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The duke of Wellington and the People, 1819-1832

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This thesis is the result of work undertaken whilst registered for postgraduate candidature at the University of Southampton. It is the product of work solely done by myself and no part has been previously submitted for another degree.

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF ARTS

HISTORY

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

The duke of Wellington and the People, 1819-1832

by Shaun Robert Durham

At the end of 1818 the first duke of Wellington returned to Britain after making his name and fortune on the continent. Despite primarily being remembered as a military hero and diplomat, his excursion into party politics upon joining Lord Liverpool's cabinet constituted a second career that continued until the duke's death in 1852.

This thesis sets out to analyse that political career from 1819 to the first Reform Act in 1832 through Wellington's unsolicited correspondence. This previously neglected source offers a revealing insight into the popular perception of politics, society and Wellington himself, which often challenges the assumptions made about press and public opinion. Indeed, these letters themselves can be regarded as a form of public opinion.

Hundreds of ordinary people from across the country wrote Wellington on every matter of government and society, for personal, commercial, political or charitable reasons. They wanted patronage for themselves or friends, money and favours. They contributed to debates on Catholic Emancipation, Parliamentary Reform and Economic distress. A sizeable minority wrote anonymous, threatening letters in an attempt to intimidate Wellington, while others gave the duke their wholehearted support.

These letters reveal the politicisation of 'The People' and their willingness to get involved in public debates. The correspondents often used the same language and terms of reference. They wrote with the same concerns, albeit for different reasons and with varying suggestions. These letters also provide a glimpse of the popular perception of Wellington - how this military hero was considered, in turn, to be a saviour, influential friend and 'evil nemesis' of the people.

Wellington did not ignore this correspondence. Most people got a reply. Their letters were filed, discussed, forwarded to appropriate people, acted upon and investigated. Crucially, some of this correspondence influenced the duke's thinking and impacted on events. Writing a letter to a member of the ruling elite could make a difference.



# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Abbreviations	2
Note on Sources	2
 Introduction	 3
 Part One: Public and Private Opinion	 15
Catholic Emancipation	21
The 'Universal' Distress of 1830	56
The Fall of Wellington's Government	114
1831-32: Wellington and Resistance	137
 Part Two: Perceptions of the duke of Wellington	 157
Patronage	160
Gifts, Dedications and Goods for sale	173
Societies and Charities	181
Inventors and Engineers	191
Medical Advice	196
Miscellany	199
Celebration and Exploitation	204
 Part Three: The People and their letters	 218
 Bibliography	 255

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Without Prof. John Rule, these words would never have made it on to the page. It being impossible for me to articulate the debt of gratitude I owe to John, I will simply thank him for friendship, supervision meetings in the Arlott room and dedication to the cause.

Dedicated to the memory of Fred Durham.

## Abbreviations

Add. Mss.	British Library, Additional Manuscripts
BL	British Library
DNB	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
HO	Home Office
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
PRO	Public Record Office, Kew, Surrey
WCD	Wellington, 2nd Duke of (ed.), <i>Despatches, Correspondence and Memoranda of Field Marshal Duke of Wellington from 1818 to 1832</i> (8 Vols., 1867-80) (Wellington Civil Despatches)
WP	Wellington Papers, University of Southampton

## Note on Sources

This study is based on the unsolicited correspondence of the first duke of Wellington, kept at the University of Southampton. Not all of this, of course, has survived. Many letters were weeded out and destroyed, while others, suffering from damp or similar damage are unavailable for the researcher. As I comment in the text, this was a particular problem for 1832. When I refer to a quantity of letters in the thesis, it is the number surviving in the archive (and available) at time of writing, NOT the number the duke actually received (unless stated otherwise, for example when discussing the index volumes). When a letter from the main series of the archive (WP1) is cited, it is one written to Wellington from one of 'The People', and not by him, again unless it is explicitly stated to the contrary. This is also the rule for letters used from other archives.

## Introduction

There is public opinion as expressed through the press, the radio, or television; or through the polls; or through public meetings; or through letters to politicians. There is public opinion as perceived by politicians.<sup>1</sup>

I will attend to this as soon as it will be in my power. But I assure you that if I could do as much in a day as I do in a week I shall not have time to read a tenth of what is written, printed & sent to me on every matter of government.<sup>2</sup>

### **The duke of Wellington and his letters:**

When editing the political correspondence of the duke of Wellington for 1833 and 1834, John Brooke and Julia Gandy felt able to exclude:

Begging letters; letters appealing for the Duke's aid in righting some real or imagined wrong; letters advocating some new invention or some political scheme - what, in short, may be called the 'crank' correspondence. Some of these letters are funny, others pathetic, but few are important.

In the second volume, Wellington's correspondence during Peel's first ministry was published, but again the 'many letters containing unsolicited information or advice' were omitted, save 'the occasional letter of this type' because 'it provoked an illuminating reply'.<sup>3</sup> While it is acceptable to exclude any letters on certain criteria, and it is important to

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<sup>1</sup> D. G. Boyce, 'Public Opinion and Historians', *History*, 63 (1978) p. 227

<sup>2</sup> WP 1/1001/19, 5 March 1829, Wellington's reply to Hugh Clifford.

<sup>3</sup> J. Brooke & J. Gandy (Eds.), *Wellington. Political Correspondence I: 1833 - November 1834* (1975), p. 2; R. J. Olney & J. Melvin (Eds.), *Wellington II: Political Correspondence November 1834 - April 1835* (1986), p.

1. Even a recent study makes little use of Wellington's unsolicited correspondence, despite recognising its

note that the volumes above - like Wellington's Despatches - are concerned with the duke's official correspondence, it does show a lack of understanding to simply dismiss these letters as 'unimportant' and the authors as 'cranks' because they were not known to Wellington.

This study sets out to analyse the unsolicited correspondence of Wellington from 1819 to the Reform Bill crisis of 1830-32. Rather than being unimportant, these letters reveal a level of political awareness, which provides an insight into what might loosely be called popular opinion. The duke's unsolicited correspondence offers a different perspective on the duke's career from that usually given in biographies, and reveals how the people perceived the political process and the duke of Wellington in the period up to the Reform Act.

The victor of Europe, Field Marshal of every European army, overwhelmed with honours, titles, gifts and money, Arthur Wellesley, first duke of Wellington returned to Britain at the end of 1818 after commanding the army of occupation in France. He entered the cabinet of Lord Liverpool as Master General of the Ordnance, a position he held until 1827. Never an ordinary Master General, Wellington's prestige meant that he was informed on many aspects of government, especially foreign affairs, and during this period he represented Britain at the congress of Verona (September - December 1822) and at the court of Tsar Nicholas I (February - April 1826). He was also Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire, Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, Constable of the Tower of London and Commander-in-Chief. When George Canning became Prime Minister in April 1827, the duke resigned his cabinet post and the command of the army, only, due to the death of Canning and the incompetence of Lord Goderich, to find himself at the head of affairs in January 1828.

Wellington remained Prime Minister until November 1830. His administration was the last Tory government of the ancien regime. It faced considerable difficulties - chiefly, the demand for Catholic relief, the distressed state of the country, the wave of continental revolutions and the agitation for reform at home - which severely tested the duke's skills as a politician: skills found to be lacking in 1830. Wellington's resignation on the 16

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usefulness to the Home Office, P. Jupp, *British Politics on the Eve of Reform. The Duke of Wellington's Administration, 1828-30* (1998) pp. 59, 123-4

November ushered in the 18 month Reform Bill crisis. The duke played an active role in marshalling the Lords against reform and the Bill was thrown out three times. Only the threat of swamping the upper chamber with new Peers forced Wellington (who had also tried to form a government during the 'Days of May') and the Ultras to back down.

After 1832 Wellington played the crucial role of directing the Lords during a period of reform. Sir Robert Peel now led the Conservative Party, and Wellington served as a caretaker for him in November and December 1834 and as a minister without portfolio from 1841 to 1846. His prestige and influence in the upper chamber enabled Peel to enact many controversial measures, including the grant for Maynooth and the repeal of the Corn Laws. After 1846 the duke no longer took any active part in party politics and received a hero's funeral on 18 November 1852.

Any prominent member of nineteenth-century society would have spent a considerable amount of time writing and reading letters. For anyone holding office it was a fact of life. The duke of Wellington received a staggering quantity of letters, and it was not unknown for him to complain about this in replies to correspondents. The surviving contemporary index volumes show that from 1819 to 1832 Wellington received nearly 20,000 letters, half of them in only two years, 1829 and 1830. On the wrappers or on the outside of these letters a secretary (usually Algernon Greville) wrote the name of the correspondent and a brief description of the contents. However it is clear from the draft replies, usually written across the letter, that Wellington did read the actual letter and not just the description of its contents. Indeed the level of response is very high. A majority of the writers received a reply from Wellington, who on numerous occasions was willing to explain his course of action to complete strangers.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Contemporaries noticed this trend. For example see, G. R. Gleig, *The Life of the Duke of Wellington* (1864, 1891) p. 482; J. H. Stocqueler, *The Life of Field Marshall the Duke of Wellington* (1853) vol. 2, p. 225

Not all of these letters have survived and not all that have are available for research.<sup>5</sup> This writer has counted some 7,500 letters written to the duke surviving in the main series of the Wellington archive (WP1) for the years 1819 to 1832. Conspicuously absent is Wellington's surviving personal correspondence, which is kept at Stratfield Saye. He has been called a 'notorious and unpredictable shredder' of his private correspondence, and it is well known that he advised people around him to destroy letters of a personal nature. Charles Arbuthnot, the duke's close friend, destroyed many of his papers relating to his duties as patronage secretary.<sup>6</sup> The duke also referred many of the letters he received to the appropriate minister. For 1829 and 1830 this amounted to nearly 850 letters. A great deal of the correspondence is 'official', that is from members of government, and others from the ruling elite. This type of correspondence came with the territory. However, Wellington was also burdened with letters from members of the public, which Neville Thompson believes 'must have made him one of the best informed men in the country'.<sup>7</sup> Of the 7,500, these letters account for approximately 1,200. It is on these letters from 'The People' that this study is based.<sup>8</sup>

From 1819 to 1827, the duke of Wellington received 178 such letters concerning a variety of topics. This compares with approximately 500 received by the several Home Secretaries in the same period.<sup>9</sup> The letters were invariably addressed to 'His Grace the Duke of Wellington' at Apsley House, and those sent to Stratfield Saye were usually

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<sup>5</sup> After Wellington's death, the second duke 'weeded' the correspondence when preparing for the publication of the Civil Despatches. See R. J. Olney, 'The Wellington Papers 1790-1978', *Archives*, 69 (1983) p. 7. Olney states that Wellington was a man 'committed to a belief in the importance of the written record'.

<sup>6</sup> J. M. Bourne, *Patronage and Society in Nineteenth-Century England* (1986) p. 10

<sup>7</sup> N. Thompson, *Wellington After Waterloo* (1986) p. 9

<sup>8</sup> For an American perspective see H. Holzer (Ed.), *Dear Mr Lincoln. Letters to the President* (Wokingham, 1993). This is the edited correspondence from ordinary men and women who wrote to Lincoln during his years at the White House (1861 to 1865). 15,000 letters remain from this time, although Lincoln received the staggered quantity of 250 letters a day (much of which was destroyed). This correspondence is remarkably similar to that received by Wellington, but on a much larger scale.

<sup>9</sup> See the index volumes at the PRO for HO 44/1-17. Figures given in the text refer to the number of surviving correspondence, not those actually received at the time, unless otherwise stated.

redirected. Only in a few instances are the letters addressed to the Master General of the Ordnance, Wellington's cabinet title. This is significant. The letters in the Home Office papers are addressed to the Home Secretary, whether it was Sidmouth, Peel or Melbourne. The letters, therefore, concern the 'job' of the recipient and as such the letters have a quasi-official feel to them.<sup>10</sup> The receipt of these letters was a function of the cabinet post occupied and concerned duties within the Home Secretary's remit, such as law and order or petitioning the King. This was not the case with Wellington. In all but a few examples, the fact that Wellington held a cabinet post was (almost) incidental. Wellington was written to because of who he was, not what he did.

Letters trying to gain something from an association with the duke dominate his early correspondence. Requests for patronage, gifts and dedications, letters from societies and charities, from inventors and those proposing medical cures, all attempted to exploit Wellington's name for personal, charitable or commercial reasons. These letters offer an insight into the workings of aristocratic patronage and the popular perception of the duke of Wellington.

This situation changed when Wellington became Prime Minister. During the three years that the duke held the post (January 1828 to November 1830) he received nearly 750 letters. People now felt that they had a duty, indeed a right, to pen a letter to the duke of Wellington as the King's representative. The nature of the correspondence also changes. People were now more concerned with matters of government and policy decisions, rather than patronage or dedication requests. This type of correspondence was still evident, and people continued attempting to exploit Wellington's position, but more writers were concerned with what the duke's government was doing. These letters on such issues as Catholic Emancipation, economic distress and parliamentary reform can be regarded as a form of public opinion.

It has become a commonplace to state the duke's hostility to the press, his antipathy towards the people and lack of interest in his popular image. The neglect of the newspaper

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<sup>10</sup> The Home Secretary also received much 'official' correspondence from magistrates, mayors etc., but this has been excluded from the above analysis in keeping with the definition of 'the people'.



press when Prime Minister and his outburst against reform are cases in point. But because the duke did not manipulate or court public opinion effectively, this does not mean that he was ignorant of its powers. Wellington was, in fact, very well informed. He read all the major newspapers, and even instructed a firm of solicitors to inspect his library of newspapers and periodicals and fill in any gaps.<sup>11</sup> The duke was extremely careful how his name was appropriated, and when it was used without his permission, he was thorough in obtaining redress.<sup>12</sup> Wellington's unsolicited correspondence kept him informed of opinion out-of-doors and allowed him to monitor his public image.

Wellington received letters from all over the British Isles, but the vast majority were sent from London. The costs of postage were still prohibitively high in this period and a significant number of letters bear no mark of going through the postal service. Some even state that they were delivered by hand.<sup>13</sup> While cost alone can not explain why most letters were sent from London (Wellington's residence in the Capital for a considerable part of the year may be another explanation), it must be a significant factor.

Wellington was not alone in receiving unsolicited correspondence. Indeed most prominent politicians did.<sup>14</sup> The Home Office papers, already mentioned, abound with this type of communication, amounting to some 950 letters between 1820 and 1832 (over 300 received in 1830 alone). Liverpool, Peel and Palmerston also suffered from this intrusion.

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<sup>11</sup> WP1/954/8, 17 September 1828

<sup>12</sup> WP1/902/1, 2 November 1827. The duel with Lord Winchilsea and the prosecution of *the Morning Journal*, both show how sensitive he could be to slurs on his name, Jupp, *Politics on eve of Reform*, pp. 62-3

<sup>13</sup> J. Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture in England 1750-1914* (Cambridge, 1989) p. 34; H. Robinson, *The British Post Office. A History* (New Jersey, 1948); K. Ellis, *The Post Office in the Eighteenth Century* (1958) The average cost of posting a letter ranged from 4d. for 15 miles to 1s. for 300 miles and 1d. for each additional mile.

<sup>14</sup> Even Nelson complained that the volume of correspondence which he had to deal with made him ill, C. White (Ed), *The Nelson Companion* (Stroud, 1995) pp. 159-60. Napoleon, too, wrote prodigiously. J. M. Thompson (ed.), *Napoleon's Letters* (1998).

For instance, in 1825 Peel received 874 letters. Patronage requests, letters discussing the Catholic claims, taxation, the currency and politics feature in all the above archives.<sup>15</sup>

Not only did correspondents write to Robert Peel, Lord Liverpool, Lord Palmerston and others on the same issues as they wrote to Wellington, but the *same* people who wrote to the duke also wrote to other politicians. And what is more, some wrote on different issues to different people, and some published their ideas in the newspapers or in pamphlets. There appears to be a culture of letter writing, of public and private debate, and before going any further it is necessary to analyse the context from within which some people choose to put pen to paper.

### **The Politicisation of the people:**

By 1819 the dissemination of political information to the people out-of-doors was an established fact. John Brewer has described the interaction between lobbies and the state and the resulting flow of information to the general public in the last thirty years of the eighteenth-century. Not only were interest groups - for example Wyvill's County associations, the General Chamber of Manufacturers and the anti-slavery movement - beginning to influence parliament more effectively, but parliament was becoming more open to public scrutiny. With the publication of the *Common's Journals*, the admission of journalists, the publication of debates, division lists and, later, of the proceedings of committees of enquiry, political intelligence became available to those who wanted it.<sup>16</sup> The organisation of political campaigns, of meetings and petitioning, required the politicisation of the individual.

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<sup>15</sup> R J Olney, *Report on the Political and semi-Political Correspondence and Papers of Henry John Temple, Third Viscount Palmerston 1806-1865* (1983) p. 5. Most of the general or 'involuntary' correspondence seems to have been destroyed.

<sup>16</sup> J. Brewer, *The Sinews of Power. War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (1989); H. T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property. Political Ideology in Eighteenth Century Britain* (1977). For an extremely useful summary of the relationship between public opinion and parliament see, Jupp, *Politics on eve of Reform*

More and more people did demand this information. As R K Webb has commented, 'It was not easy to escape from politics in nineteenth-century Britain. It filled the newspapers; it was a principal means of mass entertainment'.<sup>17</sup> As this quote makes clear, this information took the form of the written word. The construction of a dynamic, informed opinion was dependent on the spread of printed media. It was not only newspapers, but also 'prints, handbills, pamphlets, sermons and sheets of statistics' that informed parliament and the general public.<sup>18</sup> Surviving in the Wellington archive are over 3,200 pamphlets which were sent to the duke on every imaginable subject, and most of the authors 'were little known or anonymous, but their views reflected the existence of public opinion'.<sup>19</sup>

Public opinion is a notoriously difficult concept to pin down. The very term itself is open to a multiplicity of interpretations. By definition 'public' means not private; it is not merely a member of the public having an opinion on a subject. Such people may take part in public life, and attempt to influence others through the press, petitioning, meeting or forming societies. Public opinion is mostly used about areas where the state has acted or might act. It has a quasi-official justification. Anything which the state wishes to ignore can be labelled uniformed special pleading or rabble rousing. Current writing on the subject, however, stresses that parliament 'was significantly receptive to public pressure and public opinion'.<sup>20</sup> While it is unnecessary here to repeat the many contemporary views on public opinion, it is sufficient to say that most commentators probably agreed with Sir James Graham that 'the seat of public opinion is in the middle ranks of life'.<sup>21</sup> This opinion was usually expressed to parliament through the newspapers and by petitions.

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<sup>17</sup> R. K. Webb, *The British Working Class Reader 1790-1848. Literacy and Social Tension* (1955) p. 83

<sup>18</sup> Brewer, *Sinews of Power*, p. 242

<sup>19</sup> P. Cockton, *The Wellington Pamphlet Collection* (Southampton, 1978) p. 2

<sup>20</sup> Jupp, *Politics on eve of Reform*, p. 229. D. Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class. The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c. 1780-1840* (1995) esp. pp. 190-197; Also see R. W. Davis, 'The House of Lords, the Whigs and Catholic Emancipation 1806-1829' (Forthcoming)

<sup>21</sup> A. Briggs, 'The Language of 'Class' in Early Nineteenth-Century England', A. Briggs, and J. Saville, (eds.), *Essays in Labour History* (1967) p56 and passim; and Boyce, *Public Opinion*, passim

The relationship between public opinion and the press is a complex one, too detailed for a full discussion here. To sell, newspapers had to appeal to the sensibilities and prejudices of the people who bought them. Editors recognised 'that a political badge might retain a readership and an advertising base'.<sup>22</sup> It was in the newspapers' interests to reflect 'opinion'. It was a commercial arrangement. For Professor Aspinall, *The Times* was the organ of public opinion. It floated with the tide, 'conducted without the least regard to principles of any kind, and solely with the view of extending the sale.'<sup>23</sup> Wellington was well aware of the influence of the press, and of *The Times* in particular, as his many pronouncements during the Reform Bill crisis show.<sup>24</sup>

By reflecting public opinion, newspapers could hope to influence, or at least inform, the ruling elite of the state of the country. But this influence also worked in the other direction, and it was recognised that newspapers could shape public opinion. Aspinall has shown how much of the government's time and energy went into courting the press. In exchange for support, papers were favoured with priority intelligence.<sup>25</sup> Some politicians, most notably Canning, used the press to obtain popular endorsements for their policies. John Wilson Croker, who had considerable experience of dealing with the press, remarked that ministers, through their secretaries, advised editors 'what to avoid, what to hint, what to deny, when to leave folks in their errors, and when to open the real views of the government'.<sup>26</sup>

Petitioning was considered one of the rights of the freeborn Englishman. It secured access to parliament, and if presented, could be discussed (and therefore reported), printed and even lead to the establishment of a committee of enquiry.<sup>27</sup> What made the great public

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<sup>22</sup> A. Jones, *Powers of the Press. Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth-Century England* (Aldershot, 1996) p. 141

<sup>23</sup> A. Aspinall, *Politics and the Press c. 1780-1850* (1949) p. 380-1

<sup>24</sup> WP 1/1199/9, 19 October 1831. This is discussed fully later in the study.

<sup>25</sup> Aspinall, *Politics and the Press*, passim

<sup>26</sup> Jones, *Powers of the Press*, p. 156

<sup>27</sup> Boyce, *Public Opinion*, p. 232; P. Fraser, 'Public Petitioning and Parliament before 1832', *History*, 46 (1961)

opinion issues - abolition of slavery, Catholic Emancipation, reform, even agricultural distress and emigration - so significant was the existence of a mass of petitions from around the country. One has only to look at the *Commons' and Lords' Journals* to appreciate how much time was occupied in considering petitions. Yet there are problems with using petitions as a guide to public opinion. The number of signatures, the status of those who signed them, the means used to obtain signatures, the existence of rival petitions, the willingness (or otherwise) to present and endorse the prayer of the petitions, all need to be taken into consideration.

Newspapers and petitions have been discussed as guides to public opinion because they impact on this study more than others do, such as lobbies, societies, and the resolutions from public meetings. The letter writers considered here often drew attention to petitions and newspaper articles. Rather than discuss further the various means of expressing public opinion, for the purpose of this study it is sufficient to state that none of them are infallible guides. But they are guides. As is Wellington's unsolicited correspondence. There is a difficulty in using private correspondence to gauge public opinion. As D G Boyce has commented: 'a mere conglomeration of thousands of private opinions does not necessarily constitute public opinion ... public opinion may be part of private opinion, but it is essentially *public*'.<sup>28</sup> The fundamental feature of any private correspondence is that it is addressed to someone and it is understood that the person will read the letter privately. These letters can tell the historian what people are discussing in private, as they are not items usually intended for publication. Their aim is to inform one person only.<sup>29</sup> However, on occasion letters to the duke were published, and Wellington often discussed or forwarded letters to other cabinet ministers. Writing to a politician, especially on a matter of policy, was in this sense, a public, political act. What is more, if it can be demonstrated that hundreds of ordinary people across the country were expressing similar opinions and using common terms of reference when discussing political issues, we can perhaps move closer to

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<sup>28</sup> Boyce, *Public Opinion*, p. 217

<sup>29</sup> Although the writer may wish the recipient to pass the letter on after he has read it, or to use the letter as a basis for an appeal or application.

accepting Walter Bagehot's aphorism that 'public opinion is the opinion of the average man'.

The letters in the Wellington papers may not be a sufficient guide to public opinion. Neither are newspapers or petitions. But they, and letters written to other politicians, are a form of opinion that requires analysis. Their authors were not generally cranks (there are of course some). The letters written to nineteenth-century statesmen were recognised by contemporaries as a legitimate expression of opinion, and one of the more useful definitions of opinion is 'what contemporaries perceived it to be'.<sup>30</sup> If you wanted to inform a member of the ruling elite of your thoughts, intentions and feelings, you wrote a letter to him. If you wanted to inform parliament you petitioned. If you wanted to give your opinions wider currency, a pamphlet was published or a letter written to a newspaper. All of these devices have been analysed in depth by historians, but the letters of ordinary people are too often ignored. For example, in *The People's Science*, Noel Thomson, uses letters to papers, editorials and pamphlets in order to analyse popular attitudes towards political economy. The ideas on the currency and taxation that Thompson finds in these sources, are the same as those in Wellington's unsolicited correspondence.<sup>31</sup> This study extends the analysis to these letters. There was a culture of letter writing. The individual had become politicised. Moreover, there is considerable overlap between these expressions of opinion. Some of the people who wrote to Wellington, Peel and Liverpool published pamphlets and wrote open letters to newspapers. The press influenced many, but not all agreed with its version of events. All, however, sought to influence using the written word.

The subjects people wrote to Wellington about were the same as those they read about in the newspapers and they petitioned on. There are common themes in this correspondence, which show that different people from around the country were concerned about the same things. Most of this study is occupied with the contents of these letters, and how this

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<sup>30</sup> Boyce, *Public Opinion*, p. 225

<sup>31</sup> N. W. Thompson, *The People's Science. The Popular Political Economy of Exploitation and Crisis 1816-34* (1984) pp. 140, 216-7

compares with other sources of opinion. Part one discusses the public opinion issues that dominated the duke of Wellington's administration, principally Catholic Emancipation, distress and parliamentary reform. Part two is concerned with the popular perception of Wellington and the private interests of the correspondents. In short, how the duke was celebrated and exploited. Part three analyses the people and the context of letter writing. What other politicians did these correspondents write to, what happened to their letters, what was their motivation, and did they use common terms of reference? For a number of writers it is also possible to ascertain their occupations. This correspondence reveals how a section of the general public viewed the political system and one of its staunchest defenders. It can be used as a guide to the popular perception of a statesman, Prime Minister and a national hero during a period of economic upheaval and political discontent. It shows the interaction, and the unequal relationship, between the people and a member of the ruling elite.

## Part One: Public and Private Opinion

The duke of Wellington's cabinet post as Master General of the Ordnance afforded little controversy, although as a member of the Tory government which had supported the magistrates over Peterloo and opposed Queen Caroline, he had been subject to criticism from certain sections of the people.<sup>1</sup> It was only with the incapacity of Lord Liverpool, and the subsequent wrangling over his successor, that newspapers really became interested in Wellington's political manoeuvres. Before 1827 Wellington had been recognised as 'the warrior and the occasional diplomatist', now he was 'the politician and the minister'.<sup>2</sup> As Rev. Gleig (an acquaintance and future biographer of Wellington) commented on the duke's tour of the north during the recess of 1827:

Had he come among them [the people] fresh from his triumphs in the Peninsula and at Waterloo, they would have greeted him as heartily as their betters. But he was now a politician, a party politician, advocating, or being supposed to advocate, opinions of which they disapproved.<sup>3</sup>

The mixed press response to Wellington's battle with Canning in 1827 was echoed in January 1828 when he was appointed Prime Minister. Newspapers adopted positions depending on how they felt towards Wellington's supposed high Tory views.<sup>4</sup> *The Times*, an independently minded liberal paper that had been a strong supporter of Canning, was far from enthusiastic at the prospect of Wellington becoming Premier. Although they respected his 'high reputation', again and again the paper returned to Wellington's declaration in May

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<sup>1</sup> See G. Raudzens, 'The British Ordnance Department, 1815-1855', *Journal for the Society of Army Historical Research*, 57 (1979). Most biographies only mention Wellington's duties as Master General in passing. For example, Thompson, *Wellington after Waterloo*, p. 30; E. Longford, *Wellington. Pillar of State* (1972) pp. 44, 57; P. Guedalla, *The Duke* (1931, 1940) p. 310. Stocqueler described the period 1823-26 as 'a blank in his Grace's public existence', *Life of Wellington*, Vol. 2, p. 93

<sup>2</sup> Stocqueler, *Life of Wellington*, vol. 2, p. 104

<sup>3</sup> Gleig, *Life of Wellington*, p. 335

<sup>4</sup> M. S. Partridge, *The Duke of Wellington, 1769-1852: A Bibliography* (1990)



1827 that he would be 'mad' to become Prime Minister. He was unsuitable for the job: 'no man of military education, habits and character, could ever be dreamed of by the King of England as a fit person to discharge the duties of a Prime Minister'.<sup>5</sup> But what really disgusted *The Times*, was that Wellington intended to remain Commander-in-Chief. The people knew the constitution and would not tolerate it. His actions had 'appalled the public'. They even speculated that Wellington wanted the King isolated at Windsor so he could have total control, then 'nothing but a civil war could get him out.'<sup>6</sup>

Just as critical was the Whig *Morning Chronicle*. Again, they praised Wellington's military achievements but the duke was heavily criticised for signing the 'odious treaty' of Vienna. At Verona in 1822 he had done nothing for the independence of Spain. Indeed, 'when and where has he shewn himself favourable to the liberals of mankind or exhibited the least feelings for the people, by whose strong arm his victories were gained and his triumphs established.'<sup>7</sup> Why should Britain copy the continent in having military men as leaders? It was 'too German'.<sup>8</sup> Because he was a soldier, the *Morning Chronicle* believed that the duke had 'never had the leisure for inquiry' and as a result did not possess the necessary knowledge of, for example, the poor law or crime. It would be acceptable if, as a military man, he was only permitted to vote on military matters.<sup>9</sup>

The *Scotsman* was even more scathing: 'Ignorant of the state of the country, bigoted, illiberal, despising the people, and attached to measures of coercion and rigour.... If we wished to see the country covered with barracks, unpopular men thrust into all offices in church and state, taxes multiplied, Britain filled with discontent ... we would take the duke of Wellington and his friends for ministers.'<sup>10</sup> The *Liverpool Mercury* went further: 'when we consider that the duke of Wellington is the decided friend of the borough faction, the avowed and even ostentatious enemy to Catholic emancipation, and the staunch defender of

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<sup>5</sup> *The Times*, 4 February 1828

<sup>6</sup> *The Times*, 23 January 1828

<sup>7</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 18 January 1828

<sup>8</sup> *The Times*, 28 May 1828

<sup>9</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 22 January 1828

<sup>10</sup> In *Morning Chronicle*, 19 January 1828

the corn monopoly, we should shudder at the frightful prospect which threatens the country'. Surely Wellington did not need more money and honours when 'his family receives, already, from the pockets of this tax-ridden nation, about one hundred and twenty thousand pounds annually.'<sup>11</sup>

This was also William Cobbett's line of criticism, although he was more concerned with the corrupt system itself. Cobbett was not really bothered about Wellington holding the two offices of Premier and Commander-in-Chief, because he would do no more harm to the country than two people in these positions. The power (of patronage) attached to these offices was the real concern,<sup>12</sup> as was the fact that, by Cobbett's calculations, Wellington was £700,000 better off as a result of his services to the country.<sup>13</sup> But Cobbett did not criticise Wellington for becoming Premier: 'cannot the duke with perfect consistency, have taken the office, and hold the office, if he can show that no other man would take it.'<sup>14</sup>

This approach was adopted by the newspapers that supported Wellington's appointment. The ultra Tory *Standard* thought that Wellington had sacrificed 'taste and feeling' to become Prime Minister. They assumed Wellington did not want the job because he had said so.<sup>15</sup> The *Morning Post* believed that when Wellington stated that he was unfit for the job, he was simply being modest. Modesty, after all, was a characteristic of the 'truly great man.'<sup>16</sup>

These papers fervently supported Wellington and revelled in his military success. The *Courier* (known as 'Crawling Courier' because it cynically supported every administration whatever its composition) could not believe that the Catholic Association would dare to oppose 'the friend of his country - the saviour of it in its hour of greatest difficulty and danger!'<sup>17</sup> The *Standard* regarded Wellington as 'the greatest general of

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<sup>11</sup> In *Morning Chronicle*, 29 January 1828

<sup>12</sup> *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 26 January 1828

<sup>13</sup> *Political Register*, 29 March 1828. See chapter on Distress for more opinions on Wellington's wealth.

<sup>14</sup> *Political Register*, 26 January 1828

<sup>15</sup> *Standard*, 11 January 1828

<sup>16</sup> *Morning Post*, 28 January 1828

<sup>17</sup> *Courier*, 28 January 1828

modern times, and a diplomatist, second to none.<sup>18</sup> This was a favourite theme for the pro-Wellington papers: that the duke's international standing would benefit Britain. 'What man in the whole world is there so well acquainted with the relative interests, the strengths, and the weaknesses of the several states of Europe?', asked the *Standard*.<sup>19</sup> For the *Morning Post* no one in Europe possessed a greater knowledge of foreign affairs, and the *Courier* concurred with this view.<sup>20</sup> *John Bull* believed that Wellington was the only diplomatist in Europe to equal Metternich.<sup>21</sup>

The *Standard* challenged *The Times* on its campaign against Wellington holding joint offices. It used Marlborough and Washington as examples of great generals who also commanded the civil branch of government with equal success. Wellington was also to be praised because his administration 'utterly rejects all connexion with the newspapers.'<sup>22</sup> This was an attack upon Canning's, and by implication *The Times*'s, style of public endorsement politics.

Both favourable and opposition newspapers were in agreement over the duke's character traits. To the *Standard* he was modest, firm and sincere, and a defender of the constitution.<sup>23</sup> The *Morning Post* stressed his sense of duty.<sup>24</sup> The *Courier* even praised Wellington's style of speaking - 'going directly to the point' - that would simplify and shorten discussion.<sup>25</sup> *The Times* thought that the lack of debating skill was a major weakness, but he made up for this in other areas: 'he enjoys the reputation of strong sense, of strict integrity, and of unshaken firmness' (sentiments echoed by the *Morning Chronicle*).<sup>26</sup> In their view Wellington would also cut back on patronage and jobbing, which was a cause for celebration.

