results of great general importance'.<sup>96</sup> Moving, finally, to oppose the motion in the spirit of the Lords' censure, Disraeli concluded with the hope, and indeed expectation, that the result of this examination of the country's foreign policy would 'virtually announce to Europe and to another hemisphere, that the Parliament of England is resolved that, in future, her policy shall be conducted with a due regard to the rights of nations'.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>94</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXII, 725, (28 June 1850)

<sup>95</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXII, 726-727, (28 June 1850)

<sup>96</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXII, 736-737, (28 June 1850); for Disraeli's examples of the government's inconsistencies, see esp. 727-735

<sup>97</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXII, 739, (28 June 1850)

Disraeli had stopped short of attacking Palmerston outright, and in this had weakened the best line of attack the Opposition possessed. It might have been, as he claimed some years later that a sense of unpreparedness on the Opposition benches to take over the reins of government had influenced him,<sup>98</sup> but this was not all. He had also recognised the hold Palmerston had over the popular imagination and had not wanted to challenge that directly. He was concerned that Palmerston's approach might set a dangerous precedent for other powers to weigh in with military force to seek redress of grievance, but he also acknowledged that Palmerston embodied that 'nationalism of the middle classes and the artisans' and thus the only real ground of attack was, as Paul Smith notes, to press for this assertiveness in foreign policy 'at the keenest price, not pushed so far as to involve expensive collisions with substantial enemies or good customers'.<sup>99</sup>

Yet the weakness of the opposition's attack was not entirely of Disraeli's making. Stanley had not wanted Disraeli to repeat the censure passed by the Lords in the Commons recognising that it would have been foolish to attack the most popular man in the country. His aim, rather, had been to use the debate to force the Peelites into opposition to the Whigs and thereby enhance the prospects of a Protectionist reunion with the Peelites.<sup>100</sup> But as Stanley's son recorded, it seemed more likely that the Peelites would themselves divide, Gladstone and Graham

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<sup>98</sup> Some years after the debate itself, Disraeli wrote: 'The great difficulty would have been the Leadership of the House of Commons. I was leader of 250 men and, so far as numbers were concerned, no one could compete with me; but I not only had no experience of high office, but I had positively never held even the humblest office. There was no confidential intimacy at that time between Lord Derby and myself, and I don't think he would have much hesitated in suggesting a Peelite, one of his old and even recent colleagues, as Leader, if I consented and the party generally... But who? I have always thought that old Goulburn was the man whom Sir Robert Peel and Lord Derby (then Stanley) would have brought forward and furbished up like an old piece of dusty furniture, under whom we might have all served without any great outrage of personal feelings. But I could never penetrate this. (Quoted Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.297-298)

<sup>99</sup> P. Smith, *Disraeli* (Cambridge, 1996), p.185

<sup>100</sup> Stewart, *The Politics of Protection*, pp.166-167

turning against Palmerston, whilst Peel supported him.<sup>101</sup> As hopes for such a Conservative union receded, it appeared again important to tempt Palmerston to cross the floor and there were therefore good reasons for resisting the temptation to drag him down over Don Pacifico. By February 1851 Disraeli was arguing that a union between Palmerston and Lord Stanley offered the best chance of achieving a Conservative parliamentary ascendancy, as Edward Stanley recorded in his journal:

Again and again he recurred to the idea of a coalition between my Father and Palmerston: said Aberdeen had played us false: that we ought not to trust him: we had been more than once his catspaws. 'Palmerston was a man who bore no malice, who liked office, whose tendencies were Conservative, and who would find no difficulty in throwing over former colleagues, especially as he and Russell were not on the most cordial terms[']'. He felt confident that he, D., could arrange with him in 24 hours, if permitted.<sup>102</sup>

Nevertheless, Disraeli's name was the one most often associated with the Foreign Office in Conservative circles during the next couple of years. In February and December 1851 and also in February 1852, in each of these failed attempts to construct a Conservative ministry, Disraeli was mentioned in some capacity with that department.<sup>103</sup> Disraeli himself appears not to have been too active in seeking such an appointment, perhaps he did not want to have to live in Palmerston's shadow at that moment. He still, after all, regarded Palmerston as 'a man for whom I have the greatest regard, & a statesman for whom I have always entertained the greatest admiration'.<sup>104</sup>

Palmerston's political conduct, though it may have possessed no didactic force in the Disraelian mind, at least mirrored to a large extent Disraeli's own

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<sup>101</sup> 9 June 1850, Vincent (ed.) *Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party: Journals and Memoirs of Edward Henry, Lord Stanley, 1849-1869*, pp. 19-20

<sup>102</sup> 16 Feb. 1851, *ibid.*, pp.40-41

<sup>103</sup> Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.301-303, 306, 308, 311-312

<sup>104</sup> Disraeli to Palmerston, 22 Nov. 1852, Broadlands Papers, GC/DI/137. This letter is dated 'Nov. 1852' but is an immediate reply to a letter from Palmerston of 22 Nov. 1852 (GC/DI/142).

conception of the political nation. Whilst Disraeli claimed never to have welcomed letters from his Buckinghamshire constituents,<sup>105</sup> this was more an example of his style than a statement of fact. The moral (such as it was) of Disraeli's novels *Coningsby* (1844) and *Tancred* (1847), says Paul Smith, is that 'social and political reconstitution, the building of community out of conglomeration, depended on the power, not of the politician to manipulate elites, but of the genius to mobilise masses'.<sup>106</sup> Novel writing for Disraeli, argues Smith, in the 1830s and 1840s particularly, 'was his means of by-passing a Conservative party and a House of Commons too slow to recognize his pre-eminence and appealing directly to a public opinion conceived as more powerful than an effete aristocratic elite'. In the *Vindication of the English Constitution* (1835) and *Coningsby*, Disraeli demonstrated his belief that legitimate political authority derived from extra-parliamentary opinion and found its expression in the newspaper press.<sup>107</sup> These opinions he had arrived at quite independently of any example offered by Palmerston.

With the formation of the Aberdeen ministry in December 1852 it seemed that hopes of a Protectionist reconciliation with the Peelites were finally crushed. A union with Palmerston, whose importance Disraeli had already impressed on Lord Derby,<sup>108</sup> did still seem, if not immediately possible, at least ultimately desirable. Thus when called on to deliver a speech on foreign policy in February 1853, which he determined upon 'in a half apologetic tone, pleading the necessity of keeping his

<sup>105</sup> For example, he told Lady Janetta Manners on one occasion that, 'during that time I scarcely ever received a letter from a constituent, certainly never answered one' (Lady Janetta Manners to Salisbury, 10 June 1880, quoted Smith, *Disraeli*, p.85).

<sup>106</sup> Smith, *Disraeli*, p.89

<sup>107</sup> P. Smith, 'Disraeli's Politics', in C.B. Richmond and P. Smith (eds.), *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli, 1818-1851* (Cambridge, forthcoming), p.167

<sup>108</sup> See above p.96-97

party in good humour',<sup>109</sup> Disraeli used this as an opportunity to underline the new alignments. He made a point of 'sparing Palmerston throughout', whilst criticising Wood, Graham and Aberdeen, outwardly three of Palmerston's potential antagonists or rivals in the new government.<sup>110</sup>

Whilst there was a feeling that Palmerston would be disposed to unite with the Conservatives politically, their weak condition prohibited such a plan. Malmesbury told Derby in September that: 'If Palmerston left the Government there is no doubt that many of our staunchest supporters would follow him as leader of the Commons, but our present divisions are not likely to encourage him to leave his post'.<sup>111</sup> The disunity of the Cabinet, maintained Disraeli in the autumn, 'is one of the inevitable consequences of a coalition between statesmen of totally different systems',<sup>112</sup> yet even in this state of affairs, 'great as [is] the embroglio', it was insufficient grounds upon which to 'galvanise our party' and the Aberdeen government remained 'a necessity'.<sup>113</sup> Even in the wake of Palmerston's resignation when he believed 'that P. has lost caste terribly with the country by his levity of conduct', (something which it seems Disraeli did not really believe) the ministry remained strong enough largely because the opposition was so weak.<sup>114</sup>

From 1850, Disraeli had been much concerned with improving the Conservatives' record with public opinion pursuing various schemes to produce a party-newspaper, which finally resulted in the emergence of the *Press* in 1853.<sup>115</sup>

This publication reveals a great admiration for Palmerston on the part of Disraeli, for

<sup>109</sup> 16 Feb. 1853, Vincent (ed.) *Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party: Journals and Memoirs of Edward Henry, Lord Stanley, 1849-1869*, p.98

<sup>110</sup> 17 Feb. 1853, *ibid.*, pp.98-99

<sup>111</sup> Malmesbury to Derby, 8 Sept. 1853, *Disraeli Letters*, VI, 2549 n.2

<sup>112</sup> Disraeli to Lord Londonderry, 26 Sept. 1853, *Disraeli Letters*, VI, 2558

<sup>113</sup> Disraeli to Lord Stanley, 2 Oct. 1853, *Disraeli Letters*, VI, 2561

<sup>114</sup> Disraeli to Lord Stanley, 30 Dec. 1853, *Disraeli Letters*, VI, 2610

<sup>115</sup> See Smith, *Disraeli*, p.117

although he sought to keep his connection hidden, it is well known that Disraeli's contributions to its pages were frequent and full. Thus, when Palmerston walked out of the Cabinet in December 1853, the *Press* regretted the loss of 'the most eminent member of the Administration',<sup>116</sup> and a few days later in a satirical piece on the 'Downing Street Christmas Playbill', 'Mr Stone Palmer' appeared as 'The Genius of the Cabinet'. The end result, significantly, was promised as 'DESTRUCTION OF THE CABINET, AND TRIUMPH OF BRITISH POLICY'.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, not only was the *Press* loudly singing Palmerston's praises, but in the new year clearly hinted at a natural and positive connection between the genius of the Cabinet and Disraeli, if only party connection did not stand in the way:

CARMEN AMŒBÆUM  
BY MR GLADSTONE AND LORD PALMERSTON  
In the Characters of *Horace* and *Lydia*

- G - While in the Home-office seals were thine,  
Blest in my faithful PAM's alliance,  
Calm I beheld the funds decline,  
And bade the South Sea Stock defiance.
- P - While GLADSTONE, Oxford's darling child,  
Presided o'er John Bull's finances,  
Time was, at Democrats I smiled,  
Nor heeded GRAHAM'S reforming fancies.
- G - Me JEMMY GRAHAM now makes his tool,  
In cant and recant without rival,  
In whom I only wish John Bull,  
Felt half the confidence that I feel.
- P - DISRAELI'S charms my bosom feels,  
Whose name suggests the thought unpleasant,  
That some have held Exchequer seals,  
When funds were higher than at present.
- G - What if by common interest led,  
Once more to burn with mutual flame,  
You treat DISRAELI, say, as dead,  
And I throw over JEMMY GRAHAM?

<sup>116</sup> *Press*, 17 Dec. 1853

<sup>117</sup> *Press*, 24 Dec. 1853

P - Though he is versed in Tory arts,  
 And thou'rt, I fear, a ratting Raddy,  
 Still, *till our Coalition parts*,  
 I'll live and die colleagued with GLADDY.<sup>118</sup>

By this point, Disraeli was losing ground within the Conservative party and indeed, many other in that party are said to have been looking warmly at Palmerston. Disraeli denied that he was intriguing with Palmerston to form a union between themselves,<sup>119</sup> but he was widely believed to be closely connected and associated with Palmerston and Palmerstonism, to the extent that in March 1854 Lord Stanley felt that in making attacks on the government's handling of the Eastern question, Disraeli 'relies, as before, on Palmerston's secret support'.<sup>120</sup> Palmerston indeed appears to have been prepared in 1854 to cooperate with certain members of the opposition in order to promote criticism of the government's foreign policy. Malmesbury records in his *Memoirs* that in May of that year he 'had a long and confidential conversation with Palmerston, whom I met at dinner at the Walewskis, and we agreed perfectly on all points of foreign policy'. Palmerston supplied Malmesbury with information about the fleets at Odessa which Malmesbury was able to use as the basis for a question in the House of Lords the following week. The issue was evidently a sensitive one since the 'Duke of Newcastle refused to answer the question'.<sup>121</sup>

By the time the war broke out in the Crimea, Disraeli was offering the government general patriotic support, and though from the opposition benches he might have been critical of the invasion of the Crimea towards the end of 1854, his

<sup>118</sup> *Press*, 7 Jan. 1854 (the emphasis is that of the *Press*).