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<sup>18</sup> *Standard*, 21 January 1828

<sup>19</sup> *Standard*, 21 January 1828

<sup>20</sup> *Morning Post*, 22 January 1828, *Courier*, 31 January 1828

<sup>21</sup> In *Morning Chronicle*, 29 January 1828

<sup>22</sup> *Standard*, 4 February 1828

<sup>23</sup> *Standard*, 11 January & 29 March 1828

<sup>24</sup> *Morning Post*, 28 January 1828

<sup>25</sup> *Courier*, 30 January 1828

<sup>26</sup> *The Times*, 2 February 1828, *Morning Chronicle*, 22 January 1828

The duke of Wellington, then, had a definite public image in the various newspapers. He possessed integrity, firmness, sense and notions of honour and duty. This made him a strong administrator and a formidable political opponent.<sup>27</sup> While the duke's elevation to the Premiership did not generate much correspondence, save a few loyal addresses, the measures of his administration were widely commented upon. From 1828 to 1832 Wellington's correspondence was much more 'political' than hitherto. People wrote about the issues that directly impacted upon their lives, but remained quiet on those – such as foreign affairs or slavery – which did not. To quote from a recent study 'for the most part ... Britain under Wellington was concerned principally with domestic issues',<sup>28</sup> and the duke's correspondence bears this out. While his official correspondence and the press are filled with the problems of Greece, the Russo-Turkish war, Portugal, the French and Belgium revolutions, the people tended not to write on these issues. The number of letters on foreign matters surviving in the duke's papers is small compared with those written on domestic public opinion issues, a pattern followed by biographers.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the following analysis focuses on domestic issues because it is these issues which dominate the Wellington papers. As far as the people who wrote Wellington were concerned, he had to deal with three major issues – Catholic Emancipation, economic distress and parliamentary reform. Other problems undoubtedly occupied the duke's time – not least the difficulty of governing in an

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<sup>27</sup> For the most recent appraisal of Wellington's strengths, weaknesses and principles as Prime Minister, see Jupp, *Politics on eve of Reform*, pp. 41-46, 53, 59-62. Jupp describes the duke as a strong Prime Minister who governed pragmatically.

<sup>28</sup> Jupp, *Politics on eve of Reform*, p. 5

<sup>29</sup> Only 49 letters surviving on foreign matters compared with 230 on distress, over 180 on politics and reform and 124 on Emancipation. Both Thompson and Longford rarely mention the duke's foreign policy, and concentrate on domestic matters.

era of shifting political loyalties and complex ‘party’ alignments – but it is these three issues that will be considered in turn, starting with the Catholic question.

## Catholic Emancipation

On 8 April 1829 *The Times* was in jubilant mood. 'The Magna Charta of 1829' - Catholic Emancipation - had been successfully steered through parliament by a Tory administration with Whig support. The duke of Wellington was lauded in the highest possible terms, a far cry from the papers' stance a year before when the Prime Minister's military background and style of leadership had been severely criticised. Tory papers on the other hand - for example the *Standard* and the *Morning Post* - could not believe what had happened. After a stunned silence, when it was realised that one of their own, indeed their leader, had betrayed them in a most remarkable fashion, praise turned to contempt. The issue that had divided British politics for three decades had been settled.

The duke of Wellington was at the centre of the controversy surrounding Catholic Emancipation. As such he was subject to a wide range of pressures and influences, from commoners and Peers within parliament and from the people without. This chapter is not concerned with cabinet discussions, parliamentary wrangling, Peel's conversion or Wellington's intellectual development, all of which have been analysed in depth.<sup>1</sup> Rather it is intended to show how a 'public opinion' issue was made sense of and assimilated by the individuals who wrote to Wellington, some of whom then contributed to the public debate by publishing their opinions. It is possible to detect common themes and language in this

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<sup>1</sup> See W. Hinde, *Catholic Emancipation. A Shake to Men's Minds* (Oxford, 1992); R. W. Davis, 'The Tories, the Whigs and Catholic Emancipation 1827-1829', *English Historical Review*, 97 (1982); 'Wellington, the Constitution and Catholic Emancipation', *Parliamentary History*, 15, part 2 (1996); 'Wellington and the Open Question: The Issue of Catholic Emancipation, 1821-1829', *Albion*, 29 (1997); 'The House of Lords, the Whigs and Catholic Emancipation 1806-1829' (Forthcoming); G. I. T. Machin, *Catholic Emancipation in English Politics, 1820-1830* (Oxford, 1964); 'Canning, Wellington and the Catholic Question, 1827-1829', *English Historical Review* (1984); 'The Catholic Question and the Monarchy, 1827-1829', *Parliamentary History*, 16 (1997); K. A. Piggott, 'Wellington, Ireland and the Catholic Question, 1807-1827', Unpub. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Southampton, (1990); B. Hilton, 'The Ripening of Robert Peel', M. Beatley (ed.), *Public and Private Doctrine. Essays in British History presented to Maurice Cowling* (1993)

correspondence, which reveal the sentiments and prejudices of a section of the people. Before analysing these letters it is necessary to outline the context of this public opinion.

### **The Context: Public Opinions**

The Catholic Emancipation debate involved large numbers of people. Most regions of Britain and Ireland were affected as the public became involved in demonstrations, petitions and meetings. There was not a homogenised public opinion over Catholic relief. It is often stated that Emancipation was passed contrary to the wishes of the people, that the Commons ignored the views of the majority of the population who were firmly against any concession. This was, of course, English opinion. Irish opinion (arguably more important) was in favour. As Sydney Smith commented in 1826, the majority of Irish Protestants voted for Emancipation because they 'see and know the state of their own country'.<sup>2</sup> The House of Commons increasingly acknowledged this opinion (as did Peel and Wellington) which was reflected by majorities in favour of concession.<sup>3</sup> Opinion was also reflected in petitions.

Hundreds and thousands of individuals expressed themselves collectively by petitioning parliament. Many more people petitioned in favour of Catholic relief than is commonly supposed. The figures often cited for the number of petitions presented (to the Commons, up to the first reading of the relief bill on 10 March) are these: 957 against claims and only 357 in favour.<sup>4</sup> These figures are accurate but misleading. Petitioning did not stop on 10 March, and if a longer perspective is taken, from February when the measure was announced to April when it was passed, the numbers are very different indeed. Taking both houses of parliament, there were 4,730 petitions against and 3,938 in favour of

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<sup>2</sup> F. O'Ferrall, *Catholic Emancipation. Daniel O'Connell and the Birth of Irish Democracy 1820-30* (Dublin, 1985) p. 22

<sup>3</sup> See O'Ferrall, *Catholic Emancipation* pp. 103, 182; L. Colley, *Britons. Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (1994) p. 328: 'the gradual but relentless shift of opinion beloved of Whig historians really did take place on this issue and was recognised as doing so at the time'.

<sup>4</sup> For example see the *Annual Register*, 1829, p. 36, B. Ward, *The Eve of Catholic Emancipation* (1911-12) Vol. 3, p. 248

Catholic claims. In 1828 there was actually a majority of petitions in favour of Catholic claims of 799 to 611. The number of signatures is another matter. Anti-Catholic petitions frequently boasted more signatures than those in favour of claims did. To counter this the pro-Catholics claimed that these signatures were tainted - the marks of children, criminals, idiots and women could be detected, to say nothing of the scare-mongering tactics used to obtain them. In this way the pro-Catholics could claim the moral high ground. Numbers alone are not sufficient. But it is clear that more people participated in petitioning than was previously believed and that a greater proportion of these supported Catholic claims.

Petitions did not appear out of nowhere and the newspaper press were important instruments in influencing and reflecting opinion. The newspapers' assumptions about the duke of Wellington coloured their approach to Emancipation in January 1829. *The Times* used the repeal of the Test and Corporations Acts to launch a campaign trying to persuade Wellington of the virtues of passing Emancipation. It declared that Wellington possessed a 'pacific spirit'<sup>5</sup> and that he was 'anxious for the final settlement of a subject which has so frequently agitated the empire'.<sup>6</sup> The campaign continued in June 1828, after Wellington's speech of the tenth, and by the sixteenth, *The Times* no longer thought that the duke would stain his honour by not doing something for the Catholics. *The Times* continued its policy of persuasion in 1829. Their praise was intended to create expectation, their criticism served to remind Wellington about the strength of public opinion. After Lord Anglesey's (the Irish Lord Lieutenant) recall and the publication of his correspondence, *The Times* was the only paper to pick up on the implications. Wellington was praised as 'having Mr Canning's views towards Emancipation, and ten times Mr Canning's power to realise them'.<sup>7</sup> But if he failed, the paper would again take up arms - 'the arms of opinion, of national interest and justice'.<sup>8</sup> By the 30 January they were convinced (by keeping an eye on the court circular and following cabinet meetings) that a measure of relief would be introduced. *The Times* were the first paper to say so, and from then on Wellington was extravagantly praised: 'we

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<sup>5</sup> *The Times*, 23 April 1828

<sup>6</sup> *The Times*, 16 May 1828

<sup>7</sup> *The Times*, 3 January 1829

<sup>8</sup> *The Times*, 6 January 1829



stand too near the foundation of this statesman's monument to measure its full eminence or proportions'.<sup>9</sup>

The *Morning Chronicle* felt that Dr Patrick Curtis' letter showed Wellington's 'intention of not attempting to settle the Catholic question this year'.<sup>10</sup> The duke was still thought to be 'inactive' on the 17 January, but by the 30th 'indications of approaching apostasy certainly are whispered'. The next day they had it on 'good authority' that a measure would be introduced, and on the 6 February (the day after the king's speech) they started to praise the duke: 'The duke of Wellington is lauded to the skies by all parties', although he had 'no choice' and had been 'compelled to yield'.

The *Standard* believed that Wellington had withdrawn his opposition to repeal to save the religious peace of the country.<sup>11</sup> When discussing a concordat with the Pope, who better to have negotiating than Wellington. It was a 'foul and unmerited libel' to suppose that he would 'barter all the fences and guards erected around the constitution.'<sup>12</sup> The *Morning Post* also thought that repeal was a necessity, but considered it a 'hazardous innovation'.<sup>13</sup> Prior to January 1829 they had given Wellington the benefit of the doubt, but on the 13 April 1829 The *Standard* was in melancholy mood: 'we write in the last day, perhaps, of the British constitution'. The Tory press was stunned, and had waited until the last moment to accept defeat. The *Morning Post* attacked Dr Curtis as a Jesuit, his letter intended to throw 'that illustrious hero and statesman off his guard.'<sup>14</sup> On 31 January they strongly refuted *The Times*' claim that Wellington was to pass Emancipation: 'that the duke of Wellington intends to do something for Ireland, we are well aware; but it will be something not altogether palatable to the pro-Popery people.' On the 2 and 4 February they reasserted Wellington's hostility to Catholic relief. The King's speech came as a shock: 'like a thunderbolt in a cloudless sky'. It was 'melancholy and awful', the result of 'timidity,

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<sup>9</sup> *The Times*, 14 April 1829

<sup>10</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 7 January 1829. Curtis was Archbishop of Armagh and an acquaintance of the duke's.

<sup>11</sup> *Standard*, 18 April 1828

<sup>12</sup> *Standard*, 5 April 1828

<sup>13</sup> *Morning Post*, 26 February 1828

<sup>14</sup> *Morning Post*, 2 January 1829

tergiversation and intrigue'. It must have been hard for those people who had vehemently declared Wellington's opposition to Emancipation, to be proved so dramatically wrong. It would cause the *Post* pain to oppose Wellington and Peel, but they would do so. By 25 March Wellington was a 'weakened' man, distinguished but 'unhappily misled'.<sup>15</sup>

The *Courier* was equally stunned. After taking a similar line to the *Morning Post* over Dr Curtis' letter, the paper did its best not to mention Emancipation at all. On the 5 February, they were still referring to Wellington's strength 'in our foreign relations'. They did not criticise Wellington for changing his opinion - 'man is the creature of circumstance' - or attack the duke at all, but strongly opposed the measure.<sup>16</sup> The *Courier* even made a virtue of having always supported the duke, unlike those papers who had sneered and scoffed when he became Prime Minister. By the 10 March, they believed that Wellington had only passed Catholic Emancipation out of 'a sense of duty'. On the 15 April the *Courier* was stating that Wellington's standing would now be even higher in Europe, to Britain's benefit.

The other members of the Tory press were not as charitable. The *Morning Journal* (which Wellington successfully sued) called for his impeachment. The *Standard* campaigned to get Wellington and Peel removed from office. The *St James' Chronicle*, the *Age*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, the *Monthly Magazine* and *Frasier's Magazine* all called for Wellington's resignation. The duke was often referred to as the 'dictator' and, incredibly for papers that had praised his achievements, his martial characteristics and his soldiering were criticised. There were also attacks upon the duke's friends and family.<sup>17</sup>

William Cobbett offered an accurate appraisal of Wellington's and the newspapers' position in February 1829: 'The duke of Wellington had never, that I know of, explicitly declared eternal hostility to all Catholic claims being granted', but people supported 'him upon the presumption that he was an enemy to that concession.'<sup>18</sup> This presumption was

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<sup>15</sup> *Morning Post*, 13 April 1829

<sup>16</sup> *Courier*, 6 & 7 February 1829

<sup>17</sup> See J. J. Sack, 'Wellington and the Tory Press, 1828-1830', N. Gash, (ed.), *Wellington. Studies in the Military and Political Career of the First Duke of Wellington* (Manchester, 1990) pp. 164-166

<sup>18</sup> *Political Register*, 28 February 1829

grossly misjudged. The popular image of the duke of Wellington failed to adapt to the changing situation after June 1828. Admittedly, given Wellington's secrecy there was very little to forewarn people of the change in his thinking.

Opinion was formed, and informed, by other means. Pamphlets, tracts and handbills were circulated to exert an influence. In 1826 for example, 100,000 copies of the Catholic Declaration and Address were in print.<sup>19</sup> Both sides realised the importance of disseminating information and propaganda to stimulate discussion, to persuade or simply to sustain myth and prejudice. In the Wellington archive there are some 200 pamphlets concerned with Catholic Emancipation. Most were published in 1828, and all viewpoints are represented, although those written by anti-Catholics are the most common.<sup>20</sup> There are reprints of the speeches of key politicians; detailed theological discussions, history lessons and comparisons between Britain and Catholic Europe; treaties on securities, tithes and oaths. Most of these are highly prejudiced, but the authors tried to present rational arguments and well thought-out ideas in order to appear respectable. There are also pamphlets aimed at lower down the social scale, such as one entitled '*Look about you; a dialogue between a tradesman and a farmer*', which tried to capture the feelings, if not the language, of a typical Protestant freeborn Englishman.

These pamphlets were at the forefront of the debate over Catholic claims. They helped to produce an environment of claim and counter-claim, which sustained the speeches in parliament and the posturing of politicians and thus kept the issue before the people. It is against this background - when Catholic Emancipation was 'the question that at present agitates the whole kingdom'<sup>21</sup> - that some people choose to write to the duke of Wellington. Some of these writers were themselves pamphleteers. Thomas Newenham, John Cooke

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<sup>19</sup> R. W. Linker, 'The English Roman Catholics and Emancipation: The Politics of Persuasion', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 27 (1976) p. 34

<sup>20</sup> Cockton, Wellington Pamphlet Collection

<sup>21</sup> WP1/1002/21, 11 March 1829

Rogers and James Devereux all sent Wellington copies of their work, as well as writing private correspondence.<sup>22</sup>

After the Clare election in July 1828 Wellington started serious work on the question in secret, with only Peel, and later Lord Chancellor Lyndhurst in the know. As Wellington himself stated to Marquis Camden:

The complaint made is that nobody was informed; that all are taken by surprise; that I acted with duplicity &c &c. They forget that, if I had breathed a whisper to anybody, the factions of all colours would have set to work, and the plan would have been defeated.<sup>23</sup>

The first the public knew of any possible concessions was on 1 January 1829 with the publication of letters between Anglesey, Wellington and Curtis. And this was only confirmed (despite speculation by *The Times*) when the King's speech was reported on 5 February. The Tory faithful had only been informed officially the night before. The details of the Bill were then not known until 5 March when Peel introduced it. Indeed Wellington was desirous that the people were kept out of discussions. As he stated to a correspondent who wanted to call a public meeting in Liverpool: 'my colleagues and I have avoided taking any steps to appeal to the public on the measures now under discussion in parl; and I am anxious to persevere in the same course'.<sup>24</sup> Therefore the vast majority of the letters written to Wellington were from (deliberately) uninformed people. Uninformed about the actual measure that is. The arguments over Catholic claims had been in the public sphere at least since the Act of Union. In 1829 the people used the knowledge acquired over the preceding twenty years to influence the outcome in some way with a positive suggestion here or a warning of the consequences there.

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<sup>22</sup> See WP 1/941/2, 10 July 1828; 1/973/2, 27 December 1828; J. E. Devereux, *Duke of Wellington, Lord Killeen and Lord Plunkett* (1828); J. C. Rogers, *Letter of a Twenty Pound Freeholder, on the Subject of the Forty-Shilling Freeholders, of Great Britain and Ireland* (1826)

<sup>23</sup> Wellington, 2nd Duke of (ed.), *Despatches, Correspondence and Memoranda of Field Marshal Duke of Wellington from 1818 to 1832* (8 Vols., 1867-80) [WCD] Vol. V, p. 487

<sup>24</sup> WP 1/1001/21, 5 March 1829, Wellington to John Gladstone

Writing a letter to a member of the ruling elite was seen by some of these correspondents as a right and a duty. One correspondent would not have intruded upon the duke's time 'if there had not been instances in all ages, of the most humble individual, being the suggestor [sic], of what wisdom and talent, have acted upon'. Or, as another writer commented: 'God may sometimes make use of the peasant to instruct the prince'.<sup>25</sup> So while it was a right to communicate ideas to your representatives, it was also believed that they had a duty to read, and if necessary, to act on suggestions made. Although Wellington disagreed - 'It is no part of the Duke's duty to explain his intentions to those gentlemen who do him the favour to write to him upon publick subjects'<sup>26</sup> - there are numerous examples in the Wellington archive of letters that the duke did act upon. For example a letter by James Smith of Chatham, Kent, claiming that signatures for an anti-Catholic petition had been improperly collected, was forwarded to the local Peer (Lord Bexley) who replied that he would check the signatures for duplicates, minors and idiots.<sup>27</sup> Letter writing could make a difference.

It was not God alone that instructed the peasant. Newspapers, pamphlets and all kinds of political reportage empowered the people with information, which they deliberated over and in some instances acted upon. Frequently letters were written because of what the writer had observed in that day's paper. This is the case with correspondents writing to both Peel and Wellington.<sup>28</sup> Thomas Ashfield, writing from London, had seen it 'confirmed by the newspapers' that the government was to make concessions to the Catholics for the sake of Ireland.<sup>29</sup> Edward Purden, of Dublin, wrote because he saw Anglesey's letter to Dr Curtis in the morning paper.<sup>30</sup> And Henry Livesley (also from Dublin) wrote in response to a

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<sup>25</sup> WP 1/973/2, 27 December 1828; 1/988/22, 8 January 1829

<sup>26</sup> WP 1/1011/15, 20 April 1829

<sup>27</sup> WP 1/1003/12, 15 March 1829

<sup>28</sup> See Peel Papers, BL Add. Mss. 40374 f. 162, 6 March; 40375 f. 289, 31 March; 40377 f.165, 28 April 1825.

<sup>29</sup> WP 1/972/13, 22 December 1828

<sup>30</sup> WP 1/987/7, 1 January 1829

speech printed in 'the Sun newspaper'.<sup>31</sup> Wellington's standard response to these writers was: 'The Duke recommends to him as a general rule to believe nothing that he reads in the newspapers respecting the Duke or his intentions'.<sup>32</sup> As a matter of fact, by no means all of Wellington's correspondents agreed with the press, but newspapers did get people thinking about issues, which prompted some to then voice their concerns.

Some of the correspondents contributed to the public debate by publishing their ideas. The most prolific was perhaps James Edward Devereux of Wexford, who had been involved with the Catholic agitation since at least 1793, and who wrote on various aspects of the debate, from foreign perspectives to the clause against Jesuits and monastic orders.<sup>33</sup> Other examples include John Clayton and Thomas Newenham. Interestingly, two of these writers preferred to use pseudonyms for their public writings. Devereux used 'Hibernus', and Clayton 'Justitia', whereas Newenham remained anonymous.<sup>34</sup>

In the highly charged atmosphere of early 1829, amidst parliamentary debates, petitioning and public meetings, a significant number of people wrote to the Prime Minister. These letters show the existence of a different opinion, one which does not necessarily correspond with that found in the press. Like the pamphlets the duke received, most of these letters were written by people who opposed concession. Some of the themes and schemes proposed were discussed in newspapers, pamphlets and petitions, as will be shown. But some of the important parliamentary discussions were not picked up on. In this sense, the people were discerning. They were able to make a judgement on what concerned them and what could be ignored.

## Correspondence

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<sup>31</sup> WP 1/1002/26, 12 March 1829

<sup>32</sup> WP 1/1057/21, 22 November 1829

<sup>33</sup> WP 1/1047/8, 13 & 29 September 1829; *Morning Chronicle*, 8 April 1829

<sup>34</sup> See WP 1/1015/20, 4 May 1829; 941/2, 10 July 1828

The duke of Wellington received 124 letters on Catholic Emancipation, most of which were written in the first four months of 1829 making it by far the most common topic of discussion in his correspondence that year. People wrote on all aspects of the Emancipation debate. The most common themes were the question of securities for the constitution now that relief was to be granted and the potential consequences of the concession. There were letters concerning petitions, the suppression of the Catholic threat and those suggesting possible measures that might be adopted instead. A sizeable number of writers denied that the Catholic disabilities were the real cause of discontent: social and economic factors were more important, especially the education of the Catholic masses.

This correspondence to Wellington was not unique. For example, Robert Peel received nearly 300 letters on Emancipation in only two years. The pattern is very different, but the contents of the letters are similar. In 1825 Peel received 269 letters on Emancipation, in 1829 only 27. Peel received this voluminous correspondence in 1825 because he was at the head of the opposition to Burdett's motion in the House of Commons. As one correspondent noted: 'To whom should a Protestant address himself at the present moment on any matter with the Roman Catholic Question, as relating to Ireland, with so much propriety as you'. As Home Secretary, Peel was responsible for Ireland, but it was because of the views he held that people wrote to him.<sup>35</sup> He also received many petitions against Catholic claims. It is arguable that this correspondence convinced Peel of the strength of anti-Catholic feeling. (This is the case with Wellington's correspondence for 1831, except then he was convinced of the anti-reform feeling). 1829 is a different matter. Either Peel received fewer letters because of his conversion, or the falling off in numbers reinforced his view that opinion was changing. The latter may have been the case, but his correspondence did not bring about his conversion as it was written after the measure was announced. However it may well have convinced Peel that he was right to change his mind.

People wrote to Peel and Wellington on the same issues, but there are important differences. In 1825 they may have been concerned with securities, the powers of the Pope

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<sup>35</sup> BL Add. Mss. 40374, f330, 15 March 1825. For more examples of these sentiments see 40373, f338, 25 February; 40374, f144, 4 March; 40376, f350, 18 April 1825

and the need for education, but in 1829, while some continued to discuss these matters, others concentrated on Peel's position. He received letters congratulating him on his conversion and constituents wrote on the resignation of his seat for Oxford.<sup>36</sup> People wrote to the newspapers on the same issues.<sup>37</sup> These subjects do not arise in the Wellington papers because they did not concern the duke. They were about Peel.

Wellington, although presumed an ultra-Tory, was never a die-hard over Emancipation. His correspondence does not reflect the considerable hostility felt to him as a result of his tergiversation. Despite the fact that it was Peel who framed the majority of the Bill, Wellington was at the head of affairs, and as such, he was the person who attracted the letters in 1829.

## I

One of the favoured tactics for opponents of Emancipation was to stress the social and economic problems of Ireland and to ask how these were to be solved by allowing prosperous Catholics to sit at Westminster. O'Connell stressed the universalising benefits of Emancipation in order to mobilise as many Irishmen as possible against laws that made them second class citizens. Opponents tried to belittle Catholic claims for citizenship rights by pointing out that it was not the real grievance of the majority of the people and therefore not the appropriate solution.

Michael Sadler, the factory reformer, in his maiden speech against Catholic claims, adopted this approach. Absenteeism, a lack of internal investment, no jobs, and a growing pauper population were the real grievances of the Irish people.<sup>38</sup> These were also the themes that the correspondents were concerned with, and if these were the real causes of discontent then, in the words of one pamphleteer 'that Catholic Emancipation will prove a cure for the

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<sup>36</sup> BL Add. Mss. 40398, f123, 211, 229, 244, 263, February 1829; 40399, f11, 38, 121, March 1829

<sup>37</sup> See *The Times*, 23, 27 February 1829

<sup>38</sup> Hinde, *Emancipation*, pp. 172-3



many internal diseases of Ireland is about as probable ... that a new shirt is a cure for the scarlet fever'.<sup>39</sup>

Some of Wellington's correspondents were in agreement, and they highlighted Ireland's economic problems. One writer thought the Corn Bill of 1815 was the 'leading cause of distress and misery'<sup>40</sup>, but more common were the grievances resulting from the Protestant landowning ascendancy. Absenteeism, coupled with lack of investment, high land prices, sub-division of lands - encouraged by landowners in order to obtain more voting support - and rack-renting by middlemen, were at the centre of the economic system which still treated the Irish as a conquered race. The taxation of absentee landlords and increased investment were more appropriate solutions than Emancipation. The privilege of sending Catholics to Westminster, it was argued, would not create jobs. The waters, bogs and lands of Ireland should be furnished with investment, and if the people still could not find work a poor law should be introduced.<sup>41</sup> Although Wellington did not believe that a poor law was the solution,<sup>42</sup> he continually blamed the absentee landlords for many of Ireland's economic problems. As he wrote to Peel, twenty months after the passage of Emancipation:

until we can get the absentees to reside on their properties, or to dispose of them by sale to others who will reside, or can get some money out of their pockets to be laid out in the Country, we shall do but little good in Ireland.<sup>43</sup>

Wellington had considered this problem over many years. In 1824 he was suggesting compulsory residence or fines for absentee landlords.<sup>44</sup> Ireland would benefit if landowners spent their money in the local community. The people would then be brought into a market

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<sup>39</sup> Q. G., 'Few Hints on Irish Matters, transmitted to ... the Duke of Wellington, From Windsor Forest' (1828)

<sup>40</sup> WP 1/923/12, 24 March 1828

<sup>41</sup> WP 1/1011/16, 20 April 1829

<sup>42</sup> WCD, vol. vii, p. 112

<sup>43</sup> WCD, vol. vi, p. 402, 11 January 1830. This is a reoccurring theme in Wellington's correspondence. Also see, vol. vii, p. 111, 7 July 1830, Wellington to the duke of Northumberland. It was the landlords' responsibility to encourage their estates, not the government's.

<sup>44</sup> Piggott, Wellington and Catholic Question, p. 175

relationship, instead of the present system where the people suffered 'because they do not possess even the small sum of money necessary to buy a supply of food'.<sup>45</sup> A correspondent also believed that Ireland was suffering from a loss of proprietors, and to bring them back trade, farming and manufacturing all needed to be improved.<sup>46</sup> Thomas Newenham, writing from Cheltenham, adopted a similar approach. In England, he argued, the middle class through aggregate wealth and numbers, made up the public opinion, but in Ireland, the lowest class were the largest in terms of size and total income, and their opinion was dangerous. A strong, independent middle class needed to be encouraged to assert itself over a lowest class who were under the control of agitators and priests. Social reform, and especially education, was vital.<sup>47</sup> It must be noted that while Wellington agreed with many of his correspondents on the need for economic reform (he also drew up a list of amendments to the Bog Drainage Bill which failed in 1830),<sup>48</sup> this was a separate issue. He did not support these as an alternative to Emancipation, but as a complement to it. Emancipation was a political measure.

Ireland's problems were not just economic. Many people felt that Irish society also had to be reformed. The people laboured under the weight of supporting two churches, so the tithes question needed to be addressed. The Catholics suffered from early and improvident marriages, encouraged by the priests so they could charge for the service. So they had to be educated. The exploitation of the people by the priests was, as these writers saw it, the main problem. Ireland needed to be rescued from popery and for many education was the only way to achieve this. For example, John Fitzsimmons proposed 'education ... without religious distinction'.<sup>49</sup> This debate was central to the battle of winning the hearts and minds of the Irish peasantry for Protestantism.

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<sup>45</sup>WCD, vol. vii, p. 111

<sup>46</sup> WP 1/995/25, 10 February 1829

<sup>47</sup> WP 1/970/1, n.d. (1828)

<sup>48</sup> WCD vol. vii, p. 80, 10 June 1830; B. Gordon, *Economic Doctrine and Tory Liberalism, 1824 -1830* (1980) p. 81; Jupp, *Politics on eve of Reform*, pp. 101, 163

<sup>49</sup> WP 1/990/11, n.d. (1829)

The evangelical proselytising of the 'second reformation' during the 1820s heightened the conflict between Protestants and Catholics. Numerous bible and missionary societies sprang up and toured Ireland giving out bibles, in an attempt to educate (convert) the Irish peasantry away from the evils of popery. These tours often caused a violent and defensive backlash, and pushed many people into the arms of the Catholic Association.<sup>50</sup> Some of Wellington's correspondents agreed with James Edward Gordon, the founder of the Reformation Society (who wrote to Peel), that the economic problems of Ireland would never be solved until the problem of Catholicism had been sorted out. As J O Glover stated to Peel, to 'christianise Ireland' would be to save it, and his plan of 'evangelicalising the country ... would strike at once at the root of the evil'.<sup>51</sup>

An anonymous writer from Cork sent Wellington a plan for educating the lower order of Catholics. Their ignorance, he argued, was allowing Priests and demagogues to corrupt the country.<sup>52</sup> Thomas Newenham followed Gordon's reasoning very closely. The 24 prelates of the Church of Rome appointed 2,000 parish priests who influenced four and a half million people. To make matters worse the Jesuits were converting more and more Protestants. Economic measures such as a poor law or a tax on absentees, while useful, did not tackle the main problem, the 'numerical preponderance of Romanists':

To rescue Ireland, and perhaps eventually to rescue England also from the calamities ... the hitherto successful labours of education, Reformation, tract and Bible Societies ... [should] be prosecuted upon a suitably extensive scale, countenanced and protected by government.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> O'Ferrall, *Catholic Emancipation*, pp. 46, 62, 68, 166-9; J. Wolffe, *The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain 1829-1860* (Oxford, 1991) pp. 29-41

<sup>51</sup> BL Add. Mss. 40373, ff240-1, 25 February 1825; Wolffe, *Protestant Crusade*, p. 34; 40375, f365, n.d. (1825)

<sup>52</sup> WP 1/933/1, 22 May 1828

<sup>53</sup> WP 1/954/22, 23 September 1828

This view was thoroughly supported by William Lee of Tipperary, who believed that the best guide to the success of the Bible societies was the violent outcry of their foes, the priests.<sup>54</sup>

Other writers advocated home colonisation schemes where peasants would be put to useful and profitable labour,<sup>55</sup> and the Society for the Improvement of Ireland campaigned for money from the government to aid its employment plans, as did numerous other charities. Wellington showed some sympathy for public works schemes that promoted employment, but he was uneasy about using government money.<sup>56</sup> In a period of laissez-faire economics, tight public spending and disagreement over Ireland's problems, these correspondents were ultimately unsuccessful in obtaining official backing for their schemes. And when Emancipation became law, Ireland's economic problems remained.

## II

After the announcement of the Government's intention to bring forward a measure of Catholic relief in February 1829, Wellington received many angry letters demanding reasons for his apostasy. On the 28th the duke wrote to the Bishop of Salisbury defending his position and asking his critic what he would have done in his place:

I have always considered that question [Emancipation] as one of civil policy, and I earnestly entreat those who will come to discuss it in parliament to consider well the state of Ireland and of this country in relation to it. I particularly entreat your lordship to consider the mode of governing Ireland if this question is not settled, and then to find somebody who will carry into execution that plan of government.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> WP 1/1011/16, 20 April 1829

<sup>55</sup> WP 1/1001/12, 3 March 1829; 1010/18, 16 April 1829; 1004/37, 26 March 1829. See *Universal Distress* chapter

<sup>56</sup> WCD, vol. vii, p. 314. Wellington to Maurice Fitzgerald, 22 October 1830

<sup>57</sup> WCD, vol. v, p. 514

This quote sums up perfectly Wellington's and the Government's position. Catholic Emancipation was a political issue and it was expedient - a matter of government itself - to provide something for the Catholics if Ireland was to be governed. This was the approach Wellington took with the King - for instance his memorandum of 1 August 1828 - and in his speeches in the Lords. To quote Machin: 'It succeeded because it seemed the only way of preventing civil war in Ireland'.<sup>58</sup> Interestingly, Hilton has noted that Peel did not use these arguments in 1829. While Wellington adopted a pragmatic stance, Peel's was an 'intellectual conversion'.<sup>59</sup> Outside Westminster, and to the opponents of the Bill, Emancipation was seen in a totally different light. A political decision it may have been, but the popular debates and arguments centred on Catholic beliefs and practices. Many people used the old arguments about the Catholic faith to whip up hostility to an objectionable measure. These correspondents did not consider the practical problem of governing Ireland; they just reacted.

Despite the march of intellect and the shifting of opinion reflected in the House of Commons, considerable numbers of people were still angered by the prospect of giving political power to Catholics. Since the settlement of 1689 Britain had prospered, the Empire had grown and the nation had found domestic peace and happiness. The Anglican church was an integral part of this settlement. The constitution had stood the test of time, and had attained its excellence after a long struggle with popery - usually in the form of Catholic France.<sup>60</sup> 'Protestantism and Popery were contrasted at every point'; it 'had originated in a revolt against popery and was in consequence as good as popery was bad.'<sup>61</sup> For anti-Catholics therefore it was ridiculous to talk of admitting decided enemies into the realm of the constitution. The constitution was tolerant of other religions, but freedom of worship and concession granted in wartime were totally different to civil equality. These die-hard

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<sup>58</sup> Machin, *Catholic Emancipation*, p. 20

<sup>59</sup> Hilton, *Ripening of Robert*, pp. 71-77. The county Clare election was a convenient pretext; for the argument that Peel was a pragmatist see N. Gash, *Mr. Secretary Peel. The Life of Sir Robert Peel to 1830* (1961)

<sup>60</sup> See G. F. A. Best, 'The Protestant Constitution and its Supporters 1820-29', *Transactions of Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, Vol. 8 (1958); Colley, *Britons*; Hinde, *Catholic Emancipation*.

<sup>61</sup> Best, *Protestant Constitution*, p. 110

opponents doubted whether Catholics could be trusted as loyal subjects (or more accurately loyal members of the ruling executive) because they owed allegiance to a foreign power.<sup>62</sup>

For Protestants past events proved that Catholics could not be trusted. It was dangerous to give them political power: 'witness the blood-stained book of martyrs, the inquisition'. The Catholics' history was 'fraught with perjury and with blood'.<sup>63</sup> This language may have been rare in these letters but the sentiment behind them - extreme distrust and fear because of past events - was common. Catholicism was labelled superstitious and ignorant, 'a false religion' and an 'iniquitous, false and damnable system' whose members practised priestcraft.<sup>64</sup> Such ingrained prejudice was not formed overnight and nor was it to be changed simply because the situation in Ireland had altered.

The present principles of Catholicism were strongly suspected. Catholics' exclusive right to salvation and their not keeping faith with heretics were often referred to. In the Wellington letters the most popular charges were divided allegiance and the power of the Pope and influence of the priests. A foreign power - the Pope - had control over the bishops and priests, who in turn commanded loyalty from the people. This was unacceptable. The concern was that in spiritual and temporal matters, Catholics owed allegiance to the Pope and not the King of England.<sup>65</sup> In the words of one pamphleteer: 'they believe that the Pope is the universal and infallible head of the church throughout the world - the first and greatest man upon Earth ... to whom all spiritual as well as temporal obedience and honour is only due'.<sup>66</sup> One writer, from Axbridge in Somerset, even believed that the Pope had used his power to make an appointment to a 'vacant canonry in the cathedral church of Wells!'<sup>67</sup> One

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<sup>62</sup> Best, *Protestant constitution*, p.86

<sup>63</sup> H. Cole, *Brief Appeal to the British People: Showing the Real Nature of the Catholic Claims, and the Bounden Duty of every True Protestant, Whether Citizen, Commoner, Lord, or Sovereign, to Resist Them* (1829)

<sup>64</sup> For sentiments such as these see WP 1/1011/16, 23; 1012/25, April 1829

<sup>65</sup> WP 1/998/17, 24 February 1829; 940/17, 14 July 1828; 987/25, 3 January 1829

<sup>66</sup> 'Julius', *Letter to the King on the Subject of Catholic Emancipation; Showing the Impolicy, inutility, and Great Danger of the Measure; Praying an Immediate Dissolution of Parliament, and the Formation of a Purely Protestant Administration* (1829)

<sup>67</sup> WP 1/999/10, 28 February 1829

of Peel's correspondents in 1825 felt that the Pope was too powerful, and suggested a charge of high treason against any British subject who communicated with the foreign prince.<sup>68</sup> The greatest fear, and logical conclusion, was that this authority would encroach on politics: 'The pages of history furnish abundant proof of the ... popish clergy, having once acquired preponderant spiritual power, lose no opportunity of usurping civil authority.' Although individual Catholics appeared to this writer to be 'most amiable', 'their religion has not advanced in progressive improvement with themselves'.<sup>69</sup>

Only one writer, in August 1828, saw that the Emancipation campaign could have a wider political relevance. Dr James Wright had witnessed first hand a fund raising meeting in Philadelphia where nationalist campaigning had been blatant, and he feared that Emancipation was but the first step to independence. Another (anonymous) writer feared the priests for political reasons, but did not elaborate on his concerns.<sup>70</sup> In the 1820s the battles over the second reformation and Catholic relief dominated Irish agitation. Repeal became a powerful appeal after Emancipation had been achieved, when it became apparent that relief had not solved most of Ireland's problems. The Act of Union, rather than the veto on Catholics sitting at Westminster, became the symbol of oppression, intolerance and neglect.

### III

When it became clear that two 'Protestants' were to guide a measure of Catholic relief through parliament, opponents of the Bill tried to impress upon Wellington and Peel the need to include a number of securities against the perceived threat. Typical of the people who wrote on the question of securities was Rev Dr Wilkins of Nottingham. Assuming that some measure of Catholic Emancipation was to be passed his main concern was the protection of the constitution from foreign influence. In his view this could be achieved by a range of measures: no foreigner to be ordained by any British Catholic bishop, Catholics to

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<sup>68</sup> BL Add. Mss. 40373, f340, n.d (1825)

<sup>69</sup> J. C. Jennyns, *Collection of Passages from the Holy Bible, Which Combat the Errors of the Church of Rome, With a Preface, on the Claims of the Catholics* (1825)

<sup>70</sup> WP 1/946/2, 2 August 1828; 987/25, 3 January 1829

be barred from voting on matters relating to the Protestant church or religion and no Roman Catholic to be 'either a lord chancellor - a secretary of state - a first lord of the treasury - commander in chief of the army or navy - nor one of the King's household'.<sup>71</sup>

The question of securities was central to the debate surrounding Catholic claims. If some measure of Emancipation was to be granted then it was widely believed that safeguards had to be implemented to protect the established church. By 1829 the arguments for and against securities - dating back to the Act of Union, itself a kind of security - had been stated and re-stated, but they were still of fundamental importance. The need for securities was based on the fear of papal power and influence, and the perceived consequences of granting Catholics political rights. The Catholic Church was believed to be more cunning and mischievous than the Church of England. It was also assumed that without necessary securities any measure of relief would not pass through parliament, due to the opposition of the Lords.

The duke of Wellington had long been a fervent supporter of securities and he continued to advocate them until the Bill was drafted. His memorandum of 1825 was based on securities, and it is one area where there is clear proof that the duke was influenced by one of his correspondents. Henry Phillpotts, Dean of Chester, and the duke corresponded extensively on this issue.<sup>72</sup> Wellington considered adequate securities to be a concordat with the Pope, with all communication between London and Rome going through the Home Office, state licensed and paid priests, a veto over nominees and, after the County Clare election, a change in the voting qualification.<sup>73</sup> All of these were intended to give the British State some control over Catholicism in order to limit the damage it could do. The people

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<sup>71</sup> WP 1/998/17, 24 February 1829. 'Roman Catholic' was used when the writer wished to stress the foreign aspect of the religion.

<sup>72</sup> K. Noyce, 'The duke of Wellington and the Catholic Question', N Gash (Ed), *Wellington. Studies in the Military and Political Career of the First Duke of Wellington* (Manchester, 1990) pp. 140, 146-7, 234-6, 268; Machin, *Wellington and Catholic Emancipation*, p. 198: 'The humble position which Phillpotts then occupied would scarcely have won him the favour of protracted correspondence with a Prime Minister unless the latter was deeply impressed with his suggestions'

<sup>73</sup> Thompson, *Wellington after Waterloo*, p. 84



who wrote letters on securities therefore were communicating with a man who shared a lot of their views. Despite being Prime Minister, however, Wellington did not get his own way. It was to be largely Peel's Bill. Peel recognised that the Oath of Supremacy - which denied that the Pope had any authority in the UK - was incompatible with any concordat. And any licensing or payment of priests would involve some acknowledgement of papal authority.<sup>74</sup> From January to March 1829 Wellington's securities were whittled away to nothing, except for clauses against monastic orders which were petty and never enforced. The special oath of allegiance and the alteration of the voting qualification for the 40 s. freeholders (technically a different measure, but fundamental to the whole package) remained.

Numerous correspondents wanted the power of the Catholic priesthood checked in some way, and this invariably meant payment and licensing. If the government paid Catholic priests, then they would not need to exploit the people for money (early 'improvident' marriages were mentioned) and the peasants would be better off as a result. More importantly - and this is where licensing was vital - the priesthood would then depend on the government for their livelihood and would have to act in an appropriate manner. Under this system, for example, the bishops would not be able to dismiss priests at will and the priests could not, say, excommunicate converts to the Protestant religion.<sup>75</sup> Dudley Perceval, who wrote to Wellington and Peel, was not satisfied that there were adequate securities and wanted the preamble of the Bill changed.<sup>76</sup>

It was precisely because this dependency would be created that these suggestions aroused so much hostility in Ireland. It was feared that priests would be turned into informers who would then have to ask permission to perform their duties.<sup>77</sup> As Eneas MacDonnell, the Catholic Association's agent in London, declared in his pamphlet *The*

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<sup>74</sup> Noyce, *Wellington and Catholic Question*, pp. 148-50

<sup>75</sup> WP 1/940/17, 14 July 1828; 961/28, 23 October 1828; 987/6, 1 January 1829; 998/7, 21 February 1829; 1008/3, 1 April 1829

<sup>76</sup> BL Add. Mss. 40398, f327, 27 February 1829; 40399, f55, f82, 16, 26 March 1829

<sup>77</sup> R. B. McDowell, *Public Opinion and Government Policy in Ireland 1801-1846* (1952) p. 94

*Catholic Question: letters on securities*, any such restrictions would be opposed because they were ‘unnecessary, offensive and mischievous’.<sup>78</sup>

A number of writers also concurred with Wellington over the oath to be taken before any Catholic MPs could be safely admitted to parliament. Loyalty to the Protestant constitution was a prerequisite and Catholics should have to agree not to disturb or upset the established religion.<sup>79</sup> This is precisely what happened with the re-written Oath of Allegiance. One writer wanted to go further, the ‘exclusion of Catholics in parliament from all discussions and votes on matters connected with the established churches’.<sup>80</sup> However, as ‘Britannicus’ observed in a letter to *The Times*, this exclusion was incompatible with the theory of parliamentary representation: ‘a member of the British parliament is elected by his constituents, and sent by them free and unfettered to represent their interests in the general assembly of the nation’.<sup>81</sup>

If Catholics were to be banned from voting on religious issues which did not concern them - for that was the implication - then it made sense to some writers that Catholics should only be elected by fellow Catholics, and that their numbers should be restricted. J C Nelson, from Armagh, wanted to see Catholic electoral colleges in each province of Ireland, which would return a maximum of twenty members. In Britain Catholics could elect ten MPs.<sup>82</sup> Another suggestion was that in Catholic regions, two MP’s should be elected but at least one must be a Protestant.<sup>83</sup> One writer in London advised that the Catholic franchise initially should be limited to certain counties only as an experiment. It would also prevent any ‘violent shock to the political machine’.<sup>84</sup> One of Peel’s correspondents wanted to allow only Catholic MPs who had been specified by name to sit in the Commons. These were to

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<sup>78</sup> E. MacDonnell, *The Catholic Question: Letters on Securities* (1829)

<sup>79</sup> WP 1/1004/39, 25 March 1829; Also see Epsilon’s letter to *The Times*, 9 March 1829

<sup>80</sup> ‘A Scotch Catholic’, *Letter to His Grace the Duke of Wellington,.... Respecting the ‘Securities’ necessary towards Emancipation* (1829)

<sup>81</sup> *The Times*, 7 February 1829. This proposal was brought up in Parliament

<sup>82</sup> WP 1/971/5, 8 December 1828

<sup>83</sup> WP 1/1069/21, 3 January 1829

<sup>84</sup> WP 1/996/17, 14 February 1829

be exceptions, similar to the working of an indemnity bill, and would not upset the constitution.<sup>85</sup> These writers were clearly concerned about parliament being over run with Catholic Members, which was of course never likely. As two correspondents noted, numbers alone were ample security.<sup>86</sup>

Some people believed that no measure was security enough against the Catholic threat: 'There is but one real security against Catholics, which is their utter exclusion from all political power'.<sup>87</sup> E C Wilson, of Manchester, asked 'is our sovereign George - King of Great Britain and Ireland asleep'. Surely if the King were awake he would declare all communication between Rome and British subjects to be illegal. The Catholics would 'then be emancipated indeed - from foreign bigotry, superstition and priestcraft'.<sup>88</sup> But others felt that communication was important. Three writers recommended a meeting between the two churches to discuss clerical doctrines. This way an understanding could be reached. Two of these correspondents cited as a precedent a conference held between Catholic and Protestant bishops in the reign of James I. One felt that this would 'remove all responsibility from your graces administration' if a solution was not hammered out. He neglected to mention what Wellington should do if this happened.<sup>89</sup>

At the other extreme there were writers who maintained that no securities were necessary. The oaths of allegiance and supremacy should be a sufficient guarantee of loyalty as it was for Protestant MPs. To advocates of Emancipation, any security, 'wing' or condition was unacceptable and unnecessarily weakened any proposal for relief. In the words of a pamphleteer the 'only security of any value is the love or fear of the governed'.<sup>90</sup> Interestingly, only one anti-Catholic writer believed in the strength of his own religion over Catholicism. The founders of the Church of England had provided it with enough securities,

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<sup>85</sup> BL Add. Mss. 40399, f29, 4 March 1829

<sup>86</sup> WP 1/972/11, 22 December 1828

<sup>87</sup> 'Julius', Letter to the King on the Subject of Catholic Emancipation

<sup>88</sup> WP 1/972/4, 19 December 1828

<sup>89</sup> WP 1/987/25, 3 January 1829; 987/11, 2 January 1829; 1004/13, 21 March 1829

<sup>90</sup> W. J. Baldwin, *Appeal to Common Sense and to Religion, on the Catholic Question, with a Word on Tythes* (1823)

and any measure which acknowledged the Pope - such as payment of priests - was a violation of the King's duty.<sup>91</sup> Peel had used similar arguments to convince Wellington to drop his securities.

#### IV

From the vantage point of 1831 the duke of Wellington mused over the consequences of Emancipation:

I am quite certain that I was broken down by the Roman Catholic question and the conduct of parties in reference to that question, and not by parliamentary reform. I am convinced that if those who combined against me could have foreseen what has since happened, much more what is likely to occur, the ministry would not have been changed, we should have heard nothing of the King's desire for reform, the rage for reform would have spent itself as heretofore, and the country would have been safe.<sup>92</sup>

Historians have tended to agree with the first part of this conclusion. While Emancipation did not bring peace and prosperity to Ireland, it had a profound impact on the domestic political scene. Emancipation split the Tory party and weakened the anti-reformers forces by the resulting alienation between the ministerial interest and the country gentlemen. The unpopularity of the Act meant that the 'unreformed House of Commons was seen in the worst possible light as a machine for thwarting the popular will'.<sup>93</sup> Catholic Emancipation was the last major act of the unreformed system. It encouraged reformers by showing that the constitution could be altered and radical pressure groups copied O'Connell's techniques.

These were unforeseen consequences that had no relation to the actual measure. In 1828-9 people feared a very different outcome. In a final attempt to shock or persuade the duke to drop the Bill opponents of Catholic relief described in the most pessimistic and alarmed terms the post-Emancipation world.

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<sup>91</sup> WP 1/989/23, 15 January 1829

<sup>92</sup> Wellington to Lord Wharncliffe, WCD, vol. viii, p. 108

<sup>93</sup> M. Brock, *The Great Reform Act* (1973) p. 55

A favourite device was to claim that the Pope's influence would increase if the measure became law. An anonymous writer was convinced that the Pope would meddle with 'our Protestant government' and legislate for 'us', while a Cambridgeshire correspondent feared the political power of a Roman Catholic Prime Minister operating with papal authority.<sup>94</sup> There would be 'a succession of Catholic princes on the throne' cried Julius of Southampton.<sup>95</sup> Some writers feared even more dramatic - and fantastic - consequences. There would be 'temples erected for the worship of Satan himself', and the damnable doctrines of 'Voltaire, Paine and Carlyle' would be practised.<sup>96</sup> In the new confessional state, if anyone published something the Pope did not like they ran 'the risk of suffering the tortures of the damned, and being favoured with a foretaste of hell in the dungeons of the inquisition.'<sup>97</sup> Two writers commented on the prospects for peace. An anonymous correspondent predicted that if the King signed the fatal bill 'then bid adieu to future peace'.<sup>98</sup> Nearer the mark was a pamphleteer who stated that if concessions were refused 'nothing less than rebellion and civil war' would result.<sup>99</sup> This was the argument that Wellington used. A few writers offered suggestions on how to deal with a possible revolt. 'Rebellion was in mind' in Ireland<sup>100</sup> and a 'strong enactment' was needed to suppress both the Catholic Association and the Brunswickers.<sup>101</sup> The military and police presence in Ireland should also be increased and a new (unspecified) tax introduced to pay for it.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> WP 1/1069/35, 3 April 1829; 1008/12, 2 April 1829

<sup>95</sup> 'Julius' Letter to the King on the Subject of Catholic Emancipation

<sup>96</sup> WP 1/923/12, 24 March 1828

<sup>97</sup> R. C. Andrews, *Letter to the Right Hon. Robt Peel, on the prevention of the Re-Establishment in Ireland of Popery and Priestcraft* (1828)

<sup>98</sup> WP 1/1069/37, 7 April 1829

<sup>99</sup> 'One of the People', *Appeal to the Plain Sense and Calm Judgement of the People, on the question Commonly called Roman Catholic Emancipation* (1829)

<sup>100</sup> WP 1/973/2, 27 December 1828

<sup>101</sup> WP 1/1069/27, 27 January 1829

<sup>102</sup> WP 1/943/5, 24 July 1828

Thomas Newenham believed that a rebellion could easily be quashed by a blockade of trade. He also published his ideas in the *Cheltenham Chronicle and Gloucester Advertiser*.<sup>103</sup>

Some correspondents discussed the provisions of the bills before parliament. The Act to disenfranchise the 40 s. Freeholders was commented upon. An anonymous writer believed that the proposed ten-pound qualification would 'abolish the privilege of voting among the middle classes in Ireland',<sup>104</sup> while one from Galway feared that the peasantry would lose their livelihood, as the landowners only wanted them for their votes.<sup>105</sup> This was perhaps not an unfounded suggestion when one remembers how the peasantry was treated. An aspect of the Relief Bill that caused some consternation were the clauses against monastic orders. These required the registration of all men belonging to the Jesuits or other orders currently in Britain, and forbade anymore entering the country on pain of banishment.<sup>106</sup> In a rather touching letter, John Woods, a Dominican Monk, failed to understand why he had been 'selected from the great body of Catholics as still deserving persecution'. He gave no offence and carried on his business quietly.<sup>107</sup> Wellington was not sympathetic: 'The Duke cannot see what injury the law will do to Mr Woods'. But as Rev. William Henry Combes recognised in an open letter to Wellington, these provisions would have no effect because they were largely window dressing and a concession to the popular feeling against monastic orders.<sup>108</sup>

## V

Wellington also received letters from supporters of Emancipation. These people were part of the increasing number who acknowledged the 'spirit of the age', and whose opinion was

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<sup>103</sup> WP 1/941/2, 10 July 1828

<sup>104</sup> WP 1/1069/32, 17 March 1829

<sup>105</sup> WP 1/1002/24, 12 March 1829

<sup>106</sup> M. Tierney, *Daniel O'Connell* (Dublin, 1948) p. 147

<sup>107</sup> WP 1/1003/26, 19 March 1829

<sup>108</sup> Rev W. H. Combes, *Letter Addressed to ... the Duke of Wellington, on the Subject of Certain Provisions in the Relief Bill* (1829)

represented in the Commons by more and more members. A large number of pro-Catholic petitions were presented to parliament and by no means were all of these from Ireland. In areas such as Leicester, Norwich, Edinburgh and London the attitudes of the commercial and professional classes were a lot more relaxed than previously.<sup>109</sup> (Incidentally these cities also had strong radical, and nonconformist, traditions). R W Linker has shown how individual Roman Catholics working within the system succeeded in beating prejudice by 'a public letter or a learned dissertation, a conversation here or a friendship there'.<sup>110</sup> That the times had changed since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a persuasive argument. The settlement of 1689 was not set in stone and the constitution had been evolving ever since. The Test Act was seen as a panic measure belonging to a bygone age. Even Elizabeth I had not barred Catholics from office. During the eighteenth-century there had been considerable inroads into that settlement. Religious toleration and freedom of worship had been attained, Irish Catholics could vote and Catholics could hold minor civil posts and junior ranks in the army and navy. Far from being inviolable the constitution was malleable, and it was time the settlement was brought up to date. Catholic service in time of war was cited as evidence of the loyalty of the Irish Catholics. These are the arguments one finds in the Wellington letters. Rather than feeling the need to prove themselves some writers maintained that Emancipation was a right, and it should be conceded on that basis alone.

More often than not writers tried to distance themselves from the disturbances in Ireland. Because one wished to find a solution to the problems of Ireland - 'upon the success of which depends the safety of the Empire'<sup>111</sup> - did not mean that all Catholics were violent agitators. The people who stood to gain from Emancipation portrayed themselves as moderate reasonable men. The Scottish solicitor David Doud hoped that Emancipation would bring him a slice of government patronage.<sup>112</sup> What could be more reasonable than that? Only a minority of Catholics were extremists, declared James Mahon, who proposed

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<sup>109</sup> Colley, Britons, p.332

<sup>110</sup> Linker, English Roman Catholics, p. 152

<sup>111</sup> WP 1/1001/15, 4 March 1829

<sup>112</sup> WP 1/946/14, 4 August 1828

to return to Ireland and challenge O'Connell's control of the agitation.<sup>113</sup> Not everyone who supported Emancipation followed the Great Dan.

Respectability may have been important, but loyalty was an absolute necessity if Catholics were to obtain full citizenship rights. All writers adopting this argument used Catholic service in the army or navy as evidence that they could be trusted in peacetime. The loyalty of Catholics during the Peninsular war was highlighted.<sup>114</sup> As one writer stressed: 'Lord Nelson and the duke of Wellington in the day of battle, in the hour of trial, did not experience less ability, less courage, or less military pride and noble sentiment'<sup>115</sup> from the Catholic soldiers. Andrew O'Reilly, an Irishman living in Haymarket, noted that of all the officers who deserted in the Napoleonic wars, none was Catholic. During the 1798 rebellion, only twenty priests out of a total of 2,800 were implicated in the uprising.<sup>116</sup> One writer even mentioned the Armada, commenting that a Catholic, Lord Howard of Effingham, had led the British forces. Catholics would be loyal in peacetime because they had fought for the peacetime gains, and 'admit them to parliament [and] they will join with, and be amalgamated in, the great parties of the state.'<sup>117</sup>

Some writers were more forceful. Emancipation was a right. The disabling laws were 'passed at periods of popular and unjust excitement'<sup>118</sup> and no longer had any relevance. Was there another 'instance of a free state where so large a portion of the citizens as the Roman Catholics of Ireland - a body powerful in increasing numbers, wealth and intelligence, has been excluded from a full participation in all the privileges of the commonwealth'. Was it 'not a principle of the British constitution, that the free subjects of the Empire shall be eligible to bear a share in the making of those laws by which they are

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<sup>113</sup> WP 1/988/13, 6 January 1829

<sup>114</sup> 'The Late Editor of the Dublin Correspondent', *False Alarm; or, A Few Untouched and Original Arguments on the Catholic Question* (1829)

<sup>115</sup> Baldwin, *Appeal to Common Sense*

<sup>116</sup> WP 1/1004/24, 23 March 1829

<sup>117</sup> [Anon.] *Address to the People of England, on the Expediency of Removing Catholic Disabilities* (1829)

<sup>118</sup> 'The Late Editor of the Dublin Correspondent', *False Alarm*



governed'.<sup>119</sup> These were not declarations in favour of democracy, but of virtual representation where interests, not people, are represented. Catholics believed they had a right to be so represented. And because it was a right, and because Catholics had proved their loyalty, securities were counter-productive and offensive.

Not all writers expressing support for Relief were Catholic. Rev Richard J Shannon wrote from Edinburgh hoping that a declaration in favour of Emancipation from a member of the Church of England would influence others, and the 'Friends of Civil and Religious Liberty in Liverpool' proposed to call a meeting in that city in favour of Catholic claims.<sup>120</sup> Two individuals wrote describing their personal experiences of Catholics and Catholicism as Protestants. John Hall of Bath had been treated kindly while at college in Flanders. The Catholics had been very tolerant which he feared would not have happened if a Catholic attended 'one of our great public schools'. If Emancipation was passed the Catholics would be just as grateful as the dissenters, and just as unlikely to overthrow the constitution. The second writer (Rev. Thomas of Twickenham) witnessed the actions of Catholics in Madras. His support was more qualified. Catholicism was not intolerant 'however superstitious and absurd it undoubtedly is in many respects'.<sup>121</sup>

## VI

Wellington may have viewed Emancipation in a dispassionate light as a practical problem of government, but his unsolicited correspondence kept him informed of the feelings and sentiments of the people. These letters showed the duke first hand the strength of feeling on both sides of the debate. On securities and the economic problems of Ireland, he was in agreement with his correspondents, and they may have reinforced his beliefs. But the letters from opponents of Emancipation would not have convinced the duke to drop the measure, whatever the volume or contents, because he was convinced of its necessity. These letters

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<sup>119</sup> [Anon.] 'Address'; J. Davison, *Considerations on the Justice and Wisdom of Conciliatory Measures Towards Ireland, Addressed to the Electors of the University of Oxford* (1829)

<sup>120</sup> WP 1/1069/23, 13 January 1829; 1001/21, 5 March 1829

<sup>121</sup> WP 1/994/10, 2 February 1829; 1002/21, 11 March 1829

reveal how members of the public acquired, digested and passed on information surrounding Emancipation, what they felt about the proposed measure and how the government should proceed. They also reveal the writers' perception of Wellington during this tumultuous and controversial period.

The popular perception of Wellington underwent considerable re-evaluation during the four months January to April 1829. As far as the outside world was concerned Wellington was a staunch anti-Catholic. His actions reinforced this view. As early as March 1819 Dr Patrick Curtis wrote to Wellington informing him that despite his wartime achievements, he was unpopular in Ireland because he had voted against Catholic Emancipation.<sup>122</sup> The duke continued to vote against Catholic claims until 1828. It was due to this record that the Catholic Association in January 1828 organised some 1,600 simultaneous parish meetings against the new Wellington administration. And more importantly, it led to O'Connell's policy of opposition to anyone who supported the government, which found ultimate expression in the County Clare election. A ministers' image could have far reaching consequences.

The people did not know about Wellington's 1825 memorandum, his private discussions on the subject nor his refusal to join a Protestant Union in 1825 because he was a member of government.<sup>123</sup> They did know - at least the readers of all the main papers knew - that on the 28 May 1828 Wellington attended the annual dinner of the Pitt club at the City of London Tavern, where the duke and Eldon (the ultra ex-Lord Chancellor) were toasted and enthusiastically cheered.<sup>124</sup> A number of them may also have known that another ultra-Protestant organisation took his name; the Stockport Wellington Club. This honorary naming however, had one fundamental flaw. Then, as now, names are public property and can be used without consent. There is no copyright or trademark on names, unless the person takes prior action. The founders of the Pitt club unsurprisingly wanted an appellation that evoked feelings of loyalty and Britishness, forgetting, or ignoring, that Pitt had been a supporter of Catholic claims. This proved to be an omen. A speaker at the Cheshire Whig

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<sup>122</sup> WP 1/620/23, 19 March 1819

<sup>123</sup> Wellington to J. W. Carter, WP 1/811/7, 8 January 1825

<sup>124</sup> *The Times*, 30 May 1828

club warned the Stockport Wellington club 'not to denounce ... Pitt and Fox, Canning and Castlereagh, lest the duke of Wellington should add his own illustrious name to that splendid catalogue.'<sup>125</sup>

As the contents of the newspapers show, Wellington's image fundamentally changed when plans for the Emancipation Bill were made public. In the archive there are more letters praising the duke than criticising him over Catholic relief.<sup>126</sup> This does not mean that the duke was more popular after Emancipation because the issue was so divisive, but this correspondence does indicate the reasons for this popularity.

For supporters of Emancipation Wellington was lauded as the only man capable of passing the Bill. The duke possessed 'firmness of mind and soundness of judgement',<sup>127</sup> he was above petty prejudice and had 'determination'. These character traits were a result of his martial upbringing, and Wellington's military achievements were often referred to. Wellington was likened to Caesar: great in both military and civil spheres. Wellington - 'saviour of his country and the liberator of Europe' - was again being called upon to save his country, this time with his 'wisdom'.<sup>128</sup> One writer even believed that the duke was above this sort of thing: 'Victor of Waterloo! pursue the splendid course marked out to you by fate. Leave to minor souls this peddling in politics.'

Norman Gash believes that Wellington's military exploits protected him from the worst abuse: 'his prestige as the victor of Waterloo imposed a respect and restraint on his former followers which they did not feel towards the professional politician who led them in the Commons.'<sup>129</sup> In the pamphlet literature, but not in the letters, Wellington's and Peel's characters were often compared. 'The commanding influence of your Grace's name' was compared with 'the potent energies of the mind of Mr Peel'.<sup>130</sup> The 'Premier's

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<sup>125</sup> Quoted in Machin, *Catholic Emancipation*, p. 147

<sup>126</sup> This also appears to be the case with Peel

<sup>127</sup> WP 1/989/13, 13 January 1829

<sup>128</sup> 'Julius'; Letter to the King on the Subject of Catholic Emancipation; 'A Scotch Catholic', *Securities necessary towards Emancipation*

<sup>129</sup> Gash, *Mr. Secretary Peel* p. 547

<sup>130</sup> 'The Late Editor of the Dublin Correspondent', *False Alarm*

unsophisticated mind'<sup>131</sup> contrasted with Peel's effective, but rather boring, attention to detail. Wellington's achievements were martial, while Peel had initiated 'great improvements in the laws of the land'.<sup>132</sup> It was precisely because Peel came across as this rather dour public administrator that he was criticised so heavily. He possessed neither prestige nor a 'character' to protect him. He was a mere 'Cotton King'.

Wellington's popularity was given a fillip towards the end of March 1829 when he fought a duel against Lord Winchilsea. There are seven letters surviving which directly relate to the duel, including two from Jeremy Bentham in which the old radical cried 'I cannot afford to lose you'.<sup>133</sup> These writers congratulated Wellington, his honour intact, but there was also surprise and mild annoyance. Public opinion, including *The Times*, thought Wellington should be above this behaviour: 'you have done enough to establish your character for bravery, without entering the field with every blockhead that chooses to abuse you'.<sup>134</sup> The duke's was an 'invaluable life' which the country could not afford to lose.<sup>135</sup> These letters show that Wellington was regarded as public property. The country had 'claims' upon the duke. Wellington's life belonged to the country and it was irresponsible to risk it: 'Great men are deservedly deemed public property; and every person should feel an interest in maintaining the respect which is due to distinguished merit'.<sup>136</sup> Even, it seemed, the duke himself. And because Wellington was 'public property', *The Times* felt justified in offering criticism and advice.

Some writers could not help themselves, and praise turned into adulation, sometimes expressed in the form of terrible poetry.<sup>137</sup> Wellington was the 'greatest benefactor of our country and all Europe', fully entitled to all his honours.<sup>138</sup> The duke's deeds were 'without

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<sup>131</sup> J. E. Devereux, *Duke of Wellington, Lord Killeen and Lord Plunkett* (1828)

<sup>132</sup> 'Julius' Letter to the King on the Subject of Catholic Emancipation

<sup>133</sup> WP 1/1004/22, 23 March 1829

<sup>134</sup> WP 1/1004/17, 22 March 1829

<sup>135</sup> WP 1/1004/24, 23 March 1829

<sup>136</sup> Combes, Letter Addressed to ... the Duke of Wellington

<sup>137</sup> WP 1/995/25, 10 February 1829

<sup>138</sup> WP 1/989/18, 14 January 1829

parallel', all to the benefit of his country.<sup>139</sup> 'The Victor of Europe' was surrounded with power and glory and 'the confidence of millions at home and the respect of every government, and nation'.<sup>140</sup> But Wellington had opponents also. One writer, while himself supportive, pointed out how unpopular Catholic relief was in the country at large.<sup>141</sup> And despite another correspondent's assertion that Wellington was surrounded by enemies to the measure, not the duke personally,<sup>142</sup> he was attacked for his tergiversation.