<sup>119</sup> Disraeli to Ponsonby, 22 Jan. 1854, *Disraeli Letters*, VI, 2624

<sup>120</sup> 24 March 1854, Vincent (ed.) *Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party: Journals and Memoirs of Edward Henry, Lord Stanley, 1849-1869*, p.123

<sup>121</sup> Lord Malmesbury, *Memoirs of an Ex-Minister, An Autobiography* 2 vols. (London, 1884), I, p.433 (3, 11 May 1854)

role in the war, according to Blake, was a minimal one.<sup>122</sup> Only once Palmerston had acceded to the premiership did Disraeli feel comfortable about attacking him, and then with what was perhaps a surprising vehemence, as in this famous letter on the eve of Palmerston's 'triumph':

[Palmerston] seems now the inevitable man, and tho' he is really an imposter, utterly exhausted, &, at the best, only ginger beer & not champagne, & now an old painted Pantaloon, very deaf, very blind, & with false teeth, wh:, wd. fall out of his mouth when speaking, if he did not hesitate & halt so in his talk - he is a name, wh: the country resolves to associate with energy, wisdom, & eloquence, & will until he has tried and failed.<sup>123</sup>

Hampered throughout the previous decade by party factions and a minister who successfully monopolised the national colours, perhaps Disraeli felt he had finally been given his opportunity to appropriate Palmerston's mantle. If the Conservatives appeared still unsettled and Palmerston, whom Disraeli respected and could not effectively oppose, now seemed weakened, there seemed perhaps a chance to steal a march on the new Prime Minister. It was not, after all, indicative of a lasting separation of Disraeli from his admiration for Palmerston.<sup>124</sup> But it is revealing about the previous decade: one of the main prongs of the Opposition attack during this period was undermined by a sympathy for the targets' policies and, in any case, a weak platform from which to launch an attack.

<sup>122</sup> Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.356-357; 359-361

<sup>123</sup> Disraeli to Lady Londonderry, 2 Feb. 1855, *Disraeli Letters*, VI, 2730

<sup>124</sup> In 1859, for example, Disraeli wrote to Palmerston resurrecting the notion of a union of Palmerston and Derby, acknowledging not only Palmerston's continued political potency but also his right to control the foreign policy of any ministry of which he was a member (Disraeli to Palmerston, 3 May 1859, Broadlands Papers, GC/DI/140). Perhaps not surprisingly Palmerston declined the offer the same day (Palmerston to Disraeli, 3 May 1859, GC/DI/140/enc.1).

iv) Systematic opposition: Palmerston and Cobdenism

Potentially more effective, however, was the Cobdenite opposition. Based on a principled system, these 'trouble makers' were fighting less for a political interest than (what they perceived at least) as a national one: prosperity, trade and peace. As Disraeli himself observed, Cobden was well-equipped for his task:

He had great tact, & always conciliated his audience. He was a very amiable man, & extremely well informed. No man entered the house of Commons with a greater prejudice against him among the Country gentlemen, yet in time he quite overcame it. He was naturally well-bred, because he was considerate for the feelings of others, wh is the true course of good breeding. He was modest without being humble, never elated by his great success.<sup>125</sup>

Richard Cobden had risen from being an unknown 'Manchester business man' to become 'one of the most influential politicians in England' by the mid-1840s and furthermore, argues A.J.P. Taylor, whilst Cobden rejected the crude connection, there were many who saw in the gradual acceptance of Cobdenite principles the triumph of middle class liberalism, or more specifically, of the cottonocracy, in mid-Victorian politics.<sup>126</sup> Significantly, however, with the effective scuttling of what Taylor describes as the Romantic radical opposition to Palmerston of Urquhart and his associates by about 1850, a new force emerged to challenge the Palmerstonian ascendancy - the 'rational radicalism' of Cobden.

Cobdenism was founded on the principle of peace and judicious interference abroad, but denigrated the manoeuvrings of governments and secret diplomatic negotiations. Through a policy genuinely directed in the interests of free trade, Cobden believed, peace and prosperity would follow. He felt, he told his colleague

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<sup>125</sup> 'Observations on men and things: Cobden and Bright', Hughenden Papers, dep. Hughenden 26/3, fols 18-20

<sup>126</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *The Trouble Makers* (London, 1985 edn.), p.54

John Bright, 'how impossible it is to ensure the peace of the world, and guarantee us against all the burdens which our present warlike attitude entails upon us by any means excepting a free commercial intercourse between all nations'.<sup>127</sup> Palmerston's tenure at the Foreign Office did little to inspire Cobden with confidence, however. 'I thought free trade would have been the prelude to a wiser foreign policy', he told George Wilson, the former Chairman of the Anti-Corn Law League, 'that common sense would have been admitted to a seat at Downing Street - But we seem to be playing the fool in our foreign policy worse than ever'. More than this, he complained: 'Oh, I wish the English people knew how little good their 800 millions of debt had done for foreign nations, and how little the people of the Continent feel indebted to us for our sacrifices'.<sup>128</sup>

It was a desire to challenge this public ignorance that lay at the heart of Cobdenism. In Edinburgh in 1853 Cobden declared, 'we have too many people in this country who are ignorant of the state of society in foreign countries, and who do not do justice to the condition in which the people are placed in other countries'.<sup>129</sup> This was why, Cobden asserted, over the Eastern question in the 1850s Palmerston was able to mislead the people in to thinking the Ottoman Empire to be at a more advanced state of reform than it was and thus support Turkey against Russia on an entirely false basis.<sup>130</sup> Public opinion still had a crucial role to play in Cobdenism (just as it did in Palmerstonism and Disraelianism) but Cobden hoped that if this opinion was better informed it could be guided not into a bellicose course but rather

<sup>127</sup> Cobden to Bright, 24 Oct. 1846, quoted N. McCord, 'Cobden and Bright in Politics, 1846-1857', in R. Robson (ed.), *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain* (London, 1967), p.90

<sup>128</sup> Cobden to G. Wilson, 21 June 1847, quoted *ibid*, p.91

<sup>129</sup> Speech delivered by Mr Cobden at the Peace Conference, held at Edinburgh, 12 Oct. 1853, in R. Cobden, *Reminiscences of Richard Cobden* (compiled by Mrs Salis Schwabe) (London, 1895), p.197

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, pp.192-207; Cobden to House of Commons, 22 Dec. 1854 in *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy by Richard Cobden*, p.317

in the interests of peace. Certainly Bastiat in France had given Cobden to believe that a more pacific opinion in Britain would benefit free trade and prosperity whilst it seemed to Cobden that western opinion being against Russian aggressive demands for the return of Hungarian refugees from the Ottoman Empire in 1849-1850 had been sufficient to alter the Tsar's outlook.<sup>131</sup>

It was clear that the prevailing Palmerstonian policy was not conducive, according to the Cobdenite model, to a profitable and harmonious foreign policy. The essence of Cobdenism is captured in part of Cobden's speech on what was possibly the most important set-piece foreign policy debate of the Russell government, that on the Don Pacifico affair. Cobden asserted that: '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 and foreign offices'.<sup>132</sup> More than Urquhartite assaults or Disraelian challenges, Cobdenism represented a much more rounded and consistent form of opposition to Palmerston and the Whig government and therefore possessed much greater potential for success. Over Don Pacifico the so-called rational radicals were offered their first substantial opportunity to test their principles against the prevailing Palmerstonian standard.

Perhaps A.J.P. Taylor is correct in describing this debate as possibly 'the greatest debate on the principles of foreign policy in our parliamentary records', for not only was Palmerston called to account for his conduct of foreign affairs since 1830, but the radicals used this as a platform for exploring questions of morality in foreign policy.<sup>133</sup> In many ways this was both an advantage and a mistake. For whilst a clear and logical opposition to the official foreign policy of the country now

<sup>131</sup> J. Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden* (1 vol. edn., London, 1903), pp.476-478, 530-531

<sup>132</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXII, 673, (28 June 1850)

<sup>133</sup> Taylor, *The Trouble Makers*, p.56

found its expression, the chance to use this opportunity to undermine the credibility of the ministry's chief proponent of that policy was missed.

Cobden spoke on the last night of the debate. He opened with a discussion of the essential points of the case before the House - that of Don Pacifico - but grounded his censure of the government's policy not in terms of the validity of the cause, but the method of its execution. 'I will not go into the merits of them [the grievances against the Greek government];' he said, 'say the Greeks were wrong, or we were wrong, just as you please; but admit they were wrong, and what I want to know is, whether the wrong was not one that might have been readily settled by other means than by sending fifteen ships of war into the Bay of Salamis?'.<sup>134</sup> Gunboat diplomacy of this sort, contended Cobden, rather than exaggerating the potential of a nation's power - making a big stand over a little question and thereby causing more threatening rivals to pause for thought - actually achieved the opposite effect. Such a course placed a country such as Britain in a disadvantageous position relative to, for example, a power like Russia and thus open to abuse:

And why are you obliged to submit to it? Because you are committing an injustice, and conscious you do so; for otherwise, so far from this country being in a condition to be menaced by Russia, such are the advantages you possess in your great wealth, and your maritime commerce, in the knowledge and use of mechanical science, and in the advanced state of the arts over Russia, that if you behaved with dignity to small States, she would not venture even to look at you disparagingly, far less to use such language towards you.<sup>135</sup>

A more efficient mode of settling diplomatic disputes, Cobden maintained, was through the process of arbitration and restraint from direct intervention wherever possible.<sup>136</sup> Cobden's dissent from Roebuck's motion, then, ultimately was founded

<sup>134</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXII, 663, (28 June 1850)

<sup>135</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXII, 665, (28 June 1850)

<sup>136</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXII, 667-674, (28 June 1850)

on his refusal to sanction a continuous trend of interventionist foreign policy during the last two decades. Palmerston, he acknowledged, was presented frequently as the champion of liberalism and constitutionalism abroad, but, Cobden stressed, 'I cannot fall into this delusion'; Palmerston, he continued, was a man 'of an active turn of mind - that he likes these protocols and conventions - and that the smaller the subject the better it suits his taste'.<sup>137</sup> Yet despite offering a reasoned radical alternative to Palmerstonian foreign policy, Cobden took with him into the division lobbies very few colleagues, and even then they were some of his staunchest allies such as John Bright and William Molesworth.

Taylor argues that Palmerston's victory in the debate 'was more in the nature of a caution not to do it again than a triumphant acquittal',<sup>138</sup> yet a victory it was nonetheless. Cobdenism, or the Manchester School interest, had, in some respects, overplayed its hand. The *Manchester Guardian*, in a leading article published a few days after the conclusion of the debate, was highly critical of John Bright for opposing the government as he had done and rather than voting against a supposed long-standing principle of interventionism, argued that he should have moved an amendment directed specifically at the issue under discussion (in fact Bright had made no direct contribution to the debate).

A principle or a rule of action must merely be deduced, [ran the article] either from the express declaration of the party to whom it is ascribed, or from something like an invariable practice on his part. Now, where is the practice, on the part of Lord PALMERSTON, from which any such rule can be deduced? If we grant that he interfered somewhat unnecessarily, as we believe he did, with Spain, we conceive that does not altogether establish a principle or a rule of action. And, if not, pray where are the other instances of interference in other people's affairs?<sup>139</sup>

<sup>137</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXII, 673, (28 June 1850)

<sup>138</sup> Taylor, *The Trouble Makers*, p.57

<sup>139</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 6 July 1850

Rather than demonstrating a genuine commitment to their professed cause, the paper argued, Bright and his associates were merely exploiting an opportunity to undermine the Russell government in the hope that a different, more appealing ministry, might thus be ushered in. Bright himself even tacitly admitted in private that party considerations were as significant as those of principle when he noted in his journal in response to hostile assessments of his conduct such as that in the *Manchester Guardian*, that he was determined not to be 'a mere joint of a Whig tail'.<sup>140</sup>

Yet the *Manchester Guardian* was no real friend of the movement led by figures such as Cobden and Bright which emanated from the same commercial city - John Bright specifically identified his opponents as the '*Guardian* party'<sup>141</sup> - and its criticism of the Manchester School's stand in parliament over Don Pacifico signifies something other than a dissatisfaction with the parliamentary exposition of attitudes relating to the *Guardian's* constituency. For, in effect, the *Guardian* and Cobdenism represented different interests, or, more accurately, differed in their perception of those interests. As A.J.P. Taylor suggests, the Cobdenites were 'not the business men, but the business-like, a matter of mentality, not of class'.<sup>142</sup> Entrepreneurship, which demands flair and nerve, was attracted to Palmerstonian politics which offered a spirit of chance and daring, whereas Cobdenism, in a sense, was almost too rational: it represented commercial interests in the abstract. The *Manchester Guardian* represented the Manchester business-man whilst the Cobdenites stood for Manchester's economic interests theoretically apprehended and understood. Cobdenism in this regard had not been defeated in the Don Pacifico debate, although

<sup>140</sup> Quoted K. Robbins, *John Bright* (London, 1979), p.89

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72

<sup>142</sup> Taylor, *The Trouble Makers*, p.54

the class-interest it was (in this sense erroneously) believed to represent had not been well-served by Cobden himself. Thus can Cobdenism be argued to have prospered in spite of this particular result: the supposed pacifism of British policy and its attitude to international affairs which was represented by the Great Exhibition of 1851, maintains Taylor, 'seemed to mark the victory of Cobden's outlook',<sup>143</sup> coinciding as it did with a Conservative (and in particular Disraelian) retreat from protectionism.