The opponents of Emancipation believed that Wellington had caved in under pressure from O'Connell and the Catholic Association: 'Do you know how to fight' cried one anonymous correspondent.<sup>143</sup> Why surrender to the pernicious influence of the Roman Catholic clergy?<sup>144</sup> Another anonymous correspondent, who compared the Catholics to a wilful ambitious son in need of restraint, had noticed Wellington's 'tricks', especially the speed with which the measure was introduced and passed. This was the 'one indication of a bad cause'. There were others outside parliament who could do his job.<sup>145</sup> The most vehement attack came from a writer who gave his name. Rev E H Maberly had been a supporter of Wellington's, but after Emancipation 'I have regarded you in a different light & am become your decided enemy & opponent. I consider you as a traitor to your King country & the constitution'. 'Though a humble individual' Maberly would not rest 'till you are impeached for your conduct'.<sup>146</sup> Surprisingly Wellington responded to this outburst with his usual 'compliments'. The duke was also criticised by supporters of the measure. Thomas Steele, for example, compared Wellington with Jupiter who did 'something willingly, but

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<sup>139</sup> 'One of the People', Appeal to the Plain Sense

<sup>140</sup> WP 1/988/13, 6 January 1829

<sup>141</sup> WP 1/1002/19, 11 March 1829

<sup>142</sup> WP 1/1069/35, 3 April 1829

<sup>143</sup> WP 1/1069/35, 6 April 1829

<sup>144</sup> WP 1/1011/23, 20 April 1829

<sup>145</sup> WP 1/1069/37, 7 April 1829

<sup>146</sup> WP 1/1008/12, 2 April 1829

with an unwilling mind'. Why should the Prime minister be praised if he had been forced into helping his own country 'with bitter bad blood'.<sup>147</sup>

To make any sound conclusion about Wellington's popularity from these letters is very problematical. The same groups of people supported and opposed him at different times. Even the various newspapers did not have a constant perception of Wellington, which was usually governed by his current actions, not his past deeds.

## VII

Wellington laboured under the responsibility of reading and replying to all these letters: 'The Duke considers himself under the necessity frequently being painful to him of reading every letter sent to him and of acknowledging his receipt'.<sup>148</sup> The duke often complained that he lacked sufficient time to read all his correspondence, but he replied to the vast majority of letters written to him on Emancipation.<sup>149</sup>

More often than not Wellington wrote a standard, one line draft reply on a scrap piece of paper: 'Compliments. The Duke has received his letter'. But occasionally he felt that a longer response was necessary. For example, to decline the request of a personal interview to discuss the Catholic question: 'if he wishes to communicate any matter it need be in writing',<sup>150</sup> thus adding to his correspondence. Wellington also declined to present a couple of petitions to the House of Lords, and returned them so that a Peer who resided in the neighbourhood could present and, if necessary, vouch for them.<sup>151</sup> But he was not consistent over this: the duke agreed to present two petitions - one from Montrose, the other from Aberdeen.<sup>152</sup> Perhaps he needed to make a point in the House on these days or the local

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<sup>147</sup> T. Steele, *Analytical Exposition of the Absurdity and Inequity of the Oaths, When Taken by Protestants, ... that the Sacrifice of the Mass and the Invocation of the Saints are Superstitious, Idolatrous, and Damnable* (1829)

<sup>148</sup> WP 1/995/30, 11 February 1829

<sup>149</sup> WP 1/1001/19, 5 March 1829

<sup>150</sup> WP 1/995/31, 11 February 1829

<sup>151</sup> WP 1/1001/22, 5 March 1829; 999/11, 28 February 1829

<sup>152</sup> WP 1/1006/12, 31 March 1829; 1008/4, 1 April 1829

lords were anti-Catholic. To one correspondent Wellington had to reply that he had not received the petition mentioned in the letter: 'As the duke receives every day more letters than he can read he is not surprised that some of them should be mislaid.'<sup>153</sup>

Wellington was touched by some of the supportive letters he received. The duke was 'much flattered' by one correspondent's 'favourable opinion'.<sup>154</sup> To the 'Friends of Civil and Religious Liberty', who had passed a resolution thanking Wellington for his exertions, he replied: 'It is very satisfactory to me to find that the measure, which a sense of duty to His Majesty, and to the publick, induced my colleagues & me to recommend, have met with the approbation of yourself and of the Gentlemen of the City of Limerick'.<sup>155</sup> But he did not court public opinion or popularity. In a reply to John Lawless, who wanted Wellington to drop a crown prosecution against him now that Emancipation had been carried, and using the duke's potential popularity as an inducement, Wellington stated: 'I assure you that I do everything which I think right to insure for me the respect & esteem of the world; and I regret very much if I or the world should err in judgement respecting my actions.'<sup>156</sup> We must assume that Lawless picked up on Wellington's sarcastic touch.

Wellington appears remarkably patient with most correspondents. To one writer who was mildly critical of the fact that Wellington had fought a duel, he wrote: 'The Duke however begs leave to suggest to those who are so kind as to think for him for a moment if possible to consider themselves placed in the situation in which he is placed'.<sup>157</sup> He declined to give opinions on suggestions, probably from fear that they would be publicised, and when the duke felt that his time was being wasted, he said so. Wilson Wetherington wrote from London offering suggestions on oaths to ensure Catholic loyalty. But his suggestions were already law. If he had read the appropriate acts 'he will see that he need not have given himself the trouble of writing or me of reading and answering his letter'.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> WP 1/999/06, 27 February 1829

<sup>154</sup> WP 1/988/13, 6 January 1829

<sup>155</sup> WP 1/1018/13, 17 May 1829

<sup>156</sup> WP 1/1030/1, 1 July 1829

<sup>157</sup> WP 1/1004/21, 23 March 1829

<sup>158</sup> WP 1/1004/39, 25 March 1829

Despite being extremely busy, Wellington read, and on occasion responded to, forwarded or acted upon these letters. He did not dismiss these letters, probably because he was aware of their usefulness. What Prime Minister, even one who was supposedly unappreciative of public opinion, does not want to know the thoughts and feelings of the people on a major political issue? As one correspondent commented: 'The wise man increases in wisdom by all which he gains from others'.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> WP 1/972/11, 22 December 1828



## The 'Universal' Distress of 1830

The public press has canvassed the nation, endeavouring to trace the cause. ... Some have attributed the cause to the pressure of taxation, to an operation of the corn laws or to the alleviation of the currency ... to the excess of machinery, to the reaction of commerce, or to the prohibitory laws of other countries ... [to] the rapid increase of population, to the amount of parochial or county Rates and Tithes, to the admission of foreign manufactures at low duties, to the great inflow of Irish labourers and the indisposition of masters to give adequate wages ...<sup>1</sup>

I witnessed unprecedented distress among the lowest classes, but I knew that it was referable to causes beyond the control of government or legislation.<sup>2</sup>

The fifteen years since Waterloo had afforded ample opportunity for discussions of the causes of economic depression. The trade cycle - 'those shocks to which nations, and especially commercial nations, are frequently liable'<sup>3</sup> - was beginning to take shape. 'Low prices and general dullness' were witnessed in 1816, 1819-21 and 1826-30, although there were some signs of recovery in 1827/8. Economic dislocation meant that these years were periods of high social tension in the form of machine breaking, riots and political demonstrations.<sup>4</sup> This tension was reflected in Parliament, where opposition MPs and independents were frequently critical of the Tory government's stance over distress. Both Tory policies and Tory inaction were blamed for creating depression and suffering, and

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<sup>1</sup> WP 1/1020/21, 28 May 1829, Henry Lucas

<sup>2</sup> BL Add. Mss. 40400 f. 124, Granville V Vernon to Robert Peel

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Wellington in *The Times*, 9 November 1829

<sup>4</sup> See *The Courier* 1 September 1829, and for statistics on 'Social Tension', R. Brown and C. Daniels, *The Chartist* (1984). Marx and Engels also located the origins of the trade cycle in these years. See Thompson, *People's Science*.

central to these debates was the charge of corruption. At a time when the whole country was struggling, Tories were accused of benefiting from Old Corruption, in the form of pensions, sinecures and unnecessarily large emoluments. While the people were taxed, their rulers got rich. Calls for retrenchment in government spending, then, were extremely common, as were demands for parliamentary reform. The perceived extravagance and selfish nature of the elite meant that an increasingly large number of people believed that the only way to lessen their burdens was to change the system.

Philip Harling has argued persuasively that the Tory governments of Liverpool and Wellington were responsive to public opinion on this issue. Faced with pressure from parliamentary critics, respectable opinion outdoors and even radicals, the Tories cut back on their patronage, abolished sinecures, made sweeping cuts in expenditure, and tried to project an image of 'probity' to their critics. Extravagance and waste was seen as political suicide, as the government became more and more accountable for how, and on what, it spent the people's money.<sup>5</sup>

When Wellington became Premier in 1828 retrenchment was taking place and, perhaps more importantly, it was perceived to be. The duke's administration continued this trend by appointing a finance committee of enquiry (which was initiated by Canning) and by cutting taxes in its three budgets, for which it was generally praised. But in 1830 the government were in trouble. A particularly severe depression and bad winter in 1829/30 again focused attention on Tory policies.<sup>6</sup>

The opening of parliament in February 1830 provided Wellington's opponents with a perfect opportunity to attack his administration. The catalyst was this passage in the King's speech:

His Majesty laments, that notwithstanding the indication of active commerce, distress should prevail among the agricultural and manufacturing classes in some parts of the United Kingdom.

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<sup>5</sup> P. Harling, *The Waning of 'Old Corruption'. The Politics of Economical Reform in Britain, 1779-1846* (Oxford, 1996) passim, but especially introduction and chp. 5

<sup>6</sup> Harling, *Waning of Old Corruption*, pp. 186-196. For an overview of the Government's response to these economic problems see Jupp, *Politics on eve of Reform*, pp. 135-145

These 'partial distresses' were the result of

unfortunate seasons, and to the operation of other causes which are beyond the reach of legislative control or remedy.

Earl Stanhope led the challenge to the government in the House of Lords by calling for an immediate enquiry into the causes of the suffering because 'the kingdom was in a state of universal distress'. Sir Edward Knatchbull moved an amendment to the King's speech in the Commons, stating that all the great interests of the nation were affected. Parliament, and especially ministers, were responsible for the distress and should investigate the matter so as not to lose the respect of the people.<sup>7</sup>

From February to the King's death and the French Revolution in the summer of 1830, the debate on the causes and suggested remedies of the 'general' or 'partial' distress dominated parliament and the press. Central to this debate was the government's perceived responsibility. Opponents described the distress as 'universal' in order to stress the general causes - the currency, system of taxation - which were the result of Tory economic policy. If the distress was 'partial', and the causes beyond government control, then there was little the administration could do.<sup>8</sup> This was the line of defence that Wellington used. In the House of Lords, he blamed factors beyond the government's control - foreign competition, the use of machinery, and the severity of the season - and denied the universality of distress by pointing to increasing exports, canal traffic, building and the trade of retailers. The government only narrowly survived the calls for an enquiry, which showed the strength of feeling on the subject.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See *Annual Register*, 1830

<sup>8</sup> This debate was not new. See B. Hilton, *Corn, Cash, Commerce. The Economic Policies of the Tory Governments 1815-1830* (Oxford, 1977); B. Gordon, *Political Economy in Parliament, 1819-1823* (1976); Gordon, *Economic Doctrine*; for the arguments used by political economists, which the Liberal Tories put into practice, that the distress was temporary and the system would right itself. Many of the charges levelled against Liverpool's government were also used in 1830. Hilton states that Ricardianism suited Liverpool's government because it enabled a 'do nothing conservatism' to be justified, pp. 70, 125

<sup>9</sup> *Annual Register*, 1830; WCD vol. vi, p. 222, Wellington to Charles Arbuthnot, 14 October 1829

There was much to defend. Complaints had been made as early as 1828. A below-average harvest prevented farmers 'making purchases to the required extent from the manufactures and the shopkeepers'.<sup>10</sup> In an open letter to the duke of Wellington in *The Times* of 3 March 1828, 'Algernon' described the situation thus:

Our finances are in a state of almost hopeless derangement - our manufacturers sinking beneath the weight of taxation at home, and the attacks of increasing competition abroad - our commerce dull - our shipping unemployed, and nothing in our harbours - our agriculturists vainly struggling for a precarious existence...

With poor harvests again in 1829 and 1830,<sup>11</sup> and terrible weather conditions not only in Britain, but in Spain, France and Portugal as well, the depression was considered particularly severe. Bad winters had been recorded in 1795 and 1814, and 'since these dates we have had one winter - 1819-20 - of considerable severity, but the present is likely to exceed it'.<sup>12</sup> In 1830, 189 petitions were presented to parliament complaining of general distress, a further 98 on agricultural distress. 'The Chairman' of a group of agricultural labourers wrote to Wellington because of the 'alarm and concern they feel at the great increase of frost and snow'. They attributed this to divine will and called on the government to effect an immediate thaw, a request echoed by petitions to parliament.<sup>13</sup>

1830 was to prove a hard and difficult year for much of the population and for government. A combination of factors - financial and manufacturing slumps, poor harvests, a harsh winter and the governments' unsympathetic stance - ensured that discontent was rife. Across the length and breadth of the country people responded with protests, ranging from disturbances in the manufacturing districts and political demonstrations, to labourers

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<sup>10</sup> *Courier*, 1 September 1829

<sup>11</sup> *The Times* 3 August 1829; *Standard* 5 August 1829, 28 August 1830

<sup>12</sup> *Courier* 18 January, 9 February, 1830

<sup>13</sup> WP 1159/27, 4 February 1830; Longford, Wellington, p. 205. This could be seen as an ironic attack upon the government.

revolts in the countryside.<sup>14</sup> It will be argued here that the government's response to the economic crises did much to discredit it in the eyes of the nation. Previous governments may have responded to public pressure over Old Corruption, but in 1830 the hardship was too acute to be appeased by token gestures. A fundamental change was now called for, either in the way the economy was managed or in the administration itself. Discussions on economic policy widened divisions resulting from Catholic Emancipation, and other issues such as Wellington's prosecution of the *Morning Journal* for Libel, the rumour of his association with the Polignac ministry, the poor showing in the general election, the outburst against reform and the cancellation of the Lord Mayor's Dinner, all contributed to the government's demise. The alienation and disaffection resulting from the distress of 1830 helped to create a consciousness of exploitation and oppression that found expression in the demand for parliamentary reform. In this atmosphere some people wrote to the duke, highlighting the problems and suggesting solutions in an attempt to ease the country's burdens. Most used a language of political exclusion and exploitation to attack the culpability of ministers. Before considering these letters, the opinions of the press on this 'universal distress' will be considered.

Most newspaper editors tended to deny the generality of distress. *The Times* wrote on 14 July 1829 'the present is no era of great affluence, yet neither is it one of signal suffering' and at the end of the month claimed that the crops were promising.<sup>15</sup> In August it reported that the consumption of articles such as tobacco, sugar, tea and coffee 'has in general exceeded that of the preceding years ... not that we make light of the sufferings of the poor'.<sup>16</sup> In December the paper believed that the 'commerce of manufactures are obviously improving' and urged its readers against 'exaggerated representations of agricultural

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<sup>14</sup> See G. Rude, 'English Rural and Urban Disturbances on the Eve of the First Reform Bill, 1830-1831', H. J. Kaye (ed.), *The Face of the Crowd. Selected essays of George Rude* (Atlanta, 1988)

<sup>15</sup> *The Times*, 31 July 1829

<sup>16</sup> *The Times*, 6 August 1829

distress. ... Is there one single pack of fox hounds less in the country, in consequence of these cried up difficulties and that distress?'.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout October and November the *Morning Post* used accounts from provincial papers to show that trade was improving. Despite the difficulty of obtaining accurate information - 'in every considerable town in the kingdom there are at least two journals of conflicting politics', one supporting the government the other highlighting distress - the *Morning Post* considered that things were getting better.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the accounts of the Relief Committee in the city of London, the increased number of people in Coventry receiving soup aid, and the large number of entrants to the Refuge for the Destitute,<sup>19</sup> *The Times*, *Courier*, *Morning Chronicle* and the *Morning Post*, embracing political economy, preferred to stress the local causes of distress and the signs of improvement. *The Standard* took a different view. Alienated over Catholic Emancipation, it was very critical of a government that had caused distress by the 'untimely application of free trade principles'.<sup>20</sup> Cobbett, in his *Political Register* also highlighted the distress and criticised those who failed to mention it:

there would appear to be a simultaneous desire in the editors of newspapers, and especially those in London, to keep the horrible distresses of the country entirely out of view.

Only the *Morning Journal* was spared his criticism.<sup>21</sup>

When parliament met most papers supported the government's denial of the universality of distress. The *Morning Post* moved from seeing the distress as 'general' on 28 January to claiming on the 5 February 1830 that 'the cause of the partial distresses experienced in some parts are of such a nature as to be uncontrollable by government or by parliament'. It was an act of providence, and the paper supported Wellington in rejecting

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<sup>17</sup> *The Times*, 15 December 1829

<sup>18</sup> *Morning Post*, 6 October, 12 October, 3 November, 10 November, 26 November 1829

<sup>19</sup> *The Times*, 5 January 1830; *Morning Chronicle*, 27 February 1830; *Standard*, 24 July 1829

<sup>20</sup> *Standard*, 15 September 1829

<sup>21</sup> *Political Register*, 19 September 1829

Stanhope's motion. The *Post* labelled all those who called the distress 'universal' as 'distress-mongers', and published a letter from 'Zeta' denying its widespread prevalence.<sup>22</sup>

The *Morning Chronicle* considered there to be 'much' distress but not 'general' distress; suffering in one branch of industry did not have to extend to all. With the King's Speech the paper became more explicit:

Partial distress we can understand, but universal distress seems to us to involve an impossibility. The capital of the nation is not diminishing, and the whole population may be said to be producing. The idea of universal distress is, therefore, ridiculous ....<sup>23</sup>

The paper did concede that the agriculturists were depressed, and in that sense only - because parliament was made up of landowners and they only looked after their own interests - was distress 'universal'.<sup>24</sup>

*The Courier* blamed local causes, such as the decline of the 'fancy goods' made at Huddersfield (*The Times* also attributed some distress to changes in fashion), and the weather: 'uncontrollable by human agency'. The paper believed that the silk trade had not been in better condition for seven years and therefore 'we are still unwilling and unable to believe, either that the distress is universal in its operation, or unparalleled in its severity'. It was severe enough to call for acts of private charity but not 'so general as to call for an application to parliament'.<sup>25</sup>

Not everyone supported the government's position. For Cobbett 'the whole nation all except the tax-receivers are in a state of deplorable distress'.<sup>26</sup> The ultra *Standard* also took the side of the people and public opinion. The distress was 'general' because of

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<sup>22</sup> *Morning Post*, 18 February, 26 February, 26 March 1830. For the idea of providence see B. Hilton, *The Age of Atonement. The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought 1785-1865* (Oxford, 1988)

<sup>23</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 8 February 1830

<sup>24</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 9 February 1830

<sup>25</sup> *The Courier*, 5 January 1830; *The Times*, 5 January 1830; *The Courier*, 3 February, 17 March, 5 January 1830

<sup>26</sup> *Political Register*, 13 February 1830

government policy, and ‘the meetings which are multiplying throughout the country afford an irrefragable [sic] proof of the extent and universality of suffering’.<sup>27</sup> In a letter to the editor of the *Morning Chronicle*, George Poulett Scrope (the geologist and social reformer) argued that general distress could and did exist. He urged the newspaper and the administration to listen to the industrious classes for it was they who were suffering: ‘it is for the duke alone to proclaim that ‘there is no distress, there can be no distress, and there shall be no distress!’’.<sup>28</sup> The people were distressed. They held numerous meetings to discuss the fact.<sup>29</sup> These meetings did not take their lead from the metropolitan papers, and numerous petitions were sent to parliament complaining of economic hardship. It would also appear that the people who wrote to Wellington did not follow the press agenda. If most of the London papers played down the distress, the majority of correspondents stressed the severity of the season.

Wellington’s correspondents provided the duke with first hand knowledge of the distress, although some did agree with the newspapers’ appraisal of the situation. George Morris, through his job as a surveyor and land agent, travelled the country and witnessed the varying degrees of distress. In contrast to the situation in the southern counties, the agricultural labourers of York and Durham, he claimed, were not ‘superabundant’ and were relatively well paid. In the south though, there was high unemployment and as a result, much suffering. ‘JJ’ also travelled the country, and in his opinion much of the distress was exaggerated. Another anonymous writer, reiterating the point made in *The Times*, also believed that the grumbling of the farmers was over stated.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *The Standard*, 2 & 19 January 1830

<sup>28</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 15 February 1830. For Poulett Scrope, who acquired the sobriquet ‘Pamphlet Scrope’ as a result of his many writings on free trade, social reform and the poor law, see the DNB.

<sup>29</sup> *The Times*, 21 January; *Morning Post* 21 & 28 January; *Morning Chronicle*, 15 March; *The Standard*, 27 February 1830

<sup>30</sup> WP 1/1103/10, 25 March 1830; 1/1159/19, 28 January 1830



But, for most writers the existence of distress could not be denied. Thomas Basely wrote from the declining parish of Laveham in Suffolk, where distress existed among the woollen manufacturers, many of whom were old soldiers who had fought under Wellington. Basely believed that a new canal would greatly benefit the area.<sup>31</sup> Three writers described the terrible conditions in Ireland due to the failure of everything to do with agriculture. As the numbers of the poor swelled there were real fears of famine.<sup>32</sup> Thomas Potter offered to show Wellington around Manchester when the duke visited there in September 1830. Potter would ensure that the Prime Minister saw the real city, and not only the prospering side.<sup>33</sup> And a group of merchants wished to send a deputation to discuss the distress.<sup>34</sup>

As *The Standard* recognised, people were often concerned with the industry and cause ‘in immediate contact’ with them.<sup>35</sup> In petitions and letters the difficulties of individual industries or interests were often highlighted. Agriculture was held to be depressed due to high rents and tithes and low prices, and Wellington was informed about special cases such as the ‘real extent of the agricultural distress in the cheese making district of Gloucestershire’, and of the Hop planters whose crop had failed again. The duke was accused of turning his eyes ‘from the dreadful distress of the manufacturers and shipowners’. The silk, lace and glove trades and shipping feature prominently, probably because they were the subjects of much discussion in parliament.<sup>36</sup> The poor quality of British wool was described; Kent and Sussex fisherman complained of harassment from the French (Wellington considered their complaints ‘vague and unsatisfactory’); tea dealers complained of smuggling and wholesale spirit dealers wanted the excise changed to enable them to compete with publicans. In short, depressed trades tried to make a special case for

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<sup>31</sup> WP 1/1057/4, 17 November 1829

<sup>32</sup> WP 1/1146/7, 19 October 1830; 1/1163/13, 2 November 1830; 1/1159/34, 15 February 1830

<sup>33</sup> WP 1/1141/11, 16 September 1830

<sup>34</sup> WP 1/1159/117, 8 November 1830

<sup>35</sup> Gordon, *Political Economy*, p. 76; *Standard*, 19 January 1830

<sup>36</sup> WP 1/1093/28, 9 February 1830; 1/1103/4, 22 March 1830; 1/1113/14, 12 May 1830; 1/1041/11, 31 August 1829; 1/1066/7, n.d. See Gordon, *Tory Liberalism*, pp. 107-115, and Hilton, *Corn, Cash, Commerce*, for a general discussion of these debates. Gordon speculates that the alienation of the shipping interest over the navigation laws may have contributed to Wellington’s downfall.

themselves so that the government might act in their favour. It was a tactic that rarely met with success producing only disillusionment with the administration.<sup>37</sup>

Most people had an opinion as to who, or what, was to blame for the distress. To quote Boyd Hilton, 'the extremity of post war distress was making pundits of all men'.<sup>38</sup> For *The Standard* it was free trade; *The Times*, over production. William Greenwood and 'J Bull' both believed that distress was due to foreign loans.<sup>39</sup> 'AB' considered the problem to be bad weather and high London rents, whereas 'an Englishman' believed the cause to be the high price of bread and meat, and suggested that the government pass a law to regulate their price nationwide.<sup>40</sup> Mr Crosbie thought that imprisonment for debt was the main cause, while Caroline Bennett wrote on several occasions to the Home Office blaming the distress on the large number of French refugees allowed into Britain.<sup>41</sup> But these idiosyncratic suggestions were the minority. Most correspondents blamed one or more of the following: the introduction and spread of machinery; the high level of taxation and the national debt; the management of the currency; free trade or protection; or the government in general and its mismanagement of public affairs. Some writers were concerned about the effects of distress and focused on the pauper problem. These writers were very much part of the wider debates on these issues, a part which has often been ignored. These issues will be considered in turn.

## **Machinery**

Different groups with conflicting agendas across Britain discussed what Maxine Berg has termed the 'machinery question'. The country Tories joined with working class radicals in

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<sup>37</sup> WP 1/1028/3, 29 June 1829; 1/1159/18, 28 January 1830; 1/1050/5, 10 September 1829; 1/1033/23, 24 July 1829; 1/1102/4, 18 March 1830

<sup>38</sup> Hilton, *Corn, Cash, Commerce*, p. vii

<sup>39</sup> WP 1/1021/7, 29 May 1829; 1/1159/38, 23 February 1830

<sup>40</sup> WP 1/1159/49, 16 March 1830; 1/1066/15, 13 May 1829

<sup>41</sup> HO 44/11/273, 373, March, April 1822

criticising the march of the machine, while liberal Tories, political economists and successful manufacturers praised the machine for it enabled Britain to compete on the world stage.

The working class is often perceived as being in the vanguard of the opposition to the use of machinery. Machine wrecking was a traditional form of protest, and to many the very visible symbol of their distress.<sup>42</sup> However, technological unemployment did not have to be the consequence of using machinery. Some radical theorists believed that machinery could be appropriated by the working class, and if used (controlled) properly, it might relieve some of the monotony and burden of labour. Machinery could even increase leisure hours. It was a question of ownership and control of working practices in an era of increasing industrialisation.<sup>43</sup>

This was how Owenites saw the debate, and even Cobbett did not object to the machine *per se*. Francis Place, a Malthusian and birth control advocate, preferred to blame the distress on the population increase, and while radicals recognised that the machine was an example of political and economic exploitation, it was often of secondary importance to obtaining the vote.

The country Tories and the Tory radicals, who felt that they owed some obligations to the poor, viewed the machinery question within the wider context of factory employment and poor law provision. They possessed 'an intense and ever present anti-industrial and anti-machinery sentiment' and detested political economy with a passion.<sup>44</sup> Stanhope, John Maxwell and Sir William De Crespigny were some Tories who urged that there should be restrictions on the use of machinery.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1968) and E. J. Hobsbawn, 'The machine breakers', Hobsbawn, *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour* (1964)

<sup>43</sup> M. Berg, *The Machinery Question and the Making of Political Economy 1815-48* (1980), pp. 16-17, 101. This was also how the utopian socialists viewed machinery. See G. Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium. The New Moral Economy of Owenite Socialism, 1815-60* (1987)

<sup>44</sup> Berg, *Machinery Question*, pp. 255-266

<sup>45</sup> Gordon, *Political Economy*, pp. 65, 87, 89

The political economists, and the liberal Tories putting their doctrines into practice, took the opposite view. Say's Law, which states that supply creates its own demand, allowed political economists to dispute technological unemployment. Machines created extra output and incomes that resulted in increased demand for other goods, and therefore the displaced workers could find employment in other fields. Although Ricardo altered his stance on technological unemployment to a degree, it remained a powerful assumption.<sup>46</sup> *The Times* made the direct link between industrial progress over the preceding forty years and technological advance, believing that 'machinery is in the long run beneficial to the working manufacturers themselves'. Machinery increased the demand for artisans 'by increasing the demand for the articles manufactured'.<sup>47</sup> *The Morning Chronicle* supported this sentiment, but recognised the short term impact: 'when machinery is introduced for the first time into any branch of industry, hands are of course discharged, and this is an evil; but the diminished price increases the consumption and more hands are gradually employed'. Every stage of invention had been resisted, but machinery had increased the national advantage.<sup>48</sup> The Society for the Diffusion of Useful knowledge produced a pamphlet entitled *The Working Man's Companion*, in the aftermath of the Swing riots to sell the benefits of machinery to a hostile audience.<sup>49</sup> Originally they had intended to reprint Cobbett's *A Letter to the Luddites* (1816, 1823), which urged workers not to attack machinery, but to blame taxation and Old Corruption instead. Cobbett would not allow an abridged version to be published.<sup>50</sup>

That machinery caused displacement and discontent can be seen by the Swing Riots of 1830, the riots in Manchester during April and May 1826, the earlier Luddite outbreaks

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<sup>46</sup> Gordon, *Political Economy*, p. 7; Berg, *Machinery Question*, pp. 66-67

<sup>47</sup> *The Times*, 10, 14 September 1830

<sup>48</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 13 November 1829, 15 September 1830

<sup>49</sup> [Anon.] *The Working Man's Companion. The Result of Machinery, namely, Cheap Production and increased Employment* (1831)

<sup>50</sup> Berg, *Machinery Question*, pp. 101, 292-3

and numerous other local acts of machine wrecking.<sup>51</sup> Many people remained unconvinced of the arguments used by the political economists, and, as *The Times* noted, the subject generated much debate: 'if the letter writers for and against machinery continue to overload us with their favours, we fear we shall firmly sink under the weight'. *The Times* was forced to defend its use of machinery. The steam-powered printing press enabled them to improve their paper, and to employ more people, which was the same as lowering the price.<sup>52</sup> The radical publisher of the *Poor Man's Guardian*, Henry Hetherington, was also forced to defend the use of mechanical processes. He did not believe that the oft-cited remedy of a tax on machinery would have any effect: 'if machinery were taxed, would it give more employment to the working classes? Who would have to pay the tax? The consumers'.<sup>53</sup>

The people who wrote to Wellington on this issue were concerned about the unrestricted use of machinery. They tended to blame machinery for the distress because it caused over production and threw people out of work. There is evidence that Wellington supported this view. As he stated in the House of Lords:

were not competition at home and abroad, the introduction of machinery, and the general adoption of steam, calculated to produce distress among our manufacturers? Yet could parliament prevent competition? Could it prohibit the use of machinery, and the application of steam, all of which, by throwing labourers out of employment, produce distress?<sup>54</sup>

Wellington believed that the government could do nothing about this problem<sup>55</sup>, and this is where he parted company with his correspondents. They felt that the government could, and should, interfere to control machinery. Within parliament and out of doors a tax upon

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<sup>51</sup> See Rude, Disturbances, and R. Wells, 'Mr William Cobbett, Captain Swing, and king William IV', *Agricultural History Review*, Vol. 45, 1997, pp. 34-48. In the HO papers there are various letters under the heading 'Introduction of Power Looms' on machine wrecking, usually from alarmed magistrates. HO 44/16/32-52, April 1826

<sup>52</sup> *The Times*, 11 September 1830

<sup>53</sup> Berg, Machinery Question, pp. 286-7

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in *Annual Register*, 1830, p. 10

<sup>55</sup> Also see WP 1/1026/19, 26 June 1829, and *The Times* 27 May 1829 for similar sentiments

machinery was a popular solution to the problem of over production, falling wages and unemployment. Henry Appleton from London and Josephus Beddome from Manchester both wrote to Wellington in the summer of 1829. The labourer and artisan had to 'contend against a power which is under no control', which placed the basic necessities beyond their reach by reducing their wages. Both writers suggested that a tax be placed on machinery.<sup>56</sup>

To tax machinery was to make the employment of labour more attractive to the employer by making the machine relatively more expensive. 'JH', writing from Bury in November 1830, described how the 'unrestricted' use of machinery in cotton printing and weaving was having devastating effects upon the local economy. In one establishment alone five printing machines, with the assistance of twenty men, could do the work of 350 men. Raising the cost of using machinery by a tax could not fail to benefit the workers.<sup>57</sup>

A number of writers suggested regulating machinery in some other way. 'A Friend of William Pitt's' wanted machinery restrained and proposed a licensing system for new inventions. This would restrict the supply of new machinery. 'FP' went further and wanted a prohibition on the use of steam-powered machinery.<sup>58</sup> Peel and Melbourne received similar letters at the Home Office. One proposed that machinery should be banned in agricultural districts when there was severe unemployment,<sup>59</sup> and an anonymous writer believed that machines should make goods for export only, leaving goods that were consumed at home to be made by hand. This would increase employment while maintaining competition abroad.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> WP 1/1023/2, 1 June 1829; 1/1034/32, 3 July 1829. Other writers also expressed the same sentiments. See W. Dun, *Observations on the general state of the country; with a plan of relief, addressed to His Grace the duke of Wellington as Premier of England* (1830); 'No Landowner', *Cheap bread injurious to the working classes and gold unnecessary as a circulating medium* (1827). Also see Gordon, *Political Economy*, especially p. 89, for parliamentary debates.

<sup>57</sup> WP 1/1159/155, 30 November 1830. In times of high unemployment, many people wanted to get paupers back to work. See below, *The Pauper Problem*

<sup>58</sup> WP 1/1159/20, n.d.; 1/1066/20, 15 September 1829

<sup>59</sup> HO 44/21/361, October 1830. Also see E. J. T. Collins, 'The Rationality of 'surplus' Agricultural Labour: Mechanisation in English Agriculture in the nineteenth century', *Agricultural History Review*, XXXV, 1987, pp. 36-46

<sup>60</sup> HO 44/21/344, October 1830

One writer in November 1830 thought that machinery should be destroyed so that labourers could be re-employed.<sup>61</sup> ‘Captain Swing’ had already been doing this in the southern counties for several months.