Yet in this same year, an issue which brought Palmerston into conflict with the Cabinet also revealed the inherent conflict between Cobdenite policies and the prevailing Palmerstonian ethic. When Palmerston received Kossuth and thereby applauded the efforts of a noble patriot, Cobden and Bright, whilst sharing this sympathy for the fallen hero would not allow themselves to condone intervention abroad to support their causes. Continuing to place their faith in peaceful free commerce to guarantee liberty, they soon failed to act in tune with the popular mood. As Cobden observed when Bright attended one of Kossuth's speeches: 'Really a public man has a hard work to give a generous welcome to a patriot and martyr, without falling into the trap laid for him by Palmerston's tools'.<sup>144</sup>

By the winter of 1853-54 Britain was engaged on a course which demonstrated little of this peaceful philosophy. To the Crimean War the Manchester School could offer little by way of effective opposition, although dissent from the government's policy was recorded, as a salve to troubled consciences if nothing else.

When the Eastern question became one involving issues of war or peace for Britain, Cobden maintained a stout belief in the pacific disposition of the nation at

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid, p.57

<sup>144</sup> Cobden, 13 Nov. 1851, quoted McCord, 'Cobden and Bright', p.104

large. 'The great mass of the people', he told J.B. Smith, an old friend from the Anti-Corn Law League,

is always ready to hear the truth. ...They have no interest in wrong-doing. Let us then by our great meetings in Edinburgh and elsewhere show that we are not afraid to appeal to the people against those who from ignorance, prejudice and sinister motives are trying to mislead them. We may roll back the tide of military enthusiasm whilst at its height if we will now make one great effort on behalf of the right.<sup>145</sup>

Indeed, within the very highest echelons of government, voices were to be heard praising the Cobdenite view. The Peace Conference, said Aberdeen in a letter to Delane of the *Times*, went beyond the limits of his support, but the essential message the Conference sought to convey was warmly applauded by the Prime Minister. Suspecting that the *Times* was wavering in its support for peace, Aberdeen thus wrote to Delane: 'I think that both the principal speakers [Cobden and Bright] uttered so much truth as to deserve a different treatment, by which the cause of peace might have been further advanced'.<sup>146</sup> Aberdeen, however, did not necessarily speak for the nation. Rather, the popular mood seemed quite at odds with the Cobdenite view and whilst Cobden might maintain, somewhat hopelessly perhaps in December 1853, that he still carried the middle classes with him - that they were, as he put it 'fanatically devoted to peace'<sup>147</sup> - he eventually was drawn to admit some months later that this was not absolutely accurate. Retreating to his home in the country, Cobden tacitly admitted the defeat of his approach, asking an old friend:

how can I better escape from the humbling spectacle of a nation given up to the dominion of its fiercest animal passions, *whilst flattering itself that it is wielding the sceptre of justice*, than in taking refuge in my nursery, where the children, if not more logical, are at least less hypocritical than those of a larger growth

<sup>145</sup> Cobden to J.B. Smith, 5 Sept. 1853, quoted W. Hinde, *Richard Cobden: A Victorian Outsider* (New Haven, 1987), pp.244-245

<sup>146</sup> Aberdeen to J.T. Delane, 15 Oct. 1853, quoted K. Martin, *The Triumph of Lord Palmerston* (London, 1963 edn.), p.168

<sup>147</sup> Cobden to Hargreaves, 23 Dec. 1852, quoted Hinde, *Richard Cobden*, p.247

whose 'fe, fa, fi, fi, fum' is now resounding from our streets, theatres, churches and chapels? To confess the truth, I am afraid I am growing cynical, and I am half disposed to take to my tub, let my beard grow, and pass a vote of want of confidence in mankind.<sup>148</sup>

Cobden had not been a completely silent observer of events, and his disillusionment is understandable. Having presented to the House of Commons, on two notable occasions, his view of events in the East and the government's handling of those events, all that Cobden held dear and believed about the sagacity of the people he thought he represented was controverted when his counsel was not heeded. Yet these parliamentary speeches demonstrate not only the rational approach adopted by the Cobdenites, but also, in this case, its bankruptcy.

On 16 August 1853, Cobden gave an early illustration of his view of events in the East. Russia, he agreed, had acted in a manner that was 'treacherous, overbearing, and violent', and should be compelled as swiftly as possible to evacuate the occupied principalities. But this was not a plea grounded in any special regard for Turkey: 'you cannot maintain Mahomedanism in Europe' he argued and whilst Russian invasion of Constantinople was to be regretted, the Ottoman Empire thus constituted was not an appropriate ally of Britain. And whilst it was the case that many subjects of Turkey in Europe, rayahs, were Christian, this did not necessarily demand an automatic defence of their interests against Russia; indeed, noted Cobden, 'I should prefer a Russian or any other government rather than a Mahomedan one'. Combining an unwillingness to over-stretch Britain in a cause for which there were no clear grounds, with a greater degree of admiration for Russian than Turkish culture, civilisation and commercial maturity, Cobden could find no compelling reason to go to war. He could, however, identify good reason not to.

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<sup>148</sup>

Cobden to Hargreaves, 7 Oct. 1854, quoted *ibid*, p.250

Commercial interests, he argued, were not threatened by Russian advances, but in any event, free trade principles did not require a military defence: 'I have too much faith in my principles to go to war for them', he said, 'I believe that free-trade principles will spread and make converts by means of peace'. Furthermore, a war of this nature, whilst stimulating industrial output in the short-term to serve the campaign, would ultimately prove damaging to commerce: unknown numbers of markets stood to be lost or disrupted in case of war and as he observed in a remark addressed to Mr Blackett, the M.P. for Newcastle, 'there is no port which would suffer more severely, more in proportion to the magnitude of its commerce, than Newcastle would do, if we should go to war'.<sup>149</sup>

He returned to this theme in February 1854 when war had been waging in the Near East between Russia and Turkey for over four months and Britain seemed to be on the point of entering the fray. Expressing various doubts about the benefit to the Ottoman Empire of sustaining it in this manner, and consequently its ability or encouragement to reform itself, and questioning the extent to which the Ottoman Christians were suited to Ottoman, rather than Russian, rule, Cobden ultimately admitted that he was unconcerned with whether or not the proposed war was right or wrong, only that there were insufficient grounds for such an undertaking. Placing before the House his calculations of the value of Russian trade with Britain, he argued:

Compare the Russian and Turkish trades together, and you will find that in the former you have one of three times the importance of the other. There is no one foreign country whose trade is so important to us as Russia, excepting the United States; and it is well to remember that all the carrying trade between our ports and Russia is in our hands. Now, is there any ground for urging this country into a war with Russia, for the purpose of protecting our

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<sup>149</sup>

*Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXXIX, 1798-1806 (16 Aug. 1853)

commercial and trading interests? None whatever. The advantage is all on the other side.<sup>150</sup>

Cobden's arguments contained a certain logic and force, but missed the real essence of the matter. As Palmerston - significantly it was he who responded to Cobden's speech of August 1853 - argued, whilst Cobden's speech did not appear quite consistent, and refusing to accept the Cobdenite denigration of the commercial importance of Turkey which was, he insisted, important 'as the channel through which our manufactures pass into Asia', it was all for nought when the views expressed ran so much counter to the prevailing mood:

Nothing is so painful as to see a man of great ability labouring to bring about a conviction which he knows to be contrary to the opinions of the great majority of his fellow-countrymen, and which, therefore, he is afraid - I will not use a stronger expression - openly to express, but which he endeavours to conceal under every specious device which human ingenuity could afford to the precise orator.<sup>151</sup>

As Cobden himself admitted in his speech of February 1854, it was 'not to speak upon abstract principles of non-interference, or upon abstract questions of peace, that I rise to address the House; but with reference to the points at issue between Turkey and Russia, and of the war between England and France on the one side, and Russia upon the other'.<sup>152</sup> Yet herein the weakness of his case. For in the war with Russia the calculations were not those of balance sheets and account books, but of perceived violations of liberties and affronts to national honour and interest. Only once the war started to go badly did John Bright's initial questions about the nobility and popularity of the endeavour have any real resonance.<sup>153</sup>

Cobdenism had currency in parliament over the Crimean War to some extent - speeches were cheered and applauded in certain quarters although were never

<sup>150</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXXX, 917-944, (20 Feb. 1854)

<sup>151</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXXIX, 1806-1810, (16 Aug. 1853)

<sup>152</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXXX, 917, (20 Feb. 1854)

<sup>153</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXXXII, 243-267, (31 Mar. 1854)

actually put to the test directly in the division lobbies - but it lacked sympathy in the country at large. Fundamentally, it also lacked the support of its traditional constituency. Cobdenite opposition to the war not only offended Whig and Tory sensibilities, but as N. McCord has demonstrated, with many Radicals viewing the war as a crusade against a tyrannical Russia in defence of the peoples of Europe, it also alienated much parliamentary radical feeling.<sup>154</sup> Former allies from the League turned on their erstwhile leaders and denounced their anti-war stand; Cobden regretted their adherence to 'an absurd policy'.<sup>155</sup> In fact Cobden and Bright had already alienated much radical feeling in 1850 over Don Pacifico,<sup>156</sup> and now the backing, such as it was, that they would have liked to receive from radical leaders such as John Roebuck in the 1853 and 1854 went instead to Palmerston.<sup>157</sup>

Only once the war became a drawn-out and costly one did anti-war feeling really gain ground and perhaps Cobdenism, then, was not so much vindicated by the course of the war but more as anti-war sentiments increased, Cobdenism was well-placed to exploit this feeling. Nevertheless, there is a clear inference to be drawn here. With regard to foreign policy, reasoned opposition to the prevailing Palmerstonian bluster, bluff and pro-active policies. A.J.P. Taylor may well see Cobdenism as having embodied the ascendancy of liberal politics in the mid-nineteenth century, but even he does not attribute to Cobdenism such an accolade in effect until the later 1850s.

<sup>154</sup> McCord, 'Cobden and Bright', pp.104-105

<sup>155</sup> J.P. Thompson to Cobden, 18 Aug. 1853; Cobden to Bright, 9 Nov. 1854, quoted *ibid*, p.105

<sup>156</sup> D. Read, *Cobden and Bright: A Victorian Political Partnership* (London, 1967), pp.118-119

<sup>157</sup> In fact Roebuck, due to ill-health, was able to offer little effective parliamentary support to even Palmerston by 1854. R.E. Leader (ed.), *Life and Letters of John Arthur Roebuck* (London, 1897), p.258

Cobden, who in private believed that a military defeat might better serve British interests than a victory,<sup>158</sup> was believed by his former supporters now to be pursuing an 'anti-national policy'.<sup>159</sup> Cobden recognised his own political defeat:

It is a delusion to propose economy in the public expenditure [he told Wilson in 1856] so long as the people of this country as represented by almost every leading politician and newspaper - from Palmerston to Roebuck - from *The Times* to the *Despatch* - lay it down as their duty that they must regulate the affairs of the whole world, and protect Europe in particular against the encroachments of Russia or any other ambitious power. So long as such a policy is seriously professed by the country, I cannot honestly tell it that there should be a moderate peace establishment.<sup>160</sup>

So long as Palmerston carried with him, in the broadest sense, the nation, or at least was perceived somehow to represent the mood of that nation, and so long as parliamentary (party) politics kept him at the heart of non-Protectionist ministerial combinations, opposition to his foreign policy proved ultimately ineffectual. Ironically, only once he had assumed the highest office himself, in February 1855, did he become a much more vulnerable target. He could no longer manipulate senior colleagues into positions of support, explicit or implicit as the case may be, for his policies and also could no longer, to the same extent, appeal to collective Cabinet responsibility as not only a support but also a constraint. With the explosion of the Palmerstonian myth at Scutari, Sebastopol and elsewhere in the Crimea, and the exposure of Palmerston himself to much more direct attack (contrast the Don Pacifico debate of 1850 in which the government was on trial yet which was also the closest thing to a personal attack on Palmerston with the bombardment of Canton on

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<sup>158</sup> On 31 May 1853 Cobden wrote to Bright: 'speaking in the interests of our children, I doubt whether it be desirable that our arms should have a great triumph in the Crimea - for it would only foster the war spirit and make us more eager for further intervention'. The following month he wrote again on the same theme: 'Nothing I fear short of the loss of an army by disease will break up this confederacy and turn the public mind against both government and public instructors' (Cobden to Bright, 26 June 1853). Quoted *ibid*, p.107

<sup>159</sup> M. Philips to G. Wilson, 10 Jan. 1855, quoted *ibid*, p.107

<sup>160</sup> Cobden to Wilson, 23 Sept. 1853, quoted *ibid*, pp.113-114

which Cobdenism defeated Palmerston in parliament in 1857 for example) it is significant to that not only did Cobdenism gain ground, but Disraeli felt better able to challenge his 'ginger beer' opponent and, whilst outside parliament admittedly, David Urquhart's challenge to Palmerstonism also regained much of its lost momentum through the Foreign Affairs Committees.

## CONCLUSION

In September 1846 the new Prime Minister, Russell, had warned his Foreign Secretary, Palmerston, 'there is nothing the country dislikes so much as foresight in foreign affairs. They would rather wait to see the shell burst than take measures to get out of the way'.<sup>1</sup> Nearly seven years later, this time when events in the East were pressing, Palmerston told Russell, 'there are Things so contrary to Right and Justice and so adverse to essential Interests of this Country and of Europe that the Decision to regard them cannot depend upon the Course of any future Events'.<sup>2</sup> The divergence of their views owes as much to the course of politics in the intervening period, during which 'Palmerstonism' had evolved and established itself as a clear and distinct political creed, as to any differences in their received political philosophies.

It may have been that there were many people with an interest in foreign policy but little time in which to study it, and that this 'large class of persons take for granted any specious statement connected with a subject they do not understand, and are ready to re-echo every popular cry that is raised in connection with it',<sup>3</sup> but Palmerston had still been able to exploit this disposition to express opinions

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<sup>1</sup> Russell to Palmerston, 13 Sept. 1846, Broadlands Papers, Southampton University Library, GC/RU/111/1

<sup>2</sup> Palmerston to Russell, 20 June 1853, Russell Papers, Public Record Office, PRO 30/22/11A, fols 94-98

<sup>3</sup> [Anon], *Palmerston for Premier! The claims of Lord Palmerston to fill the post of Prime Minister of England considered* (London, 1854), p.5

(however much they were simply uncritical echoes of vociferous interests) to his own ends. In the face of Whig disorganisation, indeed what Angus Hawkins has called 'the bankruptcy of Whig doctrine' as uniformity of purpose gave way to 'a series of shifts and compromises',<sup>4</sup> Palmerston was able to supply leadership which ultimately placed him at the very heart of government. The *Times* had complained in October 1846 that Peel had failed to supply clear leadership and purpose and that there remained an absence of a great man now to lead the country.<sup>5</sup> As Lord John Russell also failed to provide the required leadership, Palmerston sought to impress direction on the government in his stead.

Hawkins has argued with regard to Palmerston's first premiership that Palmerston's rhetoric illuminates only the political world 'outside parliament and Clubland' and in this sense such rhetoric 'is *not* an explanation of Palmerston's political ascendancy following the fall of Aberdeen's coalition' since 'it tells us very little about the reality of Palmerston's situation within Westminster'.<sup>6</sup> This may hold true for Palmerston's own governments when, as Prime Minister, Palmerstonism 'was in essence Palmerston' and defined itself very much as 'anti-Russellism', making for a rather vulnerable central administration,<sup>7</sup> but when he had been a Secretary of State the situation had been subtly different. As this thesis has sought to demonstrate in the decade immediately preceding the formation of Palmerston's first ministry in February 1855, Palmerston's rhetoric and courting of extra-parliamentary support was vital to his parliamentary position.

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<sup>4</sup> A. Hawkins, *Parliament, Party and the Art of Politics in Britain, 1855-59* (Stanford, California, 1987), p.6

<sup>5</sup> D. Read, *Peel and the Victorians* (Oxford, 1987), p.20

<sup>6</sup> Hawkins, *Parliament, Party and the Art of Politics*, p.23

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, pp.28-29

Palmerston's manoeuvring at Westminster can be studied and indeed to a certain extent explained by an examination of the course of high politics, but only when underpinned by an appreciation of Palmerston's highly effective and indeed novel invocation of a wide and very general popular support - to forge the reputation of the national minister - do his political career and the nature of mid-century politics acquire a convincing gloss. Whilst not dissenting, therefore, from Hawkins' broader argument that both 'the distinction and relation between Palmerstonian language and parliamentary circumstance are crucial to an understanding of the true nature of Palmerston's pre-eminence during 1855 and 1856',<sup>8</sup> this thesis urges an important qualification of that view. It was during the period 1846-1855 that Palmerstonism was really established and building upon the legacy of George Canning it infused political life with a greater appreciation of the role and importance of public opinion and a more responsible attitude to a system of virtual representation. Palmerston, however, did not regard himself as the servant of public opinion: Palmerstonism required a mastery over that opinion in order to channel it towards Palmerston's own ends. To a large extent, arguably, he succeeded in demonstrating such mastery, although this may have been as much the result of the inability of his rivals to articulate the view of a contrary public opinion. Thus, whereas after 1855 Palmerston's rhetoric might fail adequately to elucidate the nature of Palmerston's parliamentary position, before he became Prime Minister it was precisely this rhetoric and more widely, Palmerston's invocation of extra-parliamentary pillars of support, that gave his parliamentary position what strength it had.

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<sup>8</sup>

Ibid, p.23

Palmerston in 1846 was already sixty two years old and by the time he became Prime Minister he was seventy. No one at the time really expected him to achieve very much politically and indeed, as the *Times* observed on the occasion of his death in 1865: 'Had he died at seventy he would have left a second class reputation. It was his great and peculiar fortune to live to right himself.'<sup>9</sup> In the sense that a retrospective review of his career in 1855 would have revealed a curmudgeonly Cabinet colleague who served in the important offices of Foreign Secretary and Home Secretary, his career would have appeared solid, respectable, occasionally noteworthy and inflammatory, but perhaps not unduly remarkable.

However, it would be wrong to judge Palmerston's career in the fashion of the *Times*. By 1855 Palmerston's place in political life (and history) was already much more than second class and indeed his association with foreign affairs before 1855 has attracted much more historical interest than his career after that date. He had not only secured for himself a prominent role in Westminster politics but had done much to place foreign affairs at the centre of political debate and had used this not only to advance his own position but to help change the face of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary politics in the mid-nineteenth century.

Traditionally foreign policy has been discussed in terms of an abstract concern of the political élite. Diplomatic history as a discipline emerged between the two world wars of the twentieth century in an attempt to learn lessons about international relations in order to avoid future conflict. It focused on the intercourse between governments and diplomats and whilst many important studies emerged during this period, the historiographical trend in the later twentieth century has been

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<sup>9</sup> *Times*, 21 Oct. 1865

to seek to place foreign policy in a much broader context; to regard it as illuminating domestic political situations as much (if not more than) external ones.<sup>10</sup>

Diplomatic business - dry, intricate and frequently legalistic - was the preserve of an educated clique, capable not only of understanding the issues but of discussing them in a foreign language. There is something to be said for this view - perhaps more than any other area of public life, foreign policy demanded a specialist interest - and Palmerston believed, when he returned to the Foreign Office in 1846 that his expertise should be relied upon in the conduct of that business. However, the Crown and the Cabinet both laid claims to a role in foreign policy as well. In an age of constitutional ambiguity, Palmerston had to defend himself against these interventions, if he was to preserve for himself the independence he sought, through a series of bluffs and threats. In terms of foreign affairs, this made British policy frequently vague and ambiguous; for Palmerston himself it was the means by which he could use an obscure area of political business to carve out a unique and pre-eminent position for himself.