## **The Protection debate**

The Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars had provided the British manufacturer and agriculturist with a high degree of protection from foreign competition. Britain was a maritime and trading nation, importing large amounts of raw materials (especially cotton) and exporting finished goods around the globe. With the post-war depressions, the collapse of demand and increased competition from abroad, the injured trades responded with a cry for more protection. Those involved in the affected trades felt that the government had an obligation to preserve domestic industry. People engaged in overseas trade, however, usually took the opposite view. They pressed for less protection, not more, and following Adam Smith and the political economists, they called for freer trade to enable them to compete on the world stage.

The early nineteenth-century was an era of lowering import and export duties, of the relaxation of the navigation laws and the ending of the East India Company’s monopoly. Huskisson’s liberal trade policies, supported by Wellington and reaching their climax with Peel’s reforms in the 1840’s, were the subject of considerable debate in parliament and out of doors.

The debate was often conducted around the Corn Law of 1815, and the sliding scale introduced in 1828. In a period of free trade, the Corn Law was considered an exceptional piece of legislation. To supporters, agriculture possessed a privileged position within the economy and therefore deserved protection. To opponents it was an odious example of class legislation. Other industries, such as silk, lace, glove making or shipping, tried to stake a similar claim and the privileged position of the East India company was discussed in the same terms. Free trade or protection touched every consumer because it fundamentally

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<sup>61</sup> HO 44/22/116, November 1830

affected the price of goods. It was also an area of the economy that the government intervened in. It is hardly surprising, then, that it should be debated in times of distress.<sup>62</sup>

In 1829 parliament received 107 petitions calling for freer trade, most against the Corn Laws and the renewal of the East India Charter, and 75 calling for protection. In 1830 and 1831 parliament received 449 and 168 petitions respectively in favour of free trade, and only 19 seeking protection.<sup>63</sup> Admittedly, the debates on the Corn Law in 1827 and 1828 generated more interest, and the East India charter was not up for renewal until 1833 (although the decision was made as early as 1829), but the fall in petitions calling for protection is still remarkable.

The protection of agriculture was justified on unique grounds. It was argued that 'parliament had a moral responsibility towards agriculturists' who had invested wartime profits in order to safeguard the food supply.<sup>64</sup> *The Standard*, critical of Wellington's free trade principles, asserted that protection was necessary because English agriculturists paid more taxes and higher wages than those on the continent.<sup>65</sup> Political economists rejected this notion. Ardent supporters of free trade, they believed that the Corn Laws encouraged inefficient domestic production, which kept prices and wages high thus lowering the nation's profits.<sup>66</sup> *The Times* supported this stance and called for a free trade in corn and criticised the 1828 bill.<sup>67</sup> *The Morning Chronicle* thought that Wellington still clung to the 'doctrines of the protecting school' and asserted 'whatever the protection adds to the price of food is an injury to the commerce of the nation'.<sup>68</sup>

Wellington, then, was believed to favour both free trade and protection, and to an extent this was true. He generally favoured Huskisson's reforms, but considered the Corn

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<sup>62</sup> See Gordon, *Political Economy*; Gordon, *Tory Liberalism*; Hilton, *Corn, Cash, Commerce*, for these debates in Parliament

<sup>63</sup> *Lords' and Commons' Journals*

<sup>64</sup> Hilton, *Corn, Cash, Commerce*, p. 113; Gordon, *Political Economy*, p. 84

<sup>65</sup> *Standard*, 30 March 1830, 15 December 1829

<sup>66</sup> Gordon, *Political Economy*, pp. 6, 10

<sup>67</sup> *The Times*, 2, 15 April 1828

<sup>68</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 30 March 1830



Laws a special case, as his 1828 Corn Law, which satisfied few people, showed.<sup>69</sup> Wellington's correspondence would suggest that he was perceived to be a protector of the landed interest<sup>70</sup>, and there is a general protectionist slant to the letters he received. A letter from Durham attributed the low prices in the agricultural districts to the release of bonded corn and called for a 'full stop' to foreign grain imports. St George Gregg of Dublin also called for a 'fixed and permanent import duty'.<sup>71</sup> One writer supported the sliding scale in theory, but considered that it operated imperfectly in practice due to the manner in which the corn averages were correlated. To greatly improve the system John Ellman, from Lewes in Sussex, suggested changing the towns where the returns were taken.<sup>72</sup>

Autarky was also stressed. Two writers were convinced that Britain should be independent of other countries for its necessary sustenance. The UK should supply itself from its own sources, should not import goods that could be made at home, and only export when there was a superabundance.<sup>73</sup> In the words of George Nolan in an open letter to Wellington: 'Are we to prefer the produce of other countries to that of our own; and, in contempt of the ordinances of nature, to neglect the cultivation of our own soil, and the employment of our own population?'.<sup>74</sup>

It was alleged that free trade had caused unemployment and distress, because foreign competitors (usually the French) were able to undercut British prices, and as a result there were requests from specific industries for protection. The misery of the Spitalfields silk weavers was said to be appalling, with lace manufacturers and glove makers in Worcester described in a similar way. All faced competition from France who could produce higher quality goods at a cheaper price. Smuggling also undermined their position. Ladies and their maids were said to go to France to buy the goods cheaply and then smuggle them back. In

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<sup>69</sup> See Hilton, *Corn, Cash, Commerce*, p. 200

<sup>70</sup> WP 1/927/12, 19 April 1828

<sup>71</sup> WP 1/922/3, 10 March 1828; 1/1040/16, 27 August 1829

<sup>72</sup> WP 1/891/6, 24 June 1827 ; 1/927/12, 15 April 1828

<sup>73</sup> WP 1/1051/1, 14 October 1829; 1/1118/3, 1 June 1830

<sup>74</sup> G. Nolan, *Practical observations upon the projected alterations of the law for regulating the import of corn in the United Kingdom ... in a letter to ... the duke of Wellington* (1828)

response, these trades invariably wanted government action and on occasion their complaints were listened to.<sup>75</sup> John Palmer, of Worcester, wrote on the condition of the glove trade. His letter was investigated by government officials who concluded that they could do nothing to stop competition.<sup>76</sup> John Ballance, for the silk trade, had already seen the Chancellor of the Exchequer.<sup>77</sup> Because the government was not responsive Thomas Clarkson, agent to the lace committee, wanted the king to rule that handmade English lace be worn at court, at balls and other social functions: 'what is it that produces fashion? answer, the exhibition and wearing anything publicly by fashionable people, or leading people in the first rank of society ... followed and worn by all ranks of society'. This would help the manufacturers to compete with machines and the French. Wellington's response was not encouraging. The king could not tell people what to wear. If it was the fashion, people would wear lace, if it were not people would wear something else.<sup>78</sup>

Boyd Hilton has described the Tory move to free trade as a 'pragmatic development' rather than an ideological conversion.<sup>79</sup> But for protectionists it was a sell out, 'a nation which rests its prosperity on manufactures is sleeping on barrels of gunpowder'.<sup>80</sup> Joseph Pinsent published a pamphlet divided into dialogues between the main interests of the nation. Landowners, labourers, manufactures, stockholders and others held a conversation with a government official on the causes of the distress. Each cited free trade as the cause and protection the cure.<sup>81</sup> Another publicist believed that as a result of free trade, and

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<sup>75</sup> WP 1/1021/9, 30 May 1829; 1/1066/7, n.d.

<sup>76</sup> WP 1/940/8, 2 July 1828. Wellington raised the question of the duties on gloves in Cabinet during August 1828, Jupp, *Politics on eve of Reform*, p. 99

<sup>77</sup> WP 1/989/20, 14 January 1829. The Government seems to have been very responsive to the distress in the silk trade, Jupp, *Politics on eve of Reform*, p. 143

<sup>78</sup> WP 1/1102/10, 18 March 1830. Also see Part Two for background to this kind of patronage request.

<sup>79</sup> Hilton, *Corn, Cash, Commerce*, p. 125

<sup>80</sup> H. Wyatt, *Address to the owners and occupiers of land, on the importance of an adequate protection for agriculture* (1827)

<sup>81</sup> J. Pinsent, *Conversations on political economy; or a series of dialogues ... with remarks on our present distress, their causes, and the remedies applicable to them* (1821)

competition with France, two or three million people would be thrown out of employment.<sup>82</sup> One writer from London called for retaliatory protectionist measures against the United States, and the letter was taken sufficiently seriously to be investigated by Thomas Peregrine Courtney, the Vice President of the Board of Trade. He disagreed with John Wylie's suggestion, for any protection would harm Britain because America provided her with vital raw materials, principally cotton.<sup>83</sup>

These requests for protection were the result of the desperate plight of the people who earned their living from the land or in uncompetitive trades. In the Wellington papers there is little discussion of trade problems, or the high level of tariffs. Trade appears to have been very buoyant in this period, which meant increasing revenues for the government at a lower cost to the consumer.<sup>84</sup> Wellington's administration collected and cited in debates a mass of excise and trading figures to show that the country was still carrying on business, and these were used to refute the existence of the generality of distress.<sup>85</sup>

Only three writers concerned with specific industries did call for freer trade. Samuel Warrand wrote twice from London complaining against the import duties on foreign wine, and requested an interview to discuss the question, which was declined. Joseph Hone, writing from Liverpool, felt that a high duty on Irish tobacco would cause unemployment in Ireland, and urged the government to set a low tariff. An anonymous writer, who thought that high duties only benefited the wealthy, made the same point.<sup>86</sup>

Similarly the privileged position of the East India Company afforded little comment. The golden age of the company had gone, and in 1813 it had lost its monopoly of trade with India. The debates surrounding the renewal of the charter in 1833 were very one sided. The company itself was not prepared to defend its monopoly of trade with China, not even the

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<sup>82</sup> J. C. Moore, *Freedom of Trade* (2nd ed. 1826)

<sup>83</sup> WP 1/938/13, 27 June 1828

<sup>84</sup> Harling, *Waning of Old Corruption*, p. 184

<sup>85</sup> For example see WP 1/1164 for the various tables and statistics used by the government

<sup>86</sup> WP 1/1119/8, 11 June 1830; 1/1176/3, 18 February 1831; 1/1121/36, 30 June 1830; 1/1159/65, 4 June 1830

profitable tea trade.<sup>87</sup> *The Times* was most critical of the monopoly which resulted in higher prices to the consumer, sentiments echoed by Robert Ogden, who wrote Wellington to inform him of a public meeting in Manchester against the monopoly in tea and the renewal of the charter.<sup>88</sup> I Carmichael from Stirling believed that to relieve distress, trade with the east had to be encouraged, whereas an anonymous writer felt the interests of the company should come first.<sup>89</sup> But three letters do not amount to a debate. Indeed in 1830 the *Annual Register* considered the debate over:

Public opinion had set it down, that the monopoly of this corporation imposed a most mischievous restraint on the trade of the country, without any reasonable causes, or counterbalancing advantage...

While some writers hoped that freer trade would aid them during the depression, most felt that it was the government's duty to protect them in times of crisis. Some of their propositions were investigated, but the conclusion was that the government could not, and would not, intervene in the market on behalf of specific interest groups. They only made an exception for the landed interest, and it was because of this that the Corn Laws were a favourite target for people who attacked government mismanagement.

## The Currency

The want of understanding the currency question has killed Lord Liverpool, Lord Castlereagh, and Mr Canning; exposed the weakness of Lord Goderich, and, what is worse than all, it has destroyed the fame of the Duke of Wellington; and all ministers who persist in maintaining the present standard will share the same fate; for, unless they can control the laws of nature, no

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<sup>87</sup> See P. Lawson, *The East India Company. A History* (1993); Hilton, Corn, Cash, Commerce, pp. 198-200, 266

<sup>88</sup> *The Times*, 9 April 1828; WP 1/1015/12, 5 February 1829

<sup>89</sup> WP 1/1020/3, 25 May 1829; 1/1021/6, 29 May 1829

minister can ever make this country prosperous under the present monetary system.<sup>90</sup>

The writer of these words may have exaggerated the influence of the monetary debates upon leading politicians, but the currency, so vital to the nation's well being, did produce deep divisions within parliament and the nation in general. In periods of economic depression the government was forced to defend its monetary policies. For opponents it was the most visible symbol of Tory economic mismanagement.

In 1819 the government decided, after committees of both Houses had reported, to resume cash payments. In February 1797, after a run on the Bank of England, payments in gold upon demand had been restricted, and the Bank embarked upon an expansionist fiscal policy by issuing £1 notes. Pitt's 'paper money system' survived until 1819 when the Liverpool administration moved against this 'fictitious' capital. The Act of that year (dubbed 'Peel's Bill') compelled the Bank of England to again tie the currency to gold, first at the market price of 81s. per ounce, moving to the mint price of 77s. 10½d. in 1821. For agriculturists the return to gold represented social stability, in contrast to paper which symbolised the industrial revolution and the 'get-rich' schemes of the unproductive fundholders. In the words of Boyd Hilton, 'in 1819 Englishmen embraced gold, seduced by its moral force as a symbol of truth and stability, of immutability and impartiality'. For political economists the 'ideal monetary system was one founded on an invariable measure of value' and gold offered the best approximation. Paper was only to be tolerated if it was convertible into gold upon demand. The government saw the restoration of the currency to a sound footing as one of the most important measures to facilitate the transition to a peacetime economy. Indeed few denied the wisdom of resuming cash payments, it was the timing that concerned opponents. Likewise, the return to a gold standard was generally accepted, but the parity was the subject of much debate and criticism.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> G. F. Muntz, *Three letters to the Duke of Wellington, in 1829 and 1830, upon the distressed state of the country* (1830)

<sup>91</sup> For these discussions, Gordon, *Political Economy*, pp. 11, 27-57; Hilton, *Corn, Cash, Commerce*, p. 48, 59

The second innovation in the currency occurred in the wake of the financial crash of December 1825. The resumption of cash payments and the return to a gold standard had failed to prevent a monetary crisis, and so the (over) issue of small notes became a favourite scapegoat. Small notes were deemed to be the currency of the poor, and it was they, or so it was believed, who were responsible for the runs on banks in times of crisis. As a result, notes under £5 were to be withdrawn in England and Wales by 5 April 1829. The government also permitted the creation of joint stock banks outside London and the establishment of Bank of England branches in the provinces. By these measures the government hoped to strengthen the monetary and banking structures, which was only really achieved by Peel in the 1840s.<sup>92</sup>

By the 1830 session of parliament, therefore, the currency was already a highly contentious issue. When the administration was abdicating responsibility for the crisis, opponents turned to the currency question as an example of government policies that had produced disastrous effects. The currency was a favourite topic for those who ascribed political causes to economic problems. Bankers such as Alexander Baring and Thomas Attwood held the Tory currency innovations responsible for low prices and a falling off of demand, and they urged further reforms. These sentiments were often echoed in the pamphlet literature, but again the newspaper press generally supported the government's stance.

*The Times* approved of the Liberal Tories' currency measures:

The experiment of a partial abolition of the small notes has been tried; and under it, we have high authority for stating that the manufacturing and commercial interest of the kingdom now experiences a daily improvement ... why recall that good, of which Mr Peel by his measure for the restoration of the gold currency has laid the groundwork, and let in the spirit of adventure, often fraudulent, to afflict us again with inordinate prices, with fictitious credit, with speculative frenzy ...<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> See, Hilton, *Corn, Cash, Commerce*, pp. 49, 202-3; Gordon, *Tory Liberalism*, pp. 40, 126; D. J Moss, 'The Bank of England and the Country Banks: Birmingham, 1827-33', *Economic History Review*, May 1981

<sup>93</sup> *The Times*, 14 February 1828

By February 1830 it had become bored and irritated with suggestions of further reform: 'we wish people would let the currency alone', and opposed Attwood's 'mischief' of asking for a re-issue of small notes.<sup>94</sup> The *Morning Post* considered 'any alteration ... at the present juncture ... [too] fearful to contemplate', and generally supported the government's position, as did the 'creeping' *Courier*.<sup>95</sup>

*The Standard* and the *Morning Chronicle* were more considered in their support. The *Chronicle* 'thought that ministers went a great deal too far in their hostility to paper, yet we think Mr Western and the county gentlemen generally at this time exaggerate greatly the inconvenience now suffered from the suppression of small notes' and blamed the Corn Laws for the distress. Landowners, like Charles Western, suspected that the currency alterations were designed to profit fundholders at their expense.<sup>96</sup> *The Standard* thought that the change in the currency had caused depression, but from 1825 felt that other causes had exerted a greater influence.<sup>97</sup>

William Cobbett, of course, was particularly outspoken on the currency issue and was set against any return to 'the base and false, worthless rags': 'I have been the rallying point ... of all those who detested the paper system'. Cobbett's critique of the inflationary effects of paper money was inextricably bound with the taxation question and Old Corruption: 'bank noting and borough-mongering began together'.<sup>98</sup> His analysis looked to a political solution. Labourers' wages did not keep pace with price increases and the funding system was responsible for the loss of independence and the poverty of the cottage. The manipulation of the medium of exchange had first disadvantaged and then devastated the worker. There is evidence that his ideas on the currency found acceptance, if not a total understanding of the intricacies involved, among the agricultural labourers.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> *The Times*, 1 February, 10 June, 1830

<sup>95</sup> *Morning Post*, 21 January 1830; *The Courier*, 25 September 1829

<sup>96</sup> Harling, *Waning of Old Corruption*, p. 140

<sup>97</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 2 December 1829; *Standard*, 2 January 1830

<sup>98</sup> *Political Register*, 9, 16 January, 1830

<sup>99</sup> I. Dyke, *William Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 13, 30, 33, 193; Thompson, *People's Science*, p. 141; Harling, *Old Corruption*, pp. 139-40

The anti-bullionists and monetary reformers believed that fortunes made during the war were genuine, not 'fictitious' as the government believed, and they were hostile to the administration's deflationary measures. The administration was accused of turning creditors into debtors and of effectively increasing the burden of taxation.<sup>100</sup> In the words of William Heygate MP, Peel's Bill should have been called 'a bill to add one third to the national debt; to add, in the same proportion, to all fixed incomes; and to subtract an equal amount from all the resources of productive capital and industry'. Alexander Baring also blamed the post-war agricultural depression on currency reforms. Depressed market prices were the direct result of the resumption of cash payments at the old standard. The same arguments used by Mathias Attwood and Burdett in 1822 were still being used in debates during 1830.<sup>101</sup>

Unlike the London press the pamphlet literature was more critical of the government. In open letters to Wellington and Peel, in published speeches and in short tracts, there was an almost universal belief that 'the chief cause of all our distress ... is mainly attributed to the two last revolutionary changes in our monetary system'.<sup>102</sup>

In principle there was little wrong with a metallic currency, but the government's unforgivable sin had been to restrict the currency which, it was alleged, caused low prices. Writers associated good times with a plentiful money supply, and bad with the 'contraction of the circulating medium'.<sup>103</sup> Because Peel's Bill was responsible for the 'diminution of sixteen millions of currency in the short space of three years', it was held in low regard.<sup>104</sup> The 1819 Act set the currency at the old standard, thus the 'bill has actually increased the pressure of taxation forty per cent'.<sup>105</sup> Another pamphleteer believed that 'the exchangeable value of the pound sterling was raised one fourth, and consequently twenty five per cent was

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<sup>100</sup> Hilton, *Corn, Cash, Commerce*, pp. 63, 96-7

<sup>101</sup> Gordon, *Political Economy*, pp. 93, 95, 143, 147-50; *Annual Register*, 1830, pp. 68-71

<sup>102</sup> See A. Majoribanks, *Letter to His Grace the Duke of Wellington on the state of The Times* (1830); C. C. Western, *Letter to the Earl of Liverpool on the cause of the present embarrassment and distress; and the measures necessary for our effectual relief* (1826); 'A Citizen of London', *Letters to the Duke of Wellington, from 1828 to 1830, on Currency* (1831)

<sup>103</sup> 'No Landowner', *Cheap Bread*

<sup>104</sup> 'M.R.', *Letter on the subject of Country Banks and Currency, to John Bull* (1828)

<sup>105</sup> 'A Citizen of London', *Letters to the Duke of Wellington*



added to all pecuniary engagements'.<sup>106</sup> Equitable adjustment, either by increasing the prices in proportion to the taxation, or by reducing the taxation in proportion to the prices, was a common cry. To opponents of Wellington's government one thing was clear: 'the sole cause of all our difficulties has been mistaken legislation respecting the currency'.<sup>107</sup>

The Tory administration was held responsible for the distress and so had acted against the interests of the people. Thomas Attwood (radical, currency reformer and brother of Mathias) was just one among many who took this approach, claiming that 'the distress has arisen from the proceedings of government'. Peel's 'obnoxious bill' had benefited fundholders, tax receivers and the 'other drones of society'. The poor man lost out. The lower orders used small notes to feed and clothe themselves and their family. 'Between 1791 and 1812 the paper money elevated prices; the price of labour rose as did the price of goods, and labourers were enabled to procure a maintenance'. With peace, and government policies, came depression.<sup>108</sup>

Wellington fundamentally disagreed with this argument. To one correspondent in January 1829 he confessed 'that I have no great faith in the doctrines of too much or too little of circulation', preferring to blame 'the want of limitation to the issues of banknotes of all description, which by facilitating the granting of credits occasions speculation and increases prices'. Eight months later in a letter to Sir Robert Farquhar, he refuted the suggestion that plentiful money would ease the depression:<sup>109</sup>

The man who makes two pairs of stockings where one pair was made before is not blessed. According to you he ought to have the Bank of England, or country banks, or some establishment or other authorised to coin fictitious money, in order that people might be able to buy more stockings than they should require. I say no - that remedy will not answer.

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<sup>106</sup> Majoribanks, Letter to His Grace the Duke of Wellington

<sup>107</sup> Western, Letter to the Earl of Liverpool

<sup>108</sup> *Causes of the present distress. Speech of Thomas Attwood at the public meeting, held in Birmingham, on 8 May, 1829, for the purpose of considering the distressed state of the Country* (1829)

<sup>109</sup> WCD, vol. v, p. 432; vol. vi, p. 147

For many of the duke's correspondents that was exactly the remedy. The contents of his mailbag may have convinced Wellington about the strength of feeling on the issue, but it did not induce him to change his mind.

On 2 February 1830 'A country gentleman' wrote to Wellington. The duke had been able to beat Napoleon because, back in England, he had the support of the pound note and the potato, meaning, a hardy populace and a thriving economy. In 1830 the potato remained, but the pound note did not, and it was no coincidence that the country was now in distress.<sup>110</sup> A plentiful supply of small notes was needed to reflate the economy.

Peel's Bill was often singled out for criticism. Charles Thomson from Hounslow, enclosing an article by Attwood, called for an equitable adjustment.<sup>111</sup> John Rooke from Cumberland considered that the 1819 Act was responsible for lowering prices and augmenting the pressure of the taxes. Government fiscal policies had lowered the value of all property and added to the private and public burdens.<sup>112</sup> A number of writers wanted an increase in the circulating currency, while an anonymous writer called for the introduction of £3 notes, instead of £5 notes, which would benefit the poorer consumer. A return to the paper currency of old was a common remedy for the distress.<sup>113</sup> Two writers, A J Gordon from London and Richard Kearney of Birr (Ireland), both suggested that the government establish an imperial bank to print and circulate its own currency. In this way the capital could be used to employ paupers on wastelands. For their efforts, Gordon sought a job co-ordinating the scheme to cultivate the wastelands, whereas Kearney wanted £50 travelling expenses in order to travel across to England to discuss his plan.<sup>114</sup>

John Fowler from Dublin believed, erroneously, that 'the return to a small note circulation is stated to be in the contemplation of your Grace; and a wise measure it

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<sup>110</sup> WP 1/1159/23, 2 February 1830

<sup>111</sup> WP 1/1016/26, 9 May 1829

<sup>112</sup> WP 1/1046/14, 24 September 1829; 1/1088/14, 28 January 1830

<sup>113</sup> WP 1/1010/17, 16 April 1829; 1/1093/19, 9 February 1830; 1/1159/16, 21 January 1830 ; 1/1051/1, 14 October 1829

<sup>114</sup> WP 1/1067/4, n.d.; 1/1069/22, 1 December 1829

undoubtedly would be'.<sup>115</sup> He did not say where his incorrect information came from, but people did check the press for speeches from the government side and were often highly critical. One anonymous writer accused Peel of knowing as much about the currency 'as a four and twenty pounder'.<sup>116</sup> While John Rooke thought that if the duke continued to 'listen to hired political economists - to grasping monied interests ... or to King Rothschild' then his popularity must suffer.<sup>117</sup> Jonathan Abbott of Suffolk wrote because he had seen a speech by the duke in *The Times*, which criticised the wartime system and the fictitious wealth generated by it. The writer, after correcting some of Wellington's facts, preferred to blame the operation of the bankruptcy and the insolvency laws. The duke replied that he knew 'nothing about publications in *The Times* newspaper and he begs leave to decline to discuss anything which he has said in his place in parliament'. Wellington of course did know about the speech, it was just his way of informing Abbott that he would not correspond on the matter.<sup>118</sup>

Other writers focused on problems in the banking system. Daniel Payne, who sent numerous manuscripts on the currency from London, stressed the unpopularity of the Bank of England due to its inefficiency. His real grumble, however, was with the Bank directors personally because they had neglected to follow his advice at an earlier date.<sup>119</sup> J Pope called for a reorganisation of the banking structure to win back the confidence of the people. But Wellington had 'no concern in banking' and declined to grant an interview to discuss the plan.<sup>120</sup>

Not all the writers were prepared to lay the blame entirely at the government's door. The value of gold, like any other marketable commodity depended upon the laws of supply and demand. Alex Mundell writing from London believed that the government's measures

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<sup>115</sup> WP 1/1044/3, 9 August 1829

<sup>116</sup> WP 1/1159/30, 7 February 1830

<sup>117</sup> WP 1/1046/14, 24 September 1829

<sup>118</sup> WP 1/1026/19, 26 June 1829

<sup>119</sup> WP 1/1087/7, 23 January 1830; 1/1025/38, 17 June 1829; Hilton, *Corn, Cash, Commerce*, p. 54, suggests that the Bank was unpopular due to capital offences for forgery

<sup>120</sup> WP 1/1121/1, 22 June 1830

would not have had such a dramatic effect if the gold supply had continued to increase. He cited the loss of American mines in 1820 as a contributing factor in the rising cost.<sup>121</sup> Henry Wagner, a vicar in Brighton, considered that the distress was exaggerated because the Brighton Savings bank had received more deposits than it had suffered withdrawals.<sup>122</sup> Henry Burgess of London had originally believed that Peel's Bill had been detrimental to the productive classes, 'but public opinion' (the newspapers) 'having been decidedly pronounced in favour of adhering to the existing policy', had forced him to change his mind. He had been converted by the press and considered it the duty of every man to try and make the policy work. To this end he proposed the establishment of provincial mints.<sup>123</sup> Finally, C S Forster, a country banker from Walsall, wrote to highlight the mistakes Wellington made in a speech. He supported the government's policy of suppressing small notes in England and Wales.<sup>124</sup> He was, however, in the minority. Most correspondents believed that the government had erred in its monetary policies, and used popularised versions of established arguments to make their point. There had been small notes and a large circulation when the country prospered, but in 1830 none of these things existed. This correspondence shows how ordinary people appropriated political theories and discussions in order to criticise a government whom they thought was ignoring their plight.

## **Taxation and the Debt**

The people unanimously call out for a reduction of taxes.<sup>125</sup>

The National Debt is a very Good Thing and it would be dangerous to pay it off, for fear of Political Economy.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> WP 1/1032/10, 20 July 1829

<sup>122</sup> WP 1/1094/21, 13 February 1830

<sup>123</sup> WP 1/1110/9, 28 April 1830

<sup>124</sup> WP 1/940/20, 5 July 1828

<sup>125</sup> *The Times*, 15 March 1830

Returning home from the Napoleonic wars the freeborn Englishman, who had suffered low pay, harsh discipline and the mental and physical rigours of war, was obliged to cover the costs of Britain's military campaigns. With the repeal of the income tax in 1816, the weight of taxation fell on the consuming population. During periods of distress, petitions praying for relief from the heavy burden of taxation were common, and from the American Revolutionary war onwards, the exploitative nature of taxation was a central plank of radical political ideology. In 1830 parliament received 267 petitions praying for reductions in taxation. But more significantly, in petitions complaining of general distress, and in those calling for parliamentary reform, the taxation system was often the motivating factor.<sup>127</sup>

Rates of taxation were linked to the growth of the national debt. Originating in 1696 after the creation of the Bank of England, it marked a departure from the practice of paying for wars in the short term. Sons now paid for the debts of their fathers. Throughout the eighteenth-century as Britain fought a series of wars, mostly against Catholic France and her interests, the debt swelled. From £75 million in 1748, to £241 million in 1783, the debt was a staggering £860,000,000 at the close of the Napoleonic wars.<sup>128</sup> Although it could be argued that the ability to sustain a debt of this size meant that Britain was a growing and prospering nation, most contemporary opinion thought otherwise. The national debt was seen as a burden to commerce and industry. References to the 'weight' of the debt, and to Britain 'groaning' under the pressure of taxes were common. A large debt meant high taxes. For the year ending 5 January 1818, the gross tax revenue was £57.6 million, of which £36.4 million came from customs and excise. Against this the annual charge of the national debt was £31.4 million.<sup>129</sup> The association was clear and absolute. To lighten the burden of

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<sup>126</sup> W. C. Sellar & R. J. Yeatman, *1066 and all that* (1930), *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, (4th ed., 1992)

<sup>127</sup> *Lords' and Commons' Journals*

<sup>128</sup> Hilton, Corn, Cash, Commerce, p.16; also see, Colley, Britons, and, C. P. Hill, *British Economic and Social History 1700 -1982* (1985), pp. 146-7; Brewer, *Sinews of Power*

<sup>129</sup> F. Shehab, *Progressive Taxation. A Study in the Development of the progressive Principle in the British Income Tax* (Oxford, 1953)

taxation, the national debt had to be reduced. To that end, various people wrote to Wellington proposing schemes to liquidate the national debt.

Because the debt was based on funded wealth - stocks, shares, and debentures - a number of correspondents argued that this should be the way to pay it off. John Hosper, a London tea dealer, suggested taking £2 in every £100 from all government dividends and annuities. At the end of twenty-five years, according to Hosper's calculations, the debt would have been halved, enabling the government to reduce taxation accordingly. The £50 loss to the fundholder would be made up through increased consumption.<sup>130</sup> Robert Jenkinson from County Wicklow proposed that £25 out of every £100 of the debt be paid off in £5 debentures which bore no interest.<sup>131</sup> Two other writers suggested that the government issue notes to fundholders equal to the amount of stock each held. There was no discussion of how these notes were to be financed. Nathaniel Charter of London, taking Ricardo fully on board, suggested a one off, extraordinary tax on property of twenty per cent, which would eliminate the debt immediately.<sup>132</sup>

The most common plan for paying off the national debt was through the imposition of an income, or property tax. William Stevenson, a London resident who described himself as 'of the working class' and who also wrote to Canning, proposed a small, but unidentified tax on real property above £1,000 per annum. 'RK' also suggested an unspecified property tax on funded, landed and commercial wealth.<sup>133</sup> There was a general belief that since the debt had increased to protect property in times of war, property should shoulder the burden. Charles Maitland of Norfolk proposed a property tax on a sliding scale, starting at one per cent on incomes of £200, rising to ten per cent on incomes of £10,000 a year. The tax should then be permanent so that assessed taxes could be repealed.<sup>134</sup> These schemes to reduce the national debt were part of the wider discussion on the relative merits of direct,

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<sup>130</sup> WP 1/1017/6, 11 May 1829

<sup>131</sup> WP 1/1094/8, 10 February 1830

<sup>132</sup> WP 1/1159/17, 23 January 1830; 1/1017/17, 14 May 1829; 1/1086/18, 20 January 1830. For Ricardo on this issue see, Gordon, *Political Economy*, pp. 22, 158

<sup>133</sup> WP 1/1041/4, 29 August 1829; 1/1159/32, 9 February 1830

<sup>134</sup> WP 1/1088/9, 27 January 1830

over indirect, forms of taxation. The anonymous writer already cited, believed that a property tax would mean the end to taxes on leather, candles, coffee, sugar, tea and other consumables.<sup>135</sup> Similarly, in a pamphlet, one writer proposed a progressive property tax on the following scale: one per cent on the first £100, increasing in half per cent intervals, so that an income of £200 per annum would pay £3, a £300 income, would pay £6 and so on to a maximum of £150,000. This would enable the government to repeal indirect taxes.<sup>136</sup> Arguments for an income tax were associated with notions of equity and justice: the burden of the debt should be spread chiefly amongst those who could afford to pay.

Within Britain there is an enduring tradition of indirect taxation which survives to the present day. Patrick K O'Brien has described in depth the eighteenth-century system of taxation. He argues that the weight of taxation fell 'mainly and increasingly upon expenditure on goods and services' and despite the apparent desire on the part of government not to tax items of necessity, the 'incomes and concerns of both the landed and monied interests ... appear to have escaped lightly'. Part of the problem was that the nature of some goods - for example sugar and tea - were changing from luxuries to decencies. There was also a fundamental misunderstanding of what was considered a necessity. Between 1793 and 1815, the £197 million in new taxes and the £298 million raised by increasing existing rates, invariably fell on the poor if salt, candles, beer, coal, starch, leather and malt were not considered as necessities.<sup>137</sup> Salt, for example, was vitally important to the cottage economy. It was required in the making of butter, cheese and bacon, and if a pig were not kept as a result, there would be no fertiliser, lard for cooking or yeast for baking. The labourer would have to buy these items, all subject to tax, from the shopkeeper. This was what so angered Cobbett. The decline in cottage brewing could be directly traced to the vast increase in the malt tax. The working man increasingly had to

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<sup>135</sup> WP 1/1066/22, 23 October 1829

<sup>136</sup> J. Fountain, *Address to the King, both Houses of Parliament, ... shewing the various causes of the late and present distresses of trade, manufactures and agriculture, with the only full and effectual cure* (1822)

<sup>137</sup> P. K. O'Brien, 'The Political Economy of British Taxation, 1660-1815', *Economic History Review*, XLI, 1988, pp. 10, 12, 17

consume his beer in the public house, which was subject to a tax of 200 per cent.<sup>138</sup> Many contemporaries stressed the injustice of this situation. For example, Thomas Attwood: 'the rich man pays 30 per cent on his wines, and the poor man pays 300 per cent on his tea and 600 per cent on his tobacco. Is this fair?'<sup>139</sup> The British people were subject to a bewildering array of indirect taxes, which it is said accounted for between sixteen and forty per cent of the working man's income.<sup>140</sup> For many, taxation was seen as the primary cause of exploitation, and increasingly these people sought a political solution for their distress.

The duke of Wellington was a firm believer in retrenchment and the gradual reduction of the national debt as means of alleviating distress.<sup>141</sup> While Master General of the Ordnance, Wellington received letters suggesting savings that would curtail government expenditure. In order to diminish the national debt, one writer proposed the reduction of field officers in the artillery and engineers. This letter was forwarded to Lieut. Col. Chapman of the Royal Engineers who investigated the suggestion.<sup>142</sup> The three budgets of the Wellington administration have been described as economic 'holding operations', devoid of imagination.<sup>143</sup> Under pressure from opinion it did cut taxes by £4.8 million, although the Tories received scant credit as they had been forced to do so.<sup>144</sup> In 1828 chancellor Goulburn abolished the sinking fund (the rather wishful device used to pay off the national debt) and reduced the army, navy and civil estimates. In 1829 and 1830 the government reduced duties on sugar, silk, coal, tobacco and abolished the leather, beer and cider taxes, and reduced the duties on some government securities.<sup>145</sup>

Wellington preferred duties on articles of consumption to direct taxation, and he did not think the taxation system itself was responsible for the hardship of the people. Indeed he

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<sup>138</sup> Dyke, William Cobbett, pp. 120-22

<sup>139</sup> Attwood, *Causes of the Present Distress*

<sup>140</sup> Hill, *British Economic History*, p. 149; Dyke, William Cobbett, p. 122; O'Brien, *British Taxation*; Thompson, *People's Science*, p. 117

<sup>141</sup> Thompson, *Wellington after Waterloo*, p. 97

<sup>142</sup> WP 1/613/10, 1 January 1819; also see 615/25, 30 January 1819; 654/15, 27 October 1820

<sup>143</sup> Gash, 'Wellington and the Premiership', Gash, *Wellington*, p. 131

<sup>144</sup> Harling, *Waning of Old Corruption*, pp. 187-88, 191

<sup>145</sup> *Annual Register*, 1830; Shehab, *Progressive Taxation*, p. 78



did not think that tax cuts would do any good. Writing in October 1829 to his friend Charles Arbuthnot, the duke blamed middlemen for taking unnecessarily large profits. Any saving from a tax cut on tea or malt would not aid the consumer, because the trader would not pass the saving on. This was

the real grievance under which the country is labouring. It is not taxation, it is not high rents, it is not tithes, it is not want of the means of employing the labour of the labourer, but it is the high profits of the retail traders, and the state of luxury in which they live.<sup>146</sup>

The Wellington government, then, were forced to cut taxes, and although this may have been a trifling 'diminution' when compared with the size of the debt,<sup>147</sup> the response from the press was generally favourable.

*The Times* recognised 'the obligation of practising the strindest [sic] economy in every department of state' and was in favour of diminishing taxes and cutting off needless expenditure. It supported Goulburn's budget of March 1830, although the paper would have liked tax cuts on candlelight, building materials and fuel. One of Wellington's anonymous correspondents, writing two weeks later, echoed this sentiment when he called for the abolition of duty on tiles and bricks.<sup>148</sup> *The Morning Chronicle* and *Courier* also supported the budget,<sup>149</sup> but *The Standard* and *Morning Post* were more sceptical. The latter did not believe that taxation was the cause of the distress and was concerned that faith should be kept with the public creditor. Continued cries against taxation were 'too bad!'. *The Standard* considered that 'all hope of substantial relief from a reduction of taxes is [in] vain' and

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<sup>146</sup> WCD, vol. vi, pp. 222-224. The duke himself complained about the increase in tax on his house, See 7th Duke of Wellington (ed.), *Wellington and his Friends. Letters of the first Duke of Wellington to Rt. Hon. Charles and Mrs Arbuthnot, the Earl and Countess Wilton, Princess Lieven and Miss Burdett-Coutts* (1965) p. 102

<sup>147</sup> [Anon] *The Currency Question freed from mystery, in a letter to Mr Peel, showing how the distress may be relieved without altering The Standard* (1830)

<sup>148</sup> *The Times*, 12 December 1829, 5 February, 16 March 1830; WP 1/1159/51, 20 March 1830; *Morning Chronicle*, 26 March 1830

<sup>149</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 16 March 1830; *The Courier*, 16 March 1830

criticised (unfairly) Wellington's patronage.<sup>150</sup> Cobbett thought the opposite: 'daylight is not more visible than that the distress arises from the taxes'. The people paid nearly £60 million in taxation and yet the poor only received £6 million in relief from the rates. Cobbett warned the ruling elite that excessive taxation was the cause of many popular revolutions.<sup>151</sup>

In 1830 the malt and beer duties aroused considerable interest. *The Times* called them 'a national grievance', and the government's decision to open up the sale of beer prompted hundreds of people to write to the editor.<sup>152</sup> *The Morning Chronicle* believed that the tax on malt had 'made it impossible for the labouring classes to have beer at home', which together with the beer tax, was an 'intolerable burden'. *The Courier* praised the government for responding to public opinion by taking off the beer duty, 'a commodity which may be called a necessity of life'. *The Standard* remained unconvinced. If the government was correct in describing the distress as temporary, how could the repeal of a tax which was not to be implemented until October, have any effect?<sup>153</sup>

Some of the duke's correspondents responded to this debate. Most of the writers were in favour of a repeal of the malt and beer duties so that the working man could escape the public house and embrace his family and start cottage brewing again. The labourers could spend more time with their families, and if the working man spent less time in the pubs this would reduce his propensity to revolt and spread sedition.<sup>154</sup> An anonymous writer wanted the duty on beer to be transferred to that on gin. This would change the habits and the morals of the people at no cost to the revenue.<sup>155</sup>

Not all people were in favour of the government measures, usually because of the 'moral' implications of drink. A 'true government man' believed that the beer bill would only encourage drunkenness. For John Gabbold of Ipswich the concern was financial. His

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<sup>150</sup> *Morning Post*, 12 December 1829, 25 March 1830; *Standard*, 30 January, 16, 26 March 1830

<sup>151</sup> *Political Register*, 13 March, 11 September 1830

<sup>152</sup> *The Times*, 21 September 1829, 14 April 1830. See Thompson, *Wellington after Waterloo*, p. 100, for the duke's change of heart over his government's policy on the sale of beer.

<sup>153</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 6 October 1829, 11 January 1830; *Courier*, *Standard*, 16 March 1830

<sup>154</sup> See WP 1/1030/7, 2 July 1829; 1/1085/18, 16 January 1830; 1/1159/46, 16 March 1830

<sup>155</sup> WP 1/1159/12, n.d.

family had invested heavily in their inns over the years and stood to lose £50,000 if the general sale of beer was to be permitted.<sup>156</sup>

People also wrote concerning other taxes: ‘one argues for the repeal of the malt tax, another for the beer tax, a third for the window tax, and, in short, nearly every man has his nostrum’.<sup>157</sup> The duties on soap, homes and windows were all discussed. Other writers concerned themselves with alternative ways of maximising government revenue, which would hopefully result in lower taxation. It was suggested that the government could abolish the office of inspector general of the coast guard in Dublin and Edinburgh, resulting in a £5,000 a year saving. One anonymous writer thought that Wellington should set an example and serve the country gratis for a year. If others followed suit a great saving could be made.<sup>158</sup> There is some evidence that ministers responded to public opinion on this issue. In 1817, ministers cut their salaries by ten per cent, and in 1829 *The Times* reported that ‘The duke of Wellington has paid into the Treasury the sum of £1,025 received by him as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports’.<sup>159</sup>

Other writers suggested the creation of new taxes. George Carden from London proposed a new, unspecified tax, which would yield £100,000 per annum with no public outcry. Wellington, encouraging further correspondence, requested more details. William Fuller (also writing from London) recommended a tax on the medical profession. An anonymous writer wanted to see a tax of 21s. placed on passports. Two writers suggested that a duty be laid on postage when people wrote or sent petitions to government. This would raise money and prevent time-wasters. One of these writers also proposed a tax on

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<sup>156</sup> WP 1/1159/69, n.d.; 1/1112/3, 1 May 1830; 1/1159/33, 11 February 1830

<sup>157</sup> *Morning Post*, 12 December 1829

<sup>158</sup> WP 1/106612, n.d.; 1/1159/78, 30 January 1830; 1/1159/85, n.d.; 1/1159/45, 15 March 1830; 1/1159/28, 5 February 1830

<sup>159</sup> *The Times*, 23 October 1829. Admittedly this was only one office, but other aristocrats did follow suit, and it fits with Harling’s ‘image of probity’, *Waning of Old Corruption*, p. 169

advertisements. And a 'commercial traveller' recommended that labourers and mechanics could be relieved by a tax on the 14,445,600 hats produced each year in Britain.<sup>160</sup>

Alternative taxes were proposed because they shifted the burden of taxation to those that could afford to pay. Liberal papers such as *The Times* and the *Morning Chronicle* felt that the existing tax system was a grave injustice: 'It is notorious that the great mass of taxes is paid, not by rich proprietors but by the great body of consumers'. In the words of the *Morning Chronicle*: 'it has often been remarked, that in this country the rich take very unfair advantage of the poor in the mode of imposing taxes'.<sup>161</sup> The landowners had their Corn Law, the parliamentarians their pensions and sinecures, and the people paid for it all. A number of writers, then, sought to even out the burden. 'A Buckinghamshire Yeoman' wanted to see a tax on musical instruments:

I suppose there is not from Mile End turnpike to your Grace's new mansion at Hyde Park Corner, a house in which if there be a young female there is not a musical instrument ... these luxuries would bear a tax, and if it were added one upon musical paper and musical publications it would fall only upon those who could afford to pay it.<sup>162</sup>

'A well wisher to his country' also suggested 'a tax on piano fortes, which would only be felt by those who ought to be able to pay it'. Another writer, who travelled the country and got to know 'the public opinions ... the feelings of many different classes in general', desired a tax on items used solely by the higher orders, such as champagne and private carriages.<sup>163</sup> The principle behind these letters is an important one; that the rich should pay a higher rate of tax, or at least the same in proportion to their income, as the rest of society. To that end some economists, politicians and ordinary members of the public believed that there should be some form of tax on property.

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<sup>160</sup> WP 1/1057/3, 16 November 1829; 1/1095/8, n.d., c. February 1830; 1/1159/10, n.d.; 1/1159/40, 27 February 1830; 1/1145/7, 12 October 1830; 1/1159/47, n.d.

<sup>161</sup> *The Times*, 14 October 1829; *Morning Chronicle*, 27 October 1829

<sup>162</sup> WP 1/1066/14, 2 May 1829

<sup>163</sup> WP 1/1159/88, n.d. ; 1/1159/144, 14 November 1830

During his budget speech of 15 march 1830 Goulburn told Parliament that ministers had considered a property tax as one of the means of 'relieving the industry of the country from more buttherensome taxation'. But they decided not 'to impose a new tax on such portions of the community as are supposed to have suffered the least, in order to relieve those who have suffered the most' - for many the very reason to impose it - and decided to abolish the beer, cider and leather duties instead'.<sup>164</sup> Within liberal Tory ranks the idea of a property tax had some support. Goderich, Huskisson and Herries had been planning one in 1828 until Wellington's rise to the Premiership ended the idea. The duke saw an income tax merely as an exceptional financial measure of wartime.<sup>165</sup> Wellington was by no means alone in this. Philip Harling has argued that it was the pressure of opinion in 1816 that forced a reluctant Liverpool to drop the tax. There was a 'long-standing and widespread antipathy to direct taxation' which 'doomed it to immediate post-war extinction'.<sup>166</sup> Throughout the eighteenth-century the wealthy resisted any revision of the land tax or the imposition of an income tax. The 'repugnant tax only entered the statute book in highly exceptional circumstances' in 1799.<sup>167</sup> As soon as the war was over, the income tax, sold to its opponents as a wartime expedient, was abandoned. As a result the weight of taxation remained on the consumer.

Debate continues as to the level of support in favour of keeping the income tax in 1816. The government only lost by 37 votes, and both Shehab and Sabine argue that from 1816 on there 'existed a definite body of informed public and private opinion in favour of its retention', although Boyd Hilton is more qualified in his judgements.<sup>168</sup> Figures such as Richard Preston, Robert Torrens, Henry Parnell, Huskisson and of course Peel, were supporters of an income tax. In the 1819 debates on distress, John Curwen suggested a property tax to lighten the load for consumers, sentiments repeated by Huskisson in 1830. In

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<sup>164</sup> *Annual Register*, 1830, p. 76

<sup>165</sup> Hilton, *Corn, Cash, Commerce*, p. 260; Gash, 'Wellington and the Premiership', p. 131

<sup>166</sup> Harling, *Waning of Old Corruption*, pp. 166-7

<sup>167</sup> O'Brien, *British Taxation*, p. 20

<sup>168</sup> Shehab, *Progressive Taxation*, p. 66; B. E. V. Sabine, *A History of Income Tax* (1966) p. 53; Hilton, *Corn, Cash, Commerce*, pp. 260-8

1820 some Tories advanced an income tax on social grounds, and Peel believed that it would ease class divisions and reduce the burden on the poor. Moreover, some argued that the distress of 1826-30 highlighted the unreliability of relying on income from consumption and trade.<sup>169</sup>

Some of Wellington's correspondents favoured a property tax in the form of an amended land tax, which had the support of *The Times*. Samuel Miller (who later published his ideas) wrote twice (from London) to Wellington on this subject. The land tax was out of date. Population and capital had increased since the levels of payment were set, and the country had changed beyond all recognition, which meant that landowners did not pay as much as they should. A year later another writer reiterated this view.<sup>170</sup>

Most writers wanted to see a return to some form of income tax. In September 1829, 'Hermes' wrote the first of a number of letters to *The Times*. He proposed the 'extinction of a large bunch of indirect taxes' to be replaced by an income tax based on property. In a pamphlet, Harrison Wilkinson proposed the abolition of indirect taxes, with a single tax on landed and funded property put in their place. Other publicists supported this view. In the words of Poulett Scrope: 'excise duties and assessed taxes must be taken off, and a direct tax on income substituted'.<sup>171</sup>

Joseph Sparrow wrote an open letter to Wellington that was published in the *Morning Journal* and sent private correspondence. 'The only remedy for the present state of trade is a fair and equitable property tax and the repeal of the ... assessed taxes'. Another correspondent felt exactly the same way. An anonymous writer sent a more detailed proposal. He suggested a five per cent tax on landed and funded wealth. If someone paid £100 in property tax and £50 in assessed, they were then free from the latter. People should not be taxed twice over. 'JJ' also sent a detailed plan. People earning below £200 per annum

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<sup>169</sup> Shehab, *Progressive Taxation*, pp. 67, 73; Hilton, *Corn, Cash, Commerce*, pp. 82, 260, 262; Gordon, *Political Economy*, p. 21; Gordon, *Tory Liberalism*, pp. 130-33

<sup>170</sup> *The Times*, 24 October 1829; WP 1/1012/18, 25 April 1829; 1/1020/20, 28 May 1829

<sup>171</sup> *The Times*, 10 September, 20 October 1829; M. Chase, 'The People's Farm'. *English Radical Agrarianism 1775-1840* (Oxford, 1988) p. 123; G Poulett Scrope, *Common cause of the landlord, tenant and labourer, and the common cure of their complaint, in a letter to the agriculturists of the south of England* (1830)

were to be exempt. Those earning between £200 and £400 were to be taxed at 2½ per cent; between £400 and £600, 3 per cent; £600 to £1,200, 5 per cent; and those earning over £1,200 were to pay a tax of 7 per cent. The progressive principle was considered important by many writers, although some favoured a flat rate tax. For example, one pamphleteer proposed a property tax of ten per cent.<sup>172</sup>

A number of people wrote specifically with Ireland in mind. Robert Croker from Killarney believed that Ireland needed special assistance. A tax of eight per cent should be levied on landed, ecclesiastical and commercial incomes, with absentee landlords in particular penalised. Two writers in November 1830 also thought that absentees should be taxed. Benjamin Gibson from Wrexham wanted to tax every Irish absentee landowner so that the money could be used to employ the ‘paddy labourer’. ‘A Sussex magistrate’ suggested a general property tax of five, ten or twenty per cent on all property, with a rebate if the landlord resided in Great Britain. This would encourage the wealthy to be resident and spend money in their communities.<sup>173</sup>

Schemes for income or property taxes were proposed for one of three reasons: to pay off the national debt; to ‘simplify the whole mass of taxes under one head and raise a single tax to serve the whole’;<sup>174</sup> or to place the financial burdens of the state upon those who could best afford them. Generally these writers wanted to reduce the weight of taxes on the working and middle classes by redistributing the burden to the wealthy. Again these letters show that people were aware of the wider debates, that they possessed a rudimentary grasp of the principles involved and that they were prepared to write to the government on the issue.

## The Pauper Problem

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<sup>172</sup> WP 1/1044/9, 9 September 1829; 1/1066/24, 10 May 1829; 1/1159/25, 3 February 1830; 1/1159/105, 6 November 1830; J. Wright, *Hints on practical economy, in two letters, to the country bankers and the landed interest* (1828); People also wrote to Liverpool, see BL Add. Mss. 38275, f101, 21 January 1819

<sup>173</sup> WP 1/1121/5, 24 June 1830; 1/1159/83, 11 November 1830; 1/1159/89, 3 November 1830; 1/1030/7, 2 July 1829; 1/1159/24, 3 February 1830

<sup>174</sup> WP 1/1157/71, 1 September 1830

Three acres, cultivated in the manner pointed out in the following pages, will enable a mechanic who works at his trade to pay a liberal rent for the land, cottage, and capital employed; and to procure not merely the necessities but the comforts of life; instead of dragging on a miserable existence in penury and want.<sup>175</sup>

The emigration of paupers as a means of relief to this country has at length forced itself on the attention of the public at large.<sup>176</sup>

A swelling population and the pauperisation caused by post-war distress led to dramatic increases in the cost of poor relief. Having been below £2 million in the 1780s, the poor rates stood at £6 million in 1830 causing many commentators to question the wisdom of maintaining the existing system. Malthusian doctrines of doom, and the responses from Tory paternalists and radicals, dominated the debates. The system of outdoor relief was held to be inefficient and expensive, and various suggestions were made to improve it. The act of settlement, the practice of topping up wages out of the rates and the Irish dimension were often used as examples of how the system was failing. During periods of economic stagnation when the numbers of unemployed seemed to take on almost dangerous proportions, commentators in and out of doors searched for a solution.

Yet in 1830, only a handful of correspondents discussed the failings of the existing system with Wellington. 'An independent man' tried to draw the duke's attention to abuses in the payment of paupers for work, and William Parker from Cork called for the abolition of parochial rates, to be replaced with a national standardised assessment. Another writer believed that too much of the poor rate was spent on administration and called for a reform.<sup>177</sup> Other writers discussed the unique situation in Ireland and speculated on the

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<sup>175</sup> W. Allen, *Colonies at Home; or the means for rendering the industrious labourer independent of parish relief; and for providing for the poor population of Ireland, by the cultivation of the soil* (1827)

<sup>176</sup> R. Gouger, *Emigration for the relief of parishes particularly considered* (1833)

<sup>177</sup> WP 1/1159/26, 3 February 1830; 1/1100/4, 5 March 1830; 1/1015/16, 2 May 1829



desirability of introducing a poor law there, a proposal supported in the press in order to halt the (costly) influx of Irish labourers into Britain.<sup>178</sup> Ireland did eventually get a poor law, and the English system was overhauled, but not without considerable opposition during the 1830s.

Far more common among the Wellington correspondence were suggestions to relieve the pressure of pauper numbers through emigration or home colonisation schemes. As will be seen these letters can be placed within the context of parliamentary and press debates surrounding the population question.<sup>179</sup>

By 1830 emigration was an established solution to the problems of a 'superabundant' pauper population and the spiralling costs of relief. In the immediate post-war years, and throughout the 1820s, the idea of state-aided emigration was discussed in parliament and in cabinet. There were various public funded 'experiments' to the Cape of Good Hope and to Canada, and in 1825 and 1826 there were House of Commons committees established to discuss the feasibility of the idea. For the chairman of these committees, R J Wilmot-Horton, and later Edward Gibbon Wakefield, state-aided emigration as a solution to the pauper problem took on the trappings of a personal crusade.<sup>180</sup>

The select committees were particularly important in disseminating information and stimulating discussion. Supporters of emigration argued that a redundant population was a huge financial burden upon the community, and further, that the excess of labourers

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<sup>178</sup> WP 1/1011/13, 18 April 1829; 1/1125/33, 17 July 1830. See *The Times*, 5 April 1828, *Morning Post*, 19 January 1830, *Morning Chronicle*, 12 January 1830, *Courier* 12 March 1830, for favourable opinions on poor laws for Ireland.

<sup>179</sup> Parliament received hundreds of petitions on emigration. In 1830 and 1831, only ten and six were received respectively, the great period of petitioning being 1825-8 as a result of the select committees, and 1819-20, due to the government sponsored emigration schemes of these years.

<sup>180</sup> Obviously many people continued to emigrate without assistance, and this probably contributed to the demise of the state-funded schemes. Discussions usually centred on whether the public should pay for large-scale emigration schemes. See Gordon, *Tory Liberalism*, pp. 69-78; H. J. M. Johnston, *British Emigration Policy, 1815-1830* (1972)

depressed the wages of all workers. Emigration could provide immediate relief by removing this excess.

The burden was considered to be heaviest in Ireland. Richard Keene wrote to Wellington in December 1823 sending a 'Plan for disposing of the redundant [Irish] population in Spanish America'. Keene had been granted land by the Spanish government in Mexico, and believed that it would be mutually beneficial to both Ireland and Britain (by establishing trade links) to settle paupers there. Five years later Robert Owen wrote on behalf of a group of people who had also been granted land in Mexico. Owen wanted the government to recognise the new state of forty million acres. Again, the settlement could help to tranquillise Ireland and would trade with Britain. In response, Colonel Keene was advised to write to the secretary for the colonies, while Wellington informed Owen that the government would do nothing until the people concerned had actually gained sovereignty.<sup>181</sup>

Richard Badnall was aware that he should really have written to the Colonial office, but considered the problem too important and so wrote to Wellington directly. He sent a pamphlet entitled *A sketch of a proposal for colonising Australasia* to all cabinet ministers. A group of gentleman were prepared to pay £100,000 for a grant of land to establish a pauper colony there: 'the overflowing population of Ireland and some parts of England, can be removed from distress and poverty, to comfort and plenty'. Again Wellington referred him to the Colonial Secretary.<sup>182</sup>

Groups of workers saw emigration as a way of obtaining relief and wrote directly to government, or they employed an agent to write for them. Prominent among these groups were the Glasgow weavers, some 2,716 of whom were sent abroad during 1820 and 1821. In May 1829 a group of weavers, who were army pensioners having served in the Peninsular, wrote to Wellington for relief through assisted emigration. If their request was acceded to they would pay back the loan in instalments.<sup>183</sup>

Wellington was not the only cabinet minister to receive letters on emigration. The Colonial Secretary would have normally received this type of correspondence, but Home

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<sup>181</sup> WP 1/778/17, 21 December 1823; 1/955/21, 30 September 1828

<sup>182</sup> WP 1/1032/24, 20 July 1829

<sup>183</sup> WP 1/1017/12, 12 May 1829; Johnson, *British Emigration*, p. 53

Secretaries Sidmouth and Peel were also approached. People wrote concerning the emigration committees, and sent plans to encourage paupers to emigrate. Some writers complained of the negative effects of emigration. In 1823 two correspondents were concerned about the number of skilled mechanics emigrating to France. Monetary considerations were said to be the cause. The financial impact of emigration was a common motivation. William Coleman wrote to Peel complaining that labourers were emigrating to America leaving their families on the parish.<sup>184</sup>

Writers such as Thomas Crump, who proposed using the six million collected from the poor rates to encourage emigration, and Robert Gouger, who suggested sending childless young married couples abroad so as to insure the biggest reduction in the poor rates, must be viewed differently from correspondents like the Glasgow weavers. Most writers wanted to 'shovel out paupers' in order to reduce taxation (the poor rate), although they usually shied away from compulsion. The Glasgow weavers wanted relief and considered that emigration was a means to ensure this.<sup>185</sup>

Emigration was seen as a new beginning and prospective travellers were given ample encouragement. Pamphlets were published offering guidance to would-be emigrants. Even Cobbett wrote one.<sup>186</sup> Emigrants also wrote home to their families usually describing their new way of life in glowing terms. Often these letters found their way into newspapers. In the summer of 1827 the *Glasgow Chronicle* and the *Glasgow Herald* published letters from settlers who were enjoying the success of their new lives. However, their expectations

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<sup>184</sup> HO 44/19/99, February 1830; 44/17/16, 37, February 1827; 44/19/288, April 1830; 44/13/38, 50, August 1823; 44/19/116, February 1830

<sup>185</sup> WP 1/1044/2, 8 September 1829; Gouger, *Emigration for relief of Parishes*; also see *Morning Chronicle*, 29 March 1830. It was generally considered more advantageous to send young couples, because their children would be born in another country, thus helping to reduce the yearly population increase.

<sup>186</sup> The Wellington Pamphlet collection has numerous examples of these guides. For example, [Anon.], *Sketch of a Proposal for Colonizing Australasia* (n.d.); A. Buchanan, *Emigration Practically Considered; with detailed directions to emigrants proceeding to British North America, particularly to the Canadas* (1828). Cobbett was against the idea of forceful emigration, and his guide was written in the context of the rural unrest of 1829. He considered it his duty to suggest alternatives to insurrection., Dyke, William Cobbett, p. 156

were low, and the arduous journey aside, it would have been hard not to better the terrible conditions left behind in Glasgow.<sup>187</sup> John Callaghan's letter to *The Times* painted a positive picture of life in Canada where, he surmised, only the idlers suffered. However, Callaghan had heard that all letters home would be checked to prevent bad accounts reaching the public. This may explain why the letters are invariably positive.<sup>188</sup>

Newspapers generally followed *The Times*' lead in supporting emigration if individuals desired it, but opposing any government scheme: 'it has always appeared to us that the transplant of large bodies of paupers ... would be found in practice a most burdensome and insupportable undertaking'. If landlords wanted to relieve their burden, they should pay themselves. The *Morning Post* believed that Horton's plan would only afford temporary relief, while the *Chronicle* was concerned that the unique position of Ireland had to be considered. Cobbett was particularly hostile.<sup>189</sup>

State-aided emigration, personified by Wilmot-Horton, had many critics. Captain Head believed that the upper and middle classes were abdicating their duty to the poor by encouraging them to emigrate. The cost to the public would only impose further financial hardships upon the community, and in any case the increasing population would soon fill the gap. John Ede made the oft-repeated point that any emigration from England would soon be negated by the influx of Irish Labourers.<sup>190</sup>

Indeed, if an excess of population was not the cause of the problem, then emigration could not be considered a cure. Michael Sadler, the MP and factory reformer, considered the cause of Ireland's problems to be absenteeism, not overpopulation. Wellington thought a reform of the poor laws more appropriate, and members of Liverpool's cabinet in general, while prepared to endorse small scale emigration during disturbances, were not prepared to

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<sup>187</sup> Johnson, *British Emigration*, p. 55

<sup>188</sup> *The Times*, 4 January 1828. Also see *The Times*, 11 August 1829 for a letter from Van Diemens land

<sup>189</sup> *The Times*, 14 January 1828; *Morning Post*, 10 March 1830; *Morning Chronicle*, 10 March 1830; *Political Register*, 20 March 1830

<sup>190</sup> F. B. Head, *Few arguments against the theory of emigration* (1828). J. Ede, *Reflections on the employment, wages and condition of the poor, showing the fallacy and injustice of recommending emigration, as a remedy for the lamentable state of the English Labourer...* (1829)

go further. Cobbett saw no reason why the pauper should be compelled to emigrate. The labourer had a right to relief. He was not an idle consumer but the producer of the nation's wealth. If anyone should emigrate then let it be the taxeater and the borough-monger. The enduring belief persisted in radical circles that the land could support the freeborn Englishman. There were alternatives to emigration and public opinion never got behind Horton's plan. For the middle class it was probably a matter of expense. For working class radicals and benevolent Tories this alternative involved using British soil.<sup>191</sup>

During the industrial revolution, when structural changes in society were transforming the emotional and physical landscape of Britons, the image of the land possessed an almost talismanic quality for certain groups. Malcolm Chase has described how the tradition of agrarianism resonated through radical circles during the first half of the nineteenth-century. The 'People's Farm' was a slogan for those who saw the land as the basis of power and exploitation, and sought to reclaim it for the people. This tradition can be seen in the careers of William Cobbett, Thomas Spence, Robert Owen and Feargus O'Connor. Schemes to establish alternative communities were explicit rejections of capitalism and the means to regain control over a person's time and output. Although Owenite communitarians, agrarian socialists, Cobbett's cottage charter and the Chartist land plan all differed in details - for example over the communal ownership of land - the common denominator was a movement back to the land.<sup>192</sup>

This radical tradition is inadequately represented in the Wellington archive. Robert Owen is the only one of the aforementioned group whose ideas feature directly.<sup>193</sup> His letter wishing to establish colonies in Mexico has already been considered, but Owen also furnished Wellington with a detailed account of his plan for a 'new moral, political and commercial system'. Owen also wrote to other prominent politicians, including Peel, and

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<sup>191</sup> Johnson, *British Emigration*, pp. 130-1, 149, 154, 162; Chase, *People's Farm*, p. 137

<sup>192</sup> Chase, *People's Farm*; Dyke, William Cobbett; D. Hardy, *Alternative Communities in Nineteenth Century England* (1979)

<sup>193</sup> Cobbett did write, asking Wellington to forward a letter

sent copies of his pamphlets.<sup>194</sup> It is the plans and suggestions that sought to relieve unemployment through spade husbandry which do feature. However, these were primarily concerned with reducing the burden of the poor rates and preventing disaffection spreading among the idle, rather than attempts at establishing alternative communities for ideological reasons.

Spade husbandry entailed a rejection of capital intensive farming using machinery in favour of a labour intensive, traditional method of man and spade (or scythe). For radicals it offered a sense of control over time and production and a return to the 'good old days'. Husbandry was a vital element of Cobbett's cottage charter and a symbol of independence. It was also said to be better for the soil and Owen spent a considerable amount of time explaining why this was so. Cobbett believed that ten farms of 100 acres would yield more than one farm of 1,000 acres. If properly worked small plots could support whole families. Owen considered half an acre per individual appropriate, William Lovett, the Chartist, reckoned on an acre, and similar ratios can be found in letters written to Wellington.<sup>195</sup> But for many people productivity was less important than the labour intensive nature of the work. In periods of depression schemes for spade husbandry - usually in a system of home colonies - were proposed as a means to alleviate distress.