As this thesis has argued, Palmerston used his 'expertise' to confound the Court and the Cabinet, and his conduct, especially during the fragile administration of Russell, was tolerated largely because he was perceived to be 'popular' with the country. There was little contemporary examination of the nature of this popularity, however, and Palmerston was able, until the government ceased to regard tolerance of him a necessary price to pay for office, to use this popularity to make himself politically indispensable, or at least central to politics, by the early 1850s.

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<sup>10</sup> For example, P. Kennedy, *The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1865-1980* (London, 1981)

After he had accepted the Home Office under Lord Aberdeen, it was not long before Palmerston made explicit his continuing pre-occupation with foreign affairs. Neither did his colleagues in this government pretend that Palmerston was really retired from foreign policy debates and if he was kept in largely because he was too dangerous to be left outside this reflected again Palmerston's perceived strengths in the field of foreign policy. This was a period, after all, in which Cobdenite critiques of policy were still a force to be reckoned with. It is significant that from the Home Office, Palmerston was able to engineer his accession to the premiership, or at least lay the foundations for such an appointment, on the grounds that he was the one best qualified to take charge of a question of foreign policy.

Palmerston's use of popular support aimed at more than establishing an ascendancy for his views of foreign policy. He cultivated an extra-parliamentary constituency of support which extended beyond the traditional political nation in order to underwrite his own political position and through which he could steal a march on rivals within the party. Through the newspapers and periodicals Palmerston could appeal (primarily) to the middle classes and lay the Palmerstonian view before them. Such publicity was vital but in this, whilst he was arguably one of the period's most skilful manipulators of the press, he was not unique. Other politicians could similarly speak through the press to the burgeoning middle classes and campaign for their approbation. Palmerston needed to establish a rapport with a community possessing political weight but over which he could exercise a more individual mastery. Enjoying little real dominance or control of a political party and being the object of antagonism for the Crown and the Cabinet, Palmerston looked to a more broadly defined political nation for support.

Here his association with foreign policy was vital. Uniquely this could be presented as an area of business of pre-eminently national significance in which even the most oppressed inhabitants of a London slum could share in the reflected 'glory' of the *pax Britannica*. Whatever the paradoxes of Palmerston's foreign policy and the inconsistencies of his attempts to present that policy as directed in the interests of liberalism all over the world, these flaws were not always apparent to a population easily swayed by an emotive Palmerstonian rhetoric. The force of Palmerston's popular support was felt throughout the high political world. Not that Palmerston was universally applauded, but in the absence of a more effective interpreter of popular feeling, he was able to present (and substantiate) the image of himself that he wanted to. Here arguably was his greatest contribution to the evolution of a new political style. Both Disraeli and Gladstone recognised the importance of Palmerston's example. Disraeli quickly sought to appropriate the Palmerstonian mantle after 1865 and even Gladstone, however much the words must have stuck in his throat, knew in 1879 the necessity of identifying himself with Palmerston. 'The name of Palmerston will ever be honoured by those who recollect the erection of the kingdom of Belgium, and the union of the disjointed provinces of Italy', he declared at the end of his third Midlothian speech. He also mentioned Russell approvingly in this speech, but more importantly he also eulogised Canning,<sup>11</sup> and as Richard Shannon has argued convincingly, Gladstone's attitude towards Balkan policy owed a great deal to Canning.<sup>12</sup> Canning's name was eminently more pronounceable than Palmerston's yet there was no denying the impact Palmerston had on the People's William.

<sup>11</sup> Gladstone's third Midlothian Campaign Speech, 27 Nov. 1879, in K. Bourne, *The Foreign Policy of Victorian England, 1830-1902* (Oxford, 1970), p.422

<sup>12</sup> R. Shannon, 'Gladstone, Canning and Bulgaria', *Etudes Balkaniques*, 4, (Sofia, 1977), 78-88

Sympathy for Palmerston had been, after all, one of the causes of weakness in the opposition to Palmerston during 1846-1855, at least in the case of Disraeli: the success and value of Palmerston's popularising foreign policy, Disraeli realised, could not justifiably be criticised. Not that Palmerston had convinced all of his political opponents, however. Palmerstonism had not achieved its final victory over the minds of politicians (witness for example the opposition led by Urquhart and Cobden), but the inability of parliamentary opponents to make a telling strike (due to their own shortcomings as much as to Palmerston's strengths) against Palmerston allowed him to pursue that goal.

John Vincent argues that in 1857 'the old school in the Cabinet', including Palmerston, came 'to regard the public as a millstone', and that 'the participation of the public in the making of foreign policy, or even their support, was hardly canvassed because they were presumed to be hostile, wrong, or ignorant'.<sup>13</sup> Palmerston had never looked to the public for guidance in the making of policy, only for its approval in the execution, but even if Vincent's argument holds true for the specific instance he is concerned with in 1857,<sup>14</sup> it is hollow if reflected back to the period prior to Palmerston's becoming Prime Minister.

Palmerston established foreign policy as central to popular politics and he placed himself as one of its key exponents. He brought the role of public opinion into sharper focus and illustrated the political capital to be made from efficient representation of the people (significantly he remained throughout an opponent of more representative government for the people). Political success in the mid-nineteenth century was determined now not solely in terms of tenure of office

<sup>13</sup> J.R. Vincent, *The Formation of the British Liberal Party, 1857-68* (Harmondsworth, 1972), pp.280-281

<sup>14</sup> Vincent uses public opposition to the Persian war in 1857 as an example here.

and the confidence of the high political élite but in the support more widely of the country. The Peelite *Morning Chronicle* declared in February 1855 that if Palmerston had been unable to form a government, 'his failure would have been a national misfortune'; the *Globe* attributed his success in large part to the force of opinion 'out of doors'.<sup>15</sup> Palmerston may have achieved his 'inevitable' rise to the premiership with a generous measure of luck, but it was a result he had long aimed at and one he had done much himself to make possible.

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<sup>15</sup>*Morning Chronicle*, 7 Feb. 1855; *Globe*, 5 Feb. 1855

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