'A.B.' wrote to the *Morning Post* on 7 November 1829 concerning the employment of the poor. The writer did not agree with emigration - 'the strength of the country is thus diminished' - and believed that paupers could be better employed at home. Within Britain there was an abundance of wasteland waiting to be cultivated, and 'A.B.' used the success of home colonies in Holland as an example. He explained his scheme further on 10 November, and a year later the writer was still popularising his ideas.<sup>196</sup>

The colony at Fredricks-oord in Holland was often used to show how a system of home colonisation could be beneficial. Success in Holland, by providing employment for

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<sup>194</sup> WP 1/1078/4, 24 December 1829; R. Owen, 'Report to the County of Lanark ... ' (1821); BL Add. Mss. 40381, f. 338, 340, 23 September 1825

<sup>195</sup> Chase, *People's Farm*, pp. 8, 136; Dyke, William Cobbett, pp. 109-11; Owen, *Report to Lanark*, pp. 11-12, 26; WP 1/1159/35, n.d.; 1/1031/8, 9 July 1829

<sup>196</sup> *Morning Post*, 7, 10 November 1829, 25 September 1830

paupers and in cultivating what had hitherto been considered poor soils (with spade and hoe), had only come over many generations. In a pamphlet, W Jacob went to great pains to detail the workings and benefits of the Holland colony: paupers were taught habits of 'industry, economy and subordination', their 'moral condition' would be much improved and there would be a 'diminution in the amount of the parochial assessments'. At times, Jacob's description of the regulations and work practices sounds more like a boot camp than a utopian community. Indeed, the work was intended to be arduous in a highly organised environment to educate and improve an idle population.<sup>197</sup>

There are striking similarities between the Holland experiment and the plans submitted for Wellington's attention. William Allen, both in a letter and in published form, made explicit reference to Fredricks-oord. To solve the social ills of Ireland he proposed the establishment of colonies of 150 acres, within which there were to be fifty cottages possessing three acres each. This would be sufficient for a family and Allen acknowledged a debt to Cobbett's cottage economy. He went into great detail about crop rotations, farming methods and the rules to be adhered to. The aims of his venture were to ameliorate the condition of the labouring population, to bring poor soils into cultivation, to protect children from vice, ignorance and indolence and to educate them. Every colonist would have to sign a declaration which, among other things, forced the pauper to 'observe, strictly, moral conduct' and 'to receive no allowance whatever from the parish'. Rents had to be paid on time and the consumption of alcohol was not permitted. Wellington discussed Allen's proposal with his cabinet colleagues, but concluded that he could not advise the King to grant Allen the land he required.<sup>198</sup>

Wellington was not adverse to these schemes provided they did not involve the government. As he wrote to the earl of Clancarty on 16 July 1829:

On the same day that your letter reached me I received two other schemes from other parties in Ireland, founded in like manner on the principles of the scheme adopted in the Netherlands for the employment of beggars. These are

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<sup>197</sup> W. Jacob, *Observations on the benefits arising from the cultivation of poor soils, by the application of pauper labour; as exemplified in the colonies for the indigent, and for orphans in Holland* (1828)

<sup>198</sup> WP 1/1031/8, 9 July 1829; Allen, *Colonies at Home*

subjects more properly for the consideration of individuals or of private societies than for government, and I here leave them.<sup>199</sup>

This did not stop people writing to the duke, and other politicians, with similar schemes that prioritised moral and financial considerations. The use of wasteland, either through colonies, some of which were to have their own hospitals, schools and food halls, or just as a means of providing employment were especially common.<sup>200</sup>

Many traditional Tories favoured schemes of home colonisation over emigration. This was either due to the cost (which was exacerbated if wages rose because of resulting labour shortages) or because it was felt that the labourers and farmers were the strength of the country, and to banish them would weaken the nation's potential.<sup>201</sup> Some nobles took the lead in providing for their labourers in this way. The Bishop of Bath and Wells, the duke of Northumberland and the marquis of Stafford had all 'made experiments in allotting land to the poor; and in no case had these experiments failed'. Lord Barnham was reported to be doing the same on his land near Maidstone. A field of ten acres was parcelled out to ten labourers so that they could work the land by spade husbandry. *The Courier* generally supported these schemes and Wellington received similar suggestions. One writer wanted the tenantry to let a portion of their land to the respectable poor, whereas another proposed that one acre out of every hundred be set aside for labourers to work.<sup>202</sup>

Some correspondents stopped short of colonisation and saw the problem merely in terms of employment. Three writers suggested that the parish should be responsible for employing their own paupers on wasteland rather than simply paying them poor relief. Other writers did not restrict themselves to employment on wasteland. National granaries, agricultural workhouses and common mills were all suggested. One writer wanted the poor to be employed building canals and railroads. D Walker suggested using people (instead of

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<sup>199</sup> WCD vol. vi, p. 18

<sup>200</sup> WP 1/1088/16, 28 January 1830; 1/1016/12, n.d. HO 44/20/258, June 1830

<sup>201</sup> Johnson, *British Emigration*, p. 133

<sup>202</sup> H. Clissold, *Prospectus of a central national institution of home colonies, designed to instruct and employ distressed unoccupied poor, on wastelands in spade husbandry* (1830); *Courier*, 7 January 1830; WP 1/1041/10, 31 August 1829; 1/1159/39, 25 February 1830



horses) to pull carriages around town on specially laid curbs which was said to work in Milan. He also wrote to Peel, as did many other people with similar proposals to those considered above: a plan for a cottage system, a scheme for spade husbandry and a proposal for employing the poor on public works, were all received at the Home Office within days of each other.<sup>203</sup>

The overriding concern of these writers was rarely for the paupers themselves, but for the negative effects upon society of increasing pauperism. During periods of economic stagnation suggestions to shovel out paupers or to set them to work were common, in order to lower the poor rate and to prevent disaffection spreading.

### **Towards a critique of government**

‘Oppression, which maketh even a wise man mad’, will necessarily stimulate popular speakers and popular assemblies.<sup>204</sup>

Distress tended to focus men’s minds on the realities of their existence. In attempting to discover the causes of their suffering, many rounded on the government, or the ‘system’. By 1830, radicalism, as a loose gathering of politicians, educators, demagogues and revolutionaries seeking political reform, had been around for generations. Tapping into the tradition of the freeborn Englishman, the glorious revolution, Wilkes and the French Jacobins, a heterogeneous group of working and middle class people became convinced of the necessity of parliamentary reform. For many people the post-war depressions, and the government’s responses to these crises, were further proof that the existing system was bankrupt and in urgent need of reform. While Liverpool’s administration had been largely successful in portraying an image of probity and ‘good government’, Wellington’s, despite

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<sup>203</sup> WP 1/1106/27, 6 April 1830; 1/1159/74, 25 October 1830; 1/1088/15, 28 January 1830; 1/1100/4, 5 March 1830; Ede, *Reflections on Emigration*; HO 44/22/93, November 1830; WP 1/1015/26, 4 May 1829; HO 44/19/168, 288, 296, 304, April 1830; Wellington also thought that the Irish poor should be put to work, WCD, vol. vi, p. 263

<sup>204</sup> *Standard*, 27 February 1830

cuts in spending and taxes, suffered from the perception that they were not doing enough. And when the calls for 'economical reform' were believed to be ignored, the alternative for many was a far-reaching reform of the legislature.<sup>205</sup> Some of these people, citing the burden of taxation, the Corn Laws, and currency alterations, and blaming the government for their plight, chose to articulate their grievances by writing to the Prime Minister.

Some writers perceived the cause of their distress to be exploitation at the hands of their employers, not the government. The literature on the emergence of class and class-consciousness is large and ever growing, and a new avenue of enquiry has been opened up by the linguistic turn. Noel Thompson and Marc Steinberg have both drawn attention to the emergence of a class based, economic analysis of distress and oppression. The working class appropriated the language and theoretical tools of political economy and created a 'People's Science' which suggested anti-capitalist and socialist prescriptions for economic evils. They also had recourse to a language of citizenship rights and claims, which the workers used to justify their role as producers of wealth thus entitling them to protection from the harsh economic environment. For the purposes of this study, it is sufficient to note that a number of writers did use this language of class (exploitation) - as 'a friction of interests between opposed groups' - when seeking remedies for their distressed condition, and recognised that the interests of the working class were fundamentally at odds with those of their capitalist employers.<sup>206</sup>

Writing from Liverpool in May 1829, Henry Lucas described the condition of 'the working class' by discussing the distressed condition of the manufacturing operatives and the agricultural labourers.<sup>207</sup> Using 'the people', 'labouring classes' and the aforementioned labels interchangeably, Lucas was convinced that the importance of the working class lay in their role as producers, rather than the Malthusian doctrine that stigmatised them as

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<sup>205</sup> Harling, *Waning of Old Corruption*, p. 190: 'The ministry encouraged the resort to desperate measures because it did not suggest any remedies of its own'

<sup>206</sup> See Thompson, *People's Science*; M. Steinberg, "'The Great End of all Government': Working People's Construction of Citizenship Claims in Early Nineteenth-Century England and the Matter of Class", *International Review of Social History* Supplement 3, Vol. 40 (1995), quote from p. 26

<sup>207</sup> WP 1/1020/21, 28 May 1829

consumers: 'labour is the origin of all wealth; for even the precious metals are worthless in the earth'. It was this thinking which lay behind the concept of the sacred month, or 'Grand National Holiday' (general strike) proposed by the ultra-radical William Benbow in 1833.<sup>208</sup>

Other writers also made the distinction between the 'productive' and 'unproductive' classes within society.<sup>209</sup> Manufacturers treated 'labourers as articles in an overstocked market', and compounded the evil by paying the labourers in goods which they also made a profit on. The worker received inadequate remuneration, the 'cash nexus' benefited the employer; 'much of the wages that should be paid to the poor is going into the hands of a rich public'. Another correspondent pointed to 'the oppression of the honest mechanic and the labourer' which resulted from 'congregating them in masses'. This enabled 'large fortunes' to be made by manufactures at the workers expense.<sup>210</sup>

Noel Thompson has discussed the emergence of a popular 'anti-capitalist and socialist' political economy that focused attention on economic grievances. Thompson sees the heyday of this (working) class based analysis during the period 1824-34, most significantly during the last four years. While seeking to downplay the importance of the older, radical, political ideology, Thompson is forced to recognise its lasting appeal. Radicals sought to assign political remedies for economic ills because 'this economic evil [general depression] was seen as the product of the ignorant or malign actions of politicians, sinecurists, placemen and the money jugglers of the bank. As such the solution lay in industrial and political reform'.<sup>211</sup> And although Philip Harling has demonstrated that by 1850 the critique of Old Corruption had lost its legitimacy as an adequate tool of political opposition, in 1830, as these letters have shown, the piecemeal reforms of sinecures and pensions had done little to deflect criticism away from the fundamental workings of government.

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<sup>208</sup> See I. McCalman, *Radical Underworld. Prophets, Revolutionaries, and Pornographers in London, 1795 – 1840* (Oxford, 1993) p. 199

<sup>209</sup> WP 1/1159/30, 7 February 1830

<sup>210</sup> WP 1/1159/20, n.d.; 1/1159/26, 3 February 1830

<sup>211</sup> Thompson, *People's Science*, p. 195

Most correspondents who wrote to Wellington on this issue can be located within this context. They believed that the government was responsible for their distressed state evinced by the Corn Laws, alterations in the currency or through the burden of taxation. For groups such as the Spitalfields silk weavers there was a direct relationship between government action and their distress.<sup>212</sup> The government was failing in its responsibility to the people. The crucial distinction was that between the government and the people; between all those who profited from the system, and those who were left to fend for themselves.

John Clayton from Nottingham wrote to Wellington because he had 'never witnessed the general effects of the people so completely paralysed; nor ruin so prevalent and apparent in every class'. Using the pseudonym 'Justitia' he also published a letter in the *Mercury* to discuss the causes of the suffering. The aristocracy and the people were at odds. The aristocracy used their privileged position 'to tax the people beyond endurance' and pass class legislation such as the Corn Laws and currency alterations which were 'forced upon the nation'.<sup>213</sup> That these were extremely common grievances the preceding pages have testified.

Commentators were quick to point out that the legislature was not acting in the interests of society as a whole. *The Times* argued that 'while volumes of laws have been made by parliament for the protection of the rich against the poor man's assumed hostility', none had been passed that benefited the workers. The tendency 'for the last half century has been, to make the rich man richer and the poor man miserably poorer'.<sup>214</sup> In the words of one publicist:

The legislature of the country, by their inconsiderate acts, have, during the short space of ten years, taken 50 per cent of the whole net revenue of the country from the producing classes, and transferred it, without compensation

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<sup>212</sup> For Spitalfields weavers see Steinberg, 'Great end of all government'

<sup>213</sup> WP 1/1015/28, 5 April 1829

<sup>214</sup> *The Times*, 21 January, 30 October 1830

or consideration, into the pockets of the money capitalists, of mortgagees, money-lenders, annuitants, placemen and pensioners.<sup>215</sup>

Government had a duty to all its subjects. But as Attwood recognised, this had not happened, and ‘the distress has arisen from the proceedings of government’.<sup>216</sup>

If the government were responsible for the suffering, then it was within their power to correct the situation. It was because of this, that calls for a parliamentary enquiry into the distress were considered to be so important. The administration’s rejection of these calls was seen as yet another example of their contempt for the people. Men’s minds were ‘enflamed with taxation and oppression and your [the government’s] proceedings in the state affairs [have] an appearance of tyranny’. Another anonymous writer warned the ruling elite about their survival if they ignored the distress any longer: ‘I should indeed be truly sorry to see England without the aristocracy, but that aristocracy to be saved, must save’.<sup>217</sup> The government’s hands-off ideology, which left everyone except the landowners to the mercy of the market, pushed many people into the arms of the radicals in demanding parliamentary reform as the only solution to their suffering.

If the people had genuine representatives in parliament to look after their interests, then measures would not have been passed which threatened their very survival. One pamphleteer cited the extravagant use of public money at a time of extreme distress - ‘for instance, grants to the Princess of Wales, Mr Percival, Lord Nelson, Duke W \_\_\_\_ and numerous others’ - as an example of the misuse of power’.<sup>218</sup> Charles Thomson from Birmingham sending a petition to the government, believed that the causes of the distress were

mainly ascribed to the mismanagement of public affairs; and ... that such mismanagement can only be effectually and permanently remedied by such a reform in your Honourable House as shall restore to the industrious classes

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<sup>215</sup> Majoribanks, Letter to His Grace the Duke of Wellington

<sup>216</sup> Fountain, Address to the King; Attwood, Cause of Present Distress

<sup>217</sup> WP 1/1159/102, 6 November 1830; 1/1159/117, 8 November 1830

<sup>218</sup> Majoribanks, Letter to His Grace the Duke of Wellington; Fountain, Address to the King

of the community that full and fair representation which the constitution placed in their hands.

Again, using language of the 'people', 'working' and 'productive classes' interchangeably, Thomson asserted that the people spoke in one voice against the

whole system of modern legislation [which] has been directed to the protection of the rich, the monied men, and the tax dependants, while the productive interests and the industrious tradesman of the land have been left to the full working of a wicked policy.<sup>219</sup>

In a long letter to Wellington, an anonymous writer considered the causes of the distress under six headings. He called for a revision of the Corn Laws; an investigation into the shipping and commercial interest; a reduction in the size of the civil list; retrenchment in government expenditure; revision of the taxation system and a moderate reform in the parliamentary representation. While no leveller or demagogue, the writer employed a language of exploitation and oppression to stress the culpability of the government for the distress of the people, and pointed to a reform of the whole system as the only remedy.<sup>220</sup> Two of these demands - reduction of the civil list and retrenchment - had in fact happened. Either the government was failing to get the message across, or they were believed to have not gone far enough with their reforms.

This Cobbettian stance was also adopted by Samuel Evans of Limerick: 'Reduce the civil list, abolish sinecures, reduce the salary of the officers of the state, lessen the interest of borough jobbers and repeal the odious law of assimilation of currency'.<sup>221</sup> Old Corruption was alive and well. Discussing the 'tyranny of taxation' an anonymous farmer noted the disillusionment that the people felt with politicians which could only be remedied by reform:

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<sup>219</sup> WP 1/1100/14, 8 March 1830. Emphasis in original.

<sup>220</sup> WP 1/1159/3, n.d.

<sup>221</sup> WP 1/1146/7, 19 October 1830

Ye people have no confidence in our miscalled representatives because we see their 'nominated' majority shamelessly voting our money & ye bred [sic] of our starving tenantry to pamper their own venal gratifications.<sup>222</sup>

It was time for a change, not just of the government, but of the whole system.

In the heady days of November 1830 H Courtney from Penzance wrote to Wellington enclosing a paper 'To The People of England' which he hoped the government would circulate for him. Speaking out against the need for political reform, Courtney championed the administration's cause. He did not deny the existence of distress, but it had 'arisen from causes over which they had no control' and the writer was convinced that Wellington, 'a man of the most extensive talent', could turn the country around.<sup>223</sup> He was mistaken. A large body of opinion assigned political causes to economic distress. Whether it was the inability to control machinery, the unwillingness to investigate the cause of distress, or legislative innovations which destroyed the old moral economy of shared interests between employer and employed, the selfish operation of the political system was held responsible. This is not to deny the existence of economic analysis of the distress, or the existence of class based languages of exploitation. Rather it is to argue that the majority of those writing to the Prime Minister articulated their grievances using a language of political opposition. Before considering the political implications of the government's policies, and the fall of Wellington's administration, the duke's attitude to this correspondence is examined.

### **The Prime Minister's Response**

Wellington replied to the vast majority of correspondents who were concerned about the distress. In one instance he even apologised 'for having suffered so much time to elapse

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<sup>222</sup> WP 1/1159/52, 21 March 1830

<sup>223</sup> WP 1/1150/5, 8 November 1830

without having acknowledged the receipt'.<sup>224</sup> Indeed, the duke considered it his 'duty' to attend to these letters,<sup>225</sup> and on occasion he positively encouraged people to write to him:

The duke is ready (as well as the Lords of the Treasury) to receive from any gentleman and to consider any suggestions which he may think proper to make for the public service in writing.<sup>226</sup>

To Mr Carter who wished to discuss annuities, Wellington replied that he would give no answer until he received 'from him in writing a detailed statement of the proposed measure'. And a tea dealer who complained about smuggling was requested to transmit further information.<sup>227</sup>

While 'ready to receive & consider any suggestion what any gentleman may think proper to make to him in writing',<sup>228</sup> the duke was not prepared to grant interviews. He simply did not have the time.<sup>229</sup> Nor was Wellington prepared to comment on press stories or elaborate on what he said in parliament, save to disarm a criticism: 'the duke did not say in the House of Lords what Mr Wilson supposes he did'.<sup>230</sup> Wellington was loath to give an opinion that could be taken as an official position, and possibly published. He gave his opinions on public matters in the right place, parliament, and refused to justify a course of action to an unknown correspondent. Thus he declined 'to give any opinion upon the plan for establishing exchange bazaars or markets', and to a correspondent who wanted Wellington's opinion of his prize rams, the duke declared 'that I am more ignorant of everything relating to agriculture and the breeding of cattle than I am of other matters'.<sup>231</sup>

Wellington did seem anxious to respond to these letters or to explain why he could not be of assistance, although occasionally there was a hint of annoyance that his time had

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<sup>224</sup> WP 1/1125/33, 17 July 1830, replied on 17 September. This was an unusually large delay. Most were answered within a couple of days

<sup>225</sup> WP 1/1118/3, 1 June 1830

<sup>226</sup> WP 1/1144/36, 9 October 1830

<sup>227</sup> WP 1/1146/4, 18 October 1830; 1033/23, 24 July 1829

<sup>228</sup> WP 1/1057/3, 16 November 1829

<sup>229</sup> For example, WP 1/1018/5, 15 May 1829; 1110/9, 28 April 1830; 1119/8, 11 June 1830

<sup>230</sup> WP 1/1103/4, 22 March 1830; also see 1026/19, 21 June 1829

<sup>231</sup> WP 1/1187/36, 16 June 1831; 1028/3, 29 January 1829





been wasted. To Thomas Baseley, who saw a canal as Levenham's economic savour, Wellington replied: 'if he will be so kind as to make enquiries respecting the practice of parliament in respect to canal bills he will discover that the duke can have but little influence'.<sup>232</sup> Occasionally the duke simply dismissed a letter informing the writer that he would not attend to its proposals.<sup>233</sup>

But there is much evidence to suggest that this correspondence was attended to by Wellington. John Wylie believed that the commercial convention of 1815 between the USA and Britain should be annulled because America had adopted a system of prohibition towards British manufactured goods. Thomas Peregrine Courtney, vice president of the board of trade, investigated this suggestion. He did not agree with the proposal because it would have adverse effects on Britain as she bought considerable amounts of raw materials from the USA.<sup>234</sup> Courtney also investigated John Palmer, whose letter on the glove trade in Worcester has already been mentioned. In his memorandum to Wellington, Courtney claimed that the depression had more to do with smuggling than the importation of cheaper French gloves. In any case, fashion, and the superior quality of French gloves ensured their sale. It would set a dangerous, and expensive, precedent if the government aided them. But at least the cabinet did discuss their plight.<sup>235</sup>

It has also been shown that Wellington forwarded emigration schemes to the Colonial Secretary, and that plans for home colonisation projects were discussed in cabinet. These plans were not dismissed out of hand, and Wellington was willing to provide reasons for a course of action.<sup>236</sup> To a writer who proposed a railway from Edinburgh to London, so that the cost of transporting coal would be lowered, Wellington suggested communicating with the chairman of the House of Lords committee on coal. A correspondent, who complained about fraudulent import of French baskets, was asked to give the information to the commissioners of the customs. And a person concerned about the distress in Ireland was

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<sup>232</sup> WP 1/1057/4, 17 November 1829

<sup>233</sup> See WP 1/1020/20, 28 May 1829; 1121/1, 22 June 1830

<sup>234</sup> WP1/938/13, 27 June 1828

<sup>235</sup> WP1/940/8, 2 July 1828,

<sup>236</sup> WP 1/1031/8, 9 July; 1032/24, 20 July 1829

advised to write to the Lord Lieutenant or his Chief Secretary.<sup>237</sup> Wellington was also prepared to present a petition praying for a revision of the Beer Act 'if it should be drawn in the form [of] the House and respectfully worded'.<sup>238</sup>

This clearly shows that the Prime Minister was responsive to a certain kind of correspondence, and that he considered its contents and then acted according to his own perception of what was appropriate. Wellington did not ignore these letters. Although they did not persuade him to alter the currency, his administration did cut taxes, he did believe that machinery was in part responsible for distress and he could see the logic of home colonisation and work creation schemes as long as the government kept its distance. This correspondence on its own may not have influenced the duke, but it could have reinforced already held beliefs, and at the very least it provoked him into thinking about the issues which concerned the general public. From November 1830 to May 1832 Wellington had to confront the issue of reform, and again, his unsolicited correspondence provides an insight into the opinions of the people.

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<sup>237</sup> WP 1/1006/15, 31 March 1829; 1038/4, 10 August 1829; 1146/7, 19 October 1830

<sup>238</sup> WP 1/1182/5, 19 April 1831

## The Fall of Wellington's Government

On the 15th November 1830 the duke of Wellington's government was defeated on a civil list motion and resigned the next day. The Whigs under Lord Grey returned to office after nearly fifty years in the political wilderness committed to a measure of parliamentary reform. As such, this event has more significance than a simple change of government personnel. The downfall of the Wellington administration was the occasion of the downfall of the British ancien regime and the origin of the Reform Bill crisis, which was not resolved until May 1832.

Various reasons have been prescribed for Wellington's downfall. For some writers, the unreformed system, and by implication the Tory party, was doomed when Catholic Emancipation passed in April 1829. John Cannon sees Emancipation as 'the battering ram that broke down the old unreformed system', and Michael Brock concludes that 'after Emancipation reform was unavoidable'.<sup>1</sup> B T Bradfield draws attention to the machinations in the Commons of the ultra-Tories, alienated over Emancipation and other 'Liberal' measures.<sup>2</sup> Carlos Flick and Ian Newbould also see Wellington's demise as a result of the activities of the political opponents in parliament. Wellington's fall was predictable when the various opposition groups decided to unite against him around a common issue. Flick detects a trend towards co-operation as early as July 1830, whereas Newbould states that a decision was made at the end of October to give Wellington a chance to introduce his own measure. It was only Wellington's speech against all reform on 2 November, which clarified the position and pushed Whigs, Huskissonites, and others into opposition.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform 1640-1832* (1973), pp. 190-2; Brock, *Reform Act*, p.65; For J. C. D. Clarke's assertion that it was Catholic Emancipation rather than Reform which destroyed the ancien regime see, *English Society 1688-1832. Ideology, social structure and political practice during the ancien regime* (Cambridge, 1985) p. 403

<sup>2</sup> B. T. Bradfield, 'Sir Richard Vyvyan and the Fall of Wellington's Government', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, Vol. XI (1967-8)

<sup>3</sup> C. Flick, 'The Fall of Wellington's Government', *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. xxxvii (1965) pp. 62-5; I. Newbould, *Whiggery and Reform, 1830-1841. The Politics of Government* (1990) pp. 51-2

Other historians turn away from the established parties and look to 'outside factors' such as the French Revolution or the activities of the radicals. Roger Wells has recently stressed the importance of the Swing disturbances in bringing down Wellington, and Roger Quinault has highlighted the influence of the July revolution in Paris on British society and politics. For Quinault, the French Revolution was the spark which ignited the campaign for parliamentary reform. Michael McGee has gone further and argued that an analysis of the political rhetoric shows that the association made between Wellington and Polignac (Charles X's reactionary first minister) fundamentally undermined both the unreformed system and the aristocracy, as the duke was personally identified with both.<sup>4</sup>

The duke of Wellington tended to blame the misunderstanding over his motives for passing Emancipation which alienated the ultra-Tories, and the French Revolution which created a temporary mania for reform, for his ejection from office. The duke would not have blamed himself, nor would he have considered that opinion out of doors could have been significant. Yet both Wellington's personality and image, and public opinion played crucial roles in his downfall. By using the previously neglected correspondence that the duke received from members of the public, it is possible to ascertain what private individuals considered the important issues to be. The widespread distress which had existed in the country since the winter of 1829 and the governments' negligence in dealing with it, and the unpopularity of Wellington who was the personification of the ministry, come across as important factors in helping to explain the duke's resignation.

The link between economic distress and demands for reform, and the articulation of economic problems through a language of political opposition, has been established in the previous chapter. This can also be seen in the petitions sent to parliament. It is often remarked that public opinion was silent on reform until 1830, and that it was only after the general election and the French Revolution that the issue really occupied people's minds. But an analysis of the *Commons' and Lords' Journals* clearly shows that the issue of reform was beginning to stir in the public conscience before this. There are only 18 reform petitions

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<sup>4</sup> Wells, Mr William Cobbett; R. Quinault, 'The French Revolution of 1830 and Parliamentary Reform', *History*, Vol. 79 (October 1994); M. C. McGee, 'The Fall of Wellington: A Case Study of the Relationship Between Theory, Practice and Rhetoric in History', *Quarterly Journal of Speech* Vol. 63 (1977)

listed in the *Commons Journal* between 4 January and 23 July, the majority of which also mention economic distress.<sup>5</sup> More significantly there are 287 petitions on distress, which called for a political remedy for economic ills. Reduction of taxation, currency reform and retrenchment were common demands. The government was directly responsible for the suffering of the people, and it was inaction on these issues that drove people to demand a reform of the political system. A demand harder to resist due to the precarious nature of the government's parliamentary position.

Wellington's administration was often in a minority after Catholic Emancipation and was sustained by Whig and Huskissonite votes (for example, on the debates over the King's speech in February 1830). The survival of the Tories largely depended on the willingness of the opposition groups to keep them in office. For the various factions to unite, a leader and an issue had to be found which were acceptable to all. Lord Grey emerged as the leader and reform became the issue. That said, it was not reform which prompted Grey to come out of semi-retirement. It was the distressed state of the country. Grey disagreed with the government's description of the distress as 'partial', and believed that Tory intransigence on the issue constituted a real threat to property and aristocracy.<sup>6</sup>

The conditions were not right in the spring of 1830 to bring Wellington down. The meetings across the country calling for redress of grievances and parliamentary reform were largely peaceful and the government ignored them. It also took time for the opposition to organise. Upon the death of George IV some of the Whigs expected to be offered places in the government, but Wellington's silence on this issue further alienated them. The monarch's death also necessitated a general election. In the light of subsequent events, much has been written about the 1830 election. The most significant development was not the influence of the July Revolution, that came after the election, but the breakdown of aristocratic influence. The political system as a whole, as represented by the Wellington government, lost prestige.<sup>7</sup> Where people had a chance to act, to voice their concerns, they

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<sup>5</sup> *Lords' and Commons' Journals* (1830)

<sup>6</sup> Newbould, Whiggery, pp. 41-6; also see Flick, *Fall of Wellington's Government*

<sup>7</sup> See Brock, *Reform Act*, pp. 86-119; For some contemporary opinions see [Brougham, H], *Result of the General Election; Or What has the Duke of Wellington gained by the Dissolution?* (2nd. ed., 1830); [Anon.],

did so against a system that failed to help them during an economic depression and a severe winter. Distress, and the conviction based on past experience that the government would continue to do nothing for the people, led to a rejection of an uncaring administration.

After the summer of 1830 parliamentary reform was firmly on the political agenda, sustained out of doors, until parliament convened in November, by popular support for the July Revolution. But demands for representation were not solely the result of immediate events across the channel. The foundations had been laid during the winter of 1829/30 and in the opening session of parliament, when the government showed that it would continue to ignore the people's grievances. Demands for reform, of course, had been common during periods of economic depression - for example, 1816-20 - and governments had resisted these demands with repression, backed by strength in parliament. In 1830 the situation was very different. In addition to being unpopular in the country (as the Tories had been since the war), the government was weak in the House of Commons. The administration could have survived if its leader had taken positive steps to ensure either support in the country or strength in the Commons. This did not happen. Wellington made tentative attempts to strengthen his ministry, but the demands made by Melbourne and Palmerston were unacceptable to the duke, who besides felt that the ultras could still be won back.<sup>8</sup> Out of doors, the people were unappeased by Tory economic measures, while at the same time encouraged to push for political change by the success of revolution abroad. The government's weakness and unpopularity were finally exposed in November 1830.

## I

Wellington's accession to the Premiership, widely commented upon in the press, occasioned very little correspondence save a handful of loyal addresses. The circumstances of the duke's fall, however, generated voluminous correspondence, which can be used to show how people felt about Wellington at this time and what they considered the reasons for his

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*Observations on Two Pamphlets (Lately Published) Attributed to Mr Brougham* (1830); [Anon.], *Reply to a Pamphlet Entitled 'What has the Duke of Wellington gained by the Dissolution?'* (1830)

<sup>8</sup> Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform*, p. 200; Newbould, *Whiggery*, p. 49

downfall to be. The duke's speech against all reform on 2 November, and the subsequent cancellation of the King's visit to the City on 9 November, caused the Prime Minister's mailbag to swell with concerned, angry and threatening correspondence.

*The Times* attributed Wellington's fall to people power:

There has not been, within our memory, a resignation of the entire cabinet, upon which public opinion may be said to have borne so directly and so powerfully, as that of the Duke of Wellington and his colleagues.<sup>9</sup>

The *Morning Chronicle* concurred. The duke's popularity nose-dived 'when he presumes to insult the people of this country', his fall the result of 'signal blunders' during the first weeks of November, when 'every movement of his Grace plunged him only deeper in the mire'.<sup>10</sup> The *Standard* remarked that Wellington had irritated everyone by some measure or another: 'he encouraged, was supported by, and deceived in turn, every great party in the country'.<sup>11</sup> To Protestants he was a traitor to the constitution. The newspaper press recoiled at his prosecution of the *Morning Journal* for libel. Wellington was accused of taking unnecessary large emoluments during a period of depression, and his government's failure to aid the distressed won him few friends among the suffering working and middle classes. The duke was branded a reactionary, privy to the absolutist policies of Prince Polignac, who in London strove to keep the people down by a new police force. After the 9 November, the influential city interest was alienated also. At the time of his fall, Wellington had few supporters left.

Wellington's correspondence chronicles this decline into pariah status. When the duke toured Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool in September 1830, he met with a good reception from the crowds and reported to the cabinet the genial disposition of the people.<sup>12</sup> In early October, one of Wellington correspondents, Mr T Claney, who had seen

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<sup>9</sup> *The Times*, 22 November 1830

<sup>10</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 11, 17 November 1830

<sup>11</sup> *Standard*, 10, 17 November 1830

<sup>12</sup> This is despite Roger Quinault's comment that Wellington believed the last time he experienced a good natured crowd was before the July Revolution, French Revolution, p. 378. Also see Thompson, Wellington after Waterloo, p. 104

the duke at Birmingham and Manchester, thought his reception 'indicative of the confidence of the people'.<sup>13</sup> Other writers also commented on Wellington's popularity. An anonymous writer, on the eve of the cancelled civic dinner, urged the duke not to resign 'for the sake of thousands who need you ... for what will be done if you advise not?' Others tried to draw a distinction between the mob and the thinking, intelligent portion of the community who were Wellington's real friends. William Grey from Newcastle rounded on the public press for spreading falsehoods about the duke and for trying 'to deceive the first minister of this country by inducing him to believe that he no longer possesses the confidence of the nation'.<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately for Wellington these were isolated attempts to bolster his resolve. The majority of his correspondence supports the view that he had indeed lost the confidence of the people. It is not just in the newspapers where the historian can find reports of Wellington being assailed in the streets. Henry Grosvenor of London viewed with 'grief and indignation' how Wellington was treated by the populace, and formed a society of 650 young men to protect him from the mob. The duke thanked him but declined the offer because 'the laws of the country are strong enough to protect me against the brutal attacks'. Wellington finished his reply by reassuring Grosvenor that 'I shall not be induced to swerve from that which I consider the line of my duty'. It was with 'deep regret' that J Smith of Edinburgh witnessed the growing opposition to the Prime Minister, and he offered to use his influence with the Scottish press on Wellington's behalf. The people were no longer paying the duke any respect. The victory at Waterloo now seemed a long time ago.<sup>15</sup>

On the 2 November 1830, the duke of Wellington sealed the fate of his administration with a speech that ruled out any government reform measure. The speech was made in reply to Lord Grey, who had decided to give Wellington the opportunity to bring forward a reform proposal. After 2 November the Whigs, and the rest of the country, were under no such illusion. Wellington's response to Grey, which was not prepared or discussed in advance with colleagues, has been the subject of much debate since newspapers

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<sup>13</sup> WP 1/1144/03, 1 October 1830

<sup>14</sup> WP 1/1159/122, 8 November 1830; 1151/10, 13 November 1830

<sup>15</sup> WP 1/1150/19, n.d.; 1150/21, 11 November 1830



first printed it. The speech has been seen as an attempt to regain ultra-Tory support and to quash rumours of a Wellingtonian measure. This ill-considered speech had dramatic consequences that showed the duke's embarrassing lack of political judgement, at least as far as public opinion was concerned. In the duke's defence, Gash has drawn attention to Wellington's style of speaking - that when he wished to express strong views, he used strong language that did not necessarily imply a steadfast position. But Wellington had been in the political arena long enough to know full well that his outburst would be reported the length and breadth of the country, colouring him as 'a reactionary from whose administration nothing further was to be expected'.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps this is what Wellington intended. By rallying his supporters the duke possibly believed he could weather the storm. He was well aware of the powers of the press, and knew his speech would be reported, and hoped this would encourage the anti-reform forces. This was to be his mistake. He underestimated the strength of feeling in favour of some parliamentary reform, but was relatively unfortunate that 'a fortuitous combination of half a dozen groups hitherto acting separately' combined against him on the civil list motion.<sup>17</sup> Whether he would have been defeated on the pending reform motion is a mute point. For a variety of reasons, including the lack of government patronage in a period of retrenchment, economic dislocation and the clamour for reform which gave the anti-Wellington forces a popular mandate, the duke's administration was in desperate trouble when parliament met in November. His speech made a bad position untenable.

This is despite the fact that the initial response of the press was rather muted. On the 3 November, *The Times* merely stated, 'the duke's declaration on the subject of reform will not escape notice'. The *Morning Chronicle*, agreeing with *The Times* that it was an attempt to woe the ultras, interpreted the speech to mean that while Wellington would not introduce a reform measure, this was only because parliament had not thrown its weight behind the issue. When the people came out in favour of the measure, Wellington's mind would

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<sup>16</sup> Gash, *Wellington and the Premiership*, pp. 133-36. Also see Thompson, *Wellington after Waterloo*, p. 106, and Brock, *Reform Act*, p. 115

<sup>17</sup> A. Aspinall (ed.), *Three Early Nineteenth Century Diaries* (1952) p. xxv

change. The *Courier*, *Standard* and *Morning Post* tried not to mention the speech at all.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the decision to cancel the King's visit to London on the 9 November afforded much greater comment in the metropolitan press. Perhaps to informed persons used to commenting on political affairs, Wellington's stance was no surprise. But to the general public it was yet another example of the government's political bankruptcy. Meetings were called, resolutions passed and petitions sent to the House of Commons.

The outburst also prompted people to write to the Prime Minister directly. The letters Wellington received, mostly during the first half of November, can be placed into three categories: those informing Wellington of the popular agitation and warning him of dangers to his person; those showing the popularity of calls for reform and the reasons for it being demanded; and anonymous threatening letters, which contributed directly to the cancellation of the King's visit, and which reveal the reasons for Wellington's unpopularity at this time. These letters will be examined in turn.

## II

In periods of economic distress and political disaffection, large numbers of 'respectable' people took fright at the potentially revolutionary situation. One has only to glance through the Home Office files for the years 1790 to 1848 to find hundreds of letters from alarmed individuals revealing plots and treason, both real and imagined. Although most of this correspondence was directed to the Home Secretary, prominent national or local figures in society - cabinet ministers, Lord Lieutenants, magistrates, mayors - would have received this type of letter. It is no surprise, then, to find such letters in the Wellington correspondence.

After his speech on 2 November, Wellington received numerous letters describing the country's slide into anarchy. Captain P Stewart of London heard from a 'very respectable authority' that some Lifeguards men were 'speaking very freely of your grace

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<sup>18</sup> *The Times*, 3 November 1830; *Morning Chronicle*, 3, 4, 6 November 1830; *Morning Post*, 4 November 1830; *Standard*, 4, 5 November 1830; *Courier*, 3 November 1830; the *Annual Register* (1830) considered the speech to be very significant in explaining Wellington's downfall, p. 154

and of the politics of the country', asserting that they would rather side with the people than ride against them. Vague warnings were received from other writers, who warned the duke about a 'general conspiracy' or the sale of arms in Ireland. One writer, Isaac Henry, from Leyburn in Yorkshire, sent a description of three conspirators from Ramsgate who he believed had been involved in the Kent Swing fires. Harvey got a terse reply from Wellington: 'the information which he has given [is too] defective as to be of no use whatever either to the publick or to the D. himself'.<sup>19</sup> The implication being that useful information would have been gratefully received.

Wellington, whether discussing the resignation of his government or the Swing disturbances in the south, tended to see a French conspiracy as the cause. Some of the letters he received shared the same opinion. In August and September the duke received communications respecting the movements of a suspicious Frenchman, which he took sufficiently seriously to have investigated.<sup>20</sup> Less credible was J G Hughes of London (who had previously been interviewed by Edward Drummond, the Prime Minister's private secretary) who informed Wellington that 500 Frenchmen had arrived in England 'to find employment for themselves in exciting a commotion'. George MacDonnell, from Poole, who had written to Lord Sidmouth ten years previously, believed that the fires in Kent were encouraged by French Masonic lodges.<sup>21</sup>

These letters, whatever their idiosyncrasies and implausible nature, are further evidence of the alarmed and perilous atmosphere which Wellington's speech helped to create. By 'refusing to do what most observers ... thought necessary'<sup>22</sup> he unleashed a backlash against the existing government, which provided ample ammunition for people with over active imaginations to give rein to their conspiracy theories.

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<sup>19</sup> WP 1/1149/23, 6 November 1830; 1150/7, 9 November 1830; 1150/12, 10 November 1830; 1152/19, 20 November 1830

<sup>20</sup> WP 1/1136/30, 31 August 1830; 1139/11, 2 September 1830; 1139/24, 6 September 1830; 1139/26, 6 September 1830; 1143/22, 8 September 1830

<sup>21</sup> WP 1/1151/12, n.d.; 1152/22, 20 November 1830

<sup>22</sup> Newbould, Whiggery, p. 41

Upon reading his speech a number of writers turned to political theorising: ‘the country must be governed for its benefit and not by promoting the interest of the aristocracy to the injury and expense of the people’. Wellington’s outburst had jeopardised the ruling elite. The aristocracy was considered a remnant of the feudal system, useful at the time, but now outdated: ‘the only wholesome ground for men’s retaining or making use of power and riches is with a considerable regard to the general welfare of mankind’. The duke’s speech proved that this was not the case, and that things must change: ‘there must be an aristocracy of merit not of empty heads & sounding titles’.<sup>23</sup>

Wellington may have been prone to talk and write for effect, but it was a miscalculation of the highest order to antagonise the political nation out of doors without obtaining the support of the anti-reform lobby. ‘Men of all parties now are looking for and expect reform’, and Wellington’s sentiments were considered to be typical of an aristocracy who plundered the system for all it was worth. As such there was a financial element to the backlash. It was felt that a reduction of taxation would follow reform. The ‘higher orders do not bear their proportion of the public burdens’, which would change in the reformed system.<sup>24</sup> One writer is worth citing in full. For forty years this anonymous correspondent, ‘Determinatus’, had been subject to the laws of his country,

but deprived of a voice in the choice of my law makers. I therefore feel myself degraded and enslaved ... nothing short of a parliament emanating from the people can check the corruption which seeps into every department of our government ... if you continue in your present powerful situation and use that power in withholding from the people their national and natural rights, you and I shall very shortly fall victims to our adverse feelings.<sup>25</sup>

‘A parliament emanating from the people’ was not on the agenda in 1830. Earlier in the year O’Connell’s motion for the ballot and triennial parliaments had met with very little support,

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<sup>23</sup> WP 1/1159/98, 5 November 1830; 1159/107, 7 November 1830; 1159/161, n.d.

<sup>24</sup> WP 1/1159/145, 14 November 1830; 1159/136, 11 November 1830; 1159/142, 13 November 1830. Emphasis in original.

<sup>25</sup> WP 1/1159/118, 9 November 1830. These letters show how important distress was in convincing people of the need for reform. Emphasis in original.

and few newspapers supported a sweeping reform. Indeed *The Times* stated that it would rather have no reform than a radical reform. It seems to have been generally accepted that reform would have to entail the disenfranchisement of rotten boroughs and the transference of their seats to the new manufacturing towns: 'the great towns desire to be represented, and they will be so. It is monstrous that they should not'.<sup>26</sup>

The people who wrote to Wellington expressed similar opinions. In the words of an anonymous correspondent from Birmingham, 'it is monstrous to accredit of argument that such towns as Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield shall be unrepresented while such rotten boroughs as Old Sarum and many others should return members'.<sup>27</sup> 'The friends of the government in Manchester' had read Wellington's speech with dismay. The 'respectable and thinking part of the community' expected representation to be given to the larger towns, and they used the threat of an uncontrolled working class to get their point across: 'a terrible hard spirit is rapidly spreading amongst the lower order. They are ripe for anything - can you depend upon the military?'.<sup>28</sup> Another anonymous writer adopted a different approach. There was no risk in giving the vote to the manufacturing towns. They were not disturbed like London or Kent who returned members, and they also aided the Empire through their coal and manufacturing output. They were worthy and could be trusted with the vote.<sup>29</sup> 'A Moderate Tory' from Leeds, tried to convince Wellington that he had not said what he meant. He presumed that the duke was not against taking seats away from proven rotten boroughs and giving them to the large towns (Wellington's vote on the Penryn and East Retford disenfranchisement Bills proved the writer to be mistaken). The writer called on Wellington to 'explain yourself more fully', that is, to advocate a moderate reform in order to win back political friends.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *The Times*, 4 November, 23 February 1830. *The Morning Chronicle*, however, did support the ballot, 8 March, 20 August 1830

<sup>27</sup> WP 1/1159/142, 13 November 1830

<sup>28</sup> WP 1/1159/95, 4 November 1830

<sup>29</sup> WP 1/1159/137, 10 November 1830

<sup>30</sup> WP 1/1159/111, 7 November 1830

The duke would not have retracted or amended his statement. In any case the damage to himself and his government had already been done. As an anonymous writer from Manchester commented, 'your speech has caused you to become from being one of the most popular men to be just the reverse. I am sorry for it'.<sup>31</sup> This sentiment is found in many letters. Wellington had been a popular minister (surely some exaggeration to highlight his dramatic fall) but 'the reverse is now too obviously known to your grace'.<sup>32</sup> The duke's views were 'too antiquated for these times of general information' and his speech was 'an insult to all the thinking part of the community'. If the people could not have reform while Wellington was in office 'then you must go out or be turned out'.<sup>33</sup> And turned out the duke was.

### III

Amidst the shock and alarm which Wellington's speech had caused, the final preparations were being made for the Lord Mayor's dinner and the King's visit to the city on the 9 November. No expense had been spared, and even the humblest tradesman was involved in decorating the route or preparing to take part in the procession. The grand civic entertainment was to be the occasion of the swearing-in of the new Lord Mayor, Alderman John Key, and of a demonstration of the city's loyalty to the new Monarch. But things did not go according to plan.<sup>34</sup>

As 9 November approached John Key began to receive menacing letters warning him of the possibility of a tumult occurring as the King entered the city. Anxious to do the right thing, Key wrote to the Prime Minister on the 6 November expressing his concerns. Key urged Wellington to attend the dinner only under heavy guard lest an attempt should be

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<sup>31</sup> WP 1/1159/95, 4 November 1830

<sup>32</sup> WP 1/1159/134, 10 November 1830; 1159/98, 5 November 1830

<sup>33</sup> WP 1/1159/111, 7 November 1830; 1159/142, 13 November 1830; 1159/136, 11 November 1830

<sup>34</sup> See R. Hyde, 'Wellington's Downfall and the Reformist Donkey', *British History Illustrated*, Vol. 3, (1976), for details of the planned dinner and some interesting caricatures. Also Jupp, *Politics on eve of Reform*, pp. 430-434

made upon his person. Wellington and Peel seized on this letter as justification for postponing the King's visit and much was made in parliament of the threatening letters and seditious handbills that had been circulating in London during the previous week.

The cancellation of the King's visit caused uproar. Although Neville Thompson has called the decision 'prudent', and Elizabeth Longford praises Wellington's skill in preventing avoidable bloodshed, forgetting perhaps that the duke was the cause of the uproar in the first place, other historians have rightly seen it as the final fatal step of a discredited ministry. To quote Michael Brock: 'in the city a government so incapable of governing that it could not reach the Guildhall was judged unfit for the times'. Contemporaries were most unhappy: 'Every householder seemed to consider the calamity an affront to him personally'.<sup>35</sup> The press were scornful of John Key's (lampooned 'donkey') letter, which even he admitted had been dispatched without either consideration or consultation, and believed the letter was merely a convenient excuse. *The Times* called the decision an 'inconsiderate and ill-judged act'. Wellington may have been unpopular, but William IV was not, and there was no reason to stop his attendance. The *Morning Chronicle* echoed these sentiments. The *Standard* called the decision a libel upon the King and the people, and asked why one letter from an Alderman had frightened Wellington. In the *Annual Register*'s judgement, the ministers 'erred in acting on too little information', and 'had exhibited themselves in a timid, a ridiculous, and unpopular light'. The *Morning Post* surely expressed the minority opinion when, believing the conspiracy theory, it praised Wellington's decision to postpone.<sup>36</sup>

The anger, disruption and fatal loss of prestige caused by the cancellation of the King's visit ensured Wellington's demise. Both in and outside parliament there was a violent backlash. The decision was taken, not because of the letter from John Key (he was a convenient scapegoat), nor because the King might receive a rough reception, but because the duke of Wellington was so unpopular that his presence at a major social function would

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<sup>35</sup> Thompson, *Wellington after Waterloo*, p. 107; Longford, *Wellington*, p. 237; Brock, *Reform Act*, p. 127; Quinault, *French Revolution*, p. 388; Hyde, *Wellington's Downfall*, p. 59

<sup>36</sup> *The Times*, 9, 10 November 1830; *Morning Chronicle*, 9, 10 November 1830; *Standard*, 8, 9 November 1830; *Annual Register* (1830) p. 162; *Morning Post*, 8, 9, 10 November 1830

have triggered off a riot. It was not the threatening letters Key received which alarmed the duke. Rather, it was the dozens he had been receiving since his speech which convinced Wellington that some sort of disturbance, directed against him, was to take place. Wellington took these letters very seriously, and a number were investigated by Home Office officials. But rather than staying away personally, and bowing to pressure from the people, Wellington and Peel decided to shift the decision to Key and to place the King's safety at the centre of the furore. This was political manipulation and opportunism of the highest order.

I have placed the menacing and threatening letters Wellington received into two categories. Those that warn the duke against attending the dinner because of the danger to his person; and letters actually threatening the duke with injury or death. An analysis of these reveal why the Prime Minister was considered to be so despicable that people were prepared to risk transportation for life for writing threatening letters. Wellington remarked that the receipt of such letters was 'Sadly ... not an uncommon event in my life'<sup>37</sup>, and while it is very unlikely that he was personally intimidated by these letters, they were used in parliament as evidence of extreme popular discontent which could result in a dangerous disturbance. They had a real and visible impact on Wellington and his government.

In the week following his speech, the duke began to receive second-hand reports about a possible disturbance on the 9 November. These writers were usually responding to rumour or overheard conversations. J Barber heard on the omnibus that the city and Apsley House specifically, was to be fired by 7,000 men from Birmingham: 'even the shopkeepers would raise their hands against you'. T W Beville heard a rumour 'that there will be a multitudinous influx of mechanics from the large provincial towns', angry at Wellington's declaration. William Farmer, anxious to show that he was only in a pubic house sheltering from rain, overheard 'a great many low Irish' discussing what sharp flints they would throw at Wellington and Peel. When looking in a shop window in Piccadilly, Mary Ann overheard three men 'and as the conversation was the duke of Wellington I paid particular attention'.

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<sup>37</sup> WCD, 8 November 1831, Vol. Viii, p. 42



A disturbance would be started on 9 November by breaking the windows of the duke's carriage, and she urged him to stay away.<sup>38</sup>

Talk is, of course, cheap. Whether any of these 'low Irish' and the like were planning a riot or an attack upon Wellington is open to question, but it is certain that the hostility the duke generated would have meant that people were talking disrespectfully about him. It could even be argued that these writers were part of the conspiracy to keep Wellington away from the dinner and concocted stories to that end. But it seems that most of these 'informers' were either genuinely concerned or easily alarmed, and on occasions the government did take their warnings seriously. For example, R B Thornhill wrote an unremarkable letter warning Wellington and Peel that they were going to be the object of the mob's vengeance on 9 November. Wellington forwarded the communication to Samuel March Phillips, Permanent Under Secretary of State for Home Affairs, who investigated Thornhill, and reported to Wellington that he was evidently a respectable man 'but speaking only as to street reports having heard remarks made by people in the mob'. Phillips also followed up a letter from Benjamin Haydon, the painter, whose servant's father had heard of a set of men planning to attack the duke. Phillips reported that Haydon had been rather hasty in sending the letter, and may well have mis-heard his servant'.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps these letters tell us more about the threatened or vulnerable nature of some people in alarmed times, and their feelings towards the duke of Wellington, than they do about the existence of any real conspiracy.

Warnings about assassination were taken very seriously, as attempts had been made on the duke's life before 1830. Two of Wellington's biographers, Elizabeth Longford and Christopher Hibbert, while mentioning these anonymous letters, often dismiss them by playing on Wellington's bravery and heroic attitude, and cite his resolute determination to carry-on regardless: 'it is not easy to kill a man'.<sup>40</sup> They use these letters to shed light on the positive attributes of Wellington's character, as far removed from their original intention as

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<sup>38</sup> WP 1/1159/86, November 1830; 1159/94, 4 November 1830; 1159/124, 8 November 1830; 1159/110, n.d. These writers were all from London

<sup>39</sup> WP 1/1159/101, n.d.; 1159/113, n.d.

<sup>40</sup> Longford, Wellington, p. 232-4; C. Hibbert, *Wellington. A Personal History* (1997) p. 291

can be imagined. Because of these letters, and public demonstrations of hostility, Wellington ordered his house to be guarded (he even drew up a memorandum on it) and he carried pistols in his carriage.<sup>41</sup> Wellington clearly wanted to make it very hard indeed to kill this particular man.

Wellington must have got accustomed to people warning him about assassination plots. In the aftermath of the Cato Street conspiracy in 1820, the Home Office received various letters warning Sidmouth, Wellington and others about plots on their lives.<sup>42</sup> Indeed it would have been strange if this had not been the case. In August 1822 Mark Lightholder, an ex-soldier in the light dragoons, informed Wellington that he had overheard two men on the western esplanade at Weymouth discussing a plot to assassinate the duke in Paris. The Home Office investigation was still continuing two years later.<sup>43</sup> In April 1830, a 'subaltern of the 5th regiment of the line', wrote to Wellington to warn him that an acquaintance of the writer, who was in a deranged state of mind, planned to assassinate the duke because he had ruined his life. Wellington drew up a memorandum detailing the enquires to be made respecting the identity of the author. He wanted to see a list of half-pay offices with enquires made at the post office and at the Commander-in-Chief's office. Both Lord Fitzroy Somerset and police commissioner Col. Rowan were involved in the search for this writer, who, because of the handwriting, Wellington thought could be a woman.<sup>44</sup> A similar communication was received from Manchester in September. A man was rumoured to be planning to shoot Wellington because he had hanged his brother for stealing in the Peninsula. To Francis Leveson Gower (Secretary at War) who was with the duke, he is supposed to have said that 'I never neglect and never believe these things'. This letter was also investigated by the local authorities, which were unable to find the man.<sup>45</sup> These

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<sup>41</sup> WCD, vol. vii, p.354

<sup>42</sup> See HO 44/3/170-2, 177, 178, 14-19 October 1820

<sup>43</sup> WP 1/718/16, 16 August 1822; HO 44/14/86, 15 September 1824

<sup>44</sup> WP 1/1159/55, 9 April 1830; 1108/10, 15 April 1830; 1108/15, 16 April 1830; 1111/31, 17 April 1830; WCD, vol. vi. p. 556

<sup>45</sup> WP 1/1141/14, 15 September; 1143/42, 14 September 1830; Francis, First Earl of Ellesmere, *Personal Reminiscences of the duke of Wellington* (1904) p. 62

(deranged and/or fictitious) men had personal grievances against the duke which were real enough for Wellington to become aware of them. After 2 November, many more people felt they had a public grievance against Wellington also, and the duke's correspondence swelled with unsavoury communications.

As Edward Thompson observed, the anonymous threatening letter 'is a characteristic form of social protest'. The authors of these communications (whether letter, handbill or notice) risked harsh penalties, and there were sufficient prosecutions to make the act of writing threatening letters very risky.<sup>46</sup> As Thompson says, these people were rarely cranks, but members 'of the working community suffering under common grievances, perhaps set a little apart by [their] literary aptitude'.<sup>47</sup> By analysing the letters to Wellington it is possible to identify these common grievances in November 1830.

Aside from the obvious intention to intimidate the recipient, the timing of these letters suggests that extreme dissatisfaction with Wellington's speech of 2 November was the motivation behind these letters. One letter, franked 30 October, warned Wellington not to attend the House of Lords between 15 and 20 November, but most were written after his speech and singled out the 9 November celebrations. For example, 'no admirer of you as a statesman' (surely an indication of where his grievance lay) warned Wellington not to attend the civic dinner for 'you will not return alive'. A 'radical and no friend of yours' threatened the duke with assassination at the hands of the 'party of the five hundred', while 'Swing' simply warned 'Beware, we all come to London'. Wellington, as Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire, one of the southern counties affected, would have been well aware of the Swing riots. By using that particular pseudonym, as many did, the writer would hope to place himself within the context of real, not imagined, fires and violence. In this atmosphere was it so implausible that Apsley House might 'display a prime blaze'?<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> See *Morning Chronicle*, 19 March 1831, for a report of the prosecution of a clergyman who was accused of writing a 'Swing' letter to a local landowner

<sup>47</sup> E. P. Thompson, 'The Crime of Anonymity', Hay et al, *Albions Fatal Tree. Crime and Society in Eighteenth Century England* (1975) p. 291

<sup>48</sup> WP 1/1159/79, 30 October 1830; 1159/80, n.d.; 1159/116, n.d.; 1159/127, 9 November 1830; 1159/159, n.d.; 1159/135, 10 November 1830

These letters were political. Their aim was to intimidate Wellington, to stop him going to the civic demonstrations and/or to force him to resign. A number of writers make this political aspect explicit: 'suffice it to say that out you must go - whether by fair means or foul'.<sup>49</sup> 'Amicus', in a direct reference to Wellington's speech remarked that 'the insult offered to the citizens through your advice will be attended with the most direful consequences'.<sup>50</sup> Swing also had a political edge, and accused Wellington of 'base vile conduct' and of 'turning a deaf ear' to the remonstrances of the people. The duke was urged to 'reform that vile nest of corruption which is bred in Downing St.', or as it was put another way: 'Parliamentary reform in a full and fair representation of the people or Death!! Mark this thou despot'.<sup>51</sup> Wellington's house was also targeted 'in consequence of your late declaration in the House of Lords and unless you retract publicly your words we shall certainly put our threats into action'. This letter is also interesting because it was forwarded to Wellington, only after some hesitation, by Sir Francis Freeling, the secretary to the General Post Office. That is to say, it was intercepted in the post. Freeling informed Wellington of where it was posted and speculated on the character of such letter writers:

My own impression is that it has been written by some idle scoundrel of which there are too many who indulge themselves in this disgraceful practice without being actuated by that diabolical spirit of which we have had so many melancholy proofs.<sup>52</sup>

In other words, despite the fact that this letter and the sentiments expressed in it were by no means uncommon, the threat should not be taken seriously.

It was not only Wellington's stance over reform that aroused hostility. His whole political career, and in some cases his military background, induced people to write. The duke was labelled 'waterloo murderer': 'If Brutus had cause against Caesar, how much cause have we against a man who for performing his individual duty as a soldier, was extravagantly paid by the public'. As Wade's Black Book and Chubb's Black List show, the

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<sup>49</sup> WP 1/1159/126, 9 November 1830

<sup>50</sup> WP 1/1159/92, 8 November 1830

<sup>51</sup> WP 1/1159/93, 4 November 1830; 1159/114, 8 November 1830. Wellington was in fact deaf in one ear.

<sup>52</sup> WP 1/1155/20, 5 December 1830

duke was clearly associated with Old Corruption.<sup>53</sup> Wellington sought 'avarice and ambition' and was 'ill-calculated by education' and disposition 'to weld the instruments of civil government'. The duke was accused of leading a 'detestable ministry' who thought it a 'pretty amusement to trifle with the feelings of Englishman'. The people would 'lop and top' until both root and branch of the government had been destroyed.<sup>54</sup>

Specific policies of Wellington's government were also attacked. The 'raw lobsters, blue devils', Peel's new police, were particularly hated. Peel cited hostility towards, and attacks upon, the police as one of the main reasons for cancelling the King's visit. They are also mentioned in the threatening letters that Wellington received.<sup>55</sup> The new uniformed police were seen as an authoritarian instrument to keep the people in subjection, and there were direct parallels with France where the police had been ordered to impose Charles X's ordinances. Wellington was alleged to have aided, or been privy to, the reactionary policies of Polignac. They were friends, both bound up with the Bourbon restoration and, as it was alleged, both had dissolved their parliaments and attacked the press. The accusation was used at the highest political level (by Brougham), and the *Standard* repeated the charge throughout August and September, although the majority of the press thought it 'unfounded'.<sup>56</sup> It would have been strange had the writers of these letters not picked up on this link between reactionary intransigence and revolution. 'Justice', alluding to 'your friend

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<sup>53</sup> WP 1/1159/132, 9 November 1830, emphasis in original; Thompson, *Making*, p. 664; On the Black List, which contained the names of all the peers who voted against the Reform Bill in October 1831, Wellington's 'annual amount of pickings' is £73, 531, second only to the Bishop of Durham, BL 808 m16.6; W. D. Rubinstein, 'The End of 'Old Corruption' in Britain, 1780-1860', *Past And Present*, 101 (1983) pp. 76-77; In the Black Book, the figure is £48,104, with the total amount 'taken' by the whole family standing at £2 million, J. Wade (ed.), *The Black Book* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1832)

<sup>54</sup> 1159/148, 17 November 1830.

<sup>55</sup> WP 1/1159/119, 9 November 1830; 1159/4, 6, n.d. See, Quinault, *French Revolution*, pp. 386-7, and newspapers for the week 2-9 November 1830, for attitudes towards the police.

<sup>56</sup> For Polignac and Wellington see McGee, *Fall of Wellington*; N. Gash, 'English Reform and French Revolution in the General Election of 1830', R. Pares, & A. J. P. Taylor, (eds.), *Essays Presented to Sir Lewis Namier* (1956); Quinault, *French Revolution*; Brougham, *Result of General Election*; Anon, *Reply to Result of General Election*. The quote is from *The Times*, 17 August 1830

Polignac', used the symbolism of the French revolution to convey his message: 'his [Polignac's] head will be topped off quite as a matter of course and if you don't keep a very sharp look out indeed you will not much longer have a head upon your shoulders to boast of'. Wellington annotated the top of this letter 'Keep for the handwriting'. Another letter similarly marked also mentions the French minister: 'fool, your intrigue and ambition have done for you ... could not the impending fate of Polignac await your foolish and mad career'.<sup>57</sup>

Wellington's speech ruling out any reform may have been the catalyst which prompted people to write these letters, and the cancellation of the King's visit the consequence, but the basic fact behind most of this correspondence was impoverishment. Numerous writers highlighted the burden of taxation and blamed government policies for their distressed state. As early as April 1830 the duke received a threatening letter which his secretary annotated 'Cato street over again'. Fifty men were ready to assassinate Wellington and Peel. The 'lower order of tradesman' were 'overburdened with taxes' and if the government ignored their request to remove certain taxes 'murder is the consequence'.<sup>58</sup>

Similar letters poured into the Prime Minister's office after 2 November. 'Not by all the new police in the world' would Englishmen be obliged 'to have this stuck down their throats ... take off taxes cause reduction in every department of the state, beginning with yourself first'. If Wellington did not comply he was advised to go to Spain and 'enjoy the delightful company of that scoundrel ... hell cat Ferdinand'. The Commander-in-Chief of the 'Bellingham Society in honour of that patriotic name' also urged Wellington and his cohorts to give up their places, pieces and palaces.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> WP 1/1159/87, 1 November 1830; 1159/91, n.d.; A third letter, also alluding to the fate of the French Ministers, was annotated by Wellington in exactly the same way (1159/9, n.d.). The duke obviously took this slander very seriously.

<sup>58</sup> WP 1/1159/57, 15 April 1830. Wellington instructed that this letter should be kept, implying that not all were afforded the same treatment.

<sup>59</sup> WP 1/1159/81, n.d.; 1159/82, n.d. John Bellingham shot and killed Prime Minister Spencer Perceval on 12 May 1812. Emphasis in original.

The people who wrote these letters were obviously desperate men who, rather than starvation, chose 'death in preference'.<sup>60</sup> This rhetorical device was used to show that they were overburdened with taxation while the upper classes paid proportionally much less. In a long letter, in which the writer is to kill Wellington and another man has been 'appointed for Bobby Peel', the author blames taxation and machinery for his distress: 'I have not had a joint of meat in my house for these two years and all through machinery you tax horses why not tax machinery'. He refuted the government's suggestion that distress was partial. His family was starving. He suffered the indignation of looking all day for a job only to come home to his crying children empty handed, and he compared this with Wellington's situation: 'look to your own salaries and compare us to them for we do not get two shillings many weeks'. Another writer also expressed this desperation and again drew the parallel between the duke's wealth and the condition of his starving family: 'your grace is tacking [sic] so much of our money and sucking all bloods' that it had become absolutely necessary 'that something was done for you'. The government had pushed both these writers into the extreme course of action that they now threatened.<sup>61</sup>

References to the 'ruin of the poor', 'famishing countrymen' and 'autocratical oppression' abound in these letters and reveal the economic concerns upon which they were based.<sup>62</sup> It is evident that the 'tyrant' Wellington was considered by many to be the personification of the causes of their suffering. One final example should do:

You are guilty of every evil you lobster looking son of a bitch ... look at the poor starving country people, and ask your own conscience if you are going on as you ought to do. it is my intention to shoot you or stab you, so look out - and if possible Burn your house down. Swing<sup>63</sup>

#### IV

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<sup>60</sup> WP 1/1159/119, 9 November 1830

<sup>61</sup> WP 1/1159/109, 7 November 1830; 1159/156, 12 December 1830

<sup>62</sup> See WP 1/1159/115, 133, 160 (9 November, 14 December 1830)

<sup>63</sup> WP 1/1159/162, n.d. Lobster was the slang term for the red coated army, raw lobsters (which are blue) was used for the police.

It is unlikely that Wellington looked beyond the threats in these letters. To the duke the writers were merely 'blackguards'. Most of Wellington's historians have similarly not looked for the motivation behind these letters. They reveal the tragedy and the desperation which extreme hardship could create. Not all of them simply threaten Wellington (although some do), and it is possible to detect legitimate grievances against the government, such as taxation or the lack of representation, which were felt by many people, and not just those in the working class. The writers of these letters merely articulated their grievances in a different manner. Undoubtedly, some would have been desperate, or deluded enough, to attempt some sort of Cato Street, but the majority were using a recognised form of intimidation (even radical platform orators used frightening language and images to intimidate the authorities to accede to their demands) to frighten an intransigent government to at least look into their grievances.

The letters discussed in this chapter have shown how government actions and policies were perceived and shaped by the politicised nation out of doors. They reveal how unpopular the Wellington administration had become in November 1830 because of their economic policies and the duke's antipathy to parliamentary reform. The policy of retrenchment failed to protect Wellington against charges of personal greed and of exploitation. He was still very much associated in the people's mind with Old Corruption, and his refusal to countenance a reform of parliament was seen as typical of the self-serving aristocracy who governed the people.

Moreover, this correspondence had a dramatic influence. The Home Office and the police invariably investigated letters that provided intelligence about threats to the duke's life. Threatening letters were kept for an analysis of the handwriting, and most significantly, they were used in both the Lords and Commons as evidence to support the government's policy of cancelling the King's visit to the City. They show just how vulnerable Wellington's administration was to a display of opposition out of doors. The Prime Minister's correspondence for November 1830 left no doubt about the feelings of the country towards him. Wellington had lost the confidence of the nation and this was confirmed by the cancellation of the 9 November celebrations. This emboldened the



parliamentary opposition to oust the Tories. They sensed that a perfect opportunity existed for them to obtain a popular mandate to take up the reins of government, and many Tories, including Peel, were perfectly willing to let them do so.

## 1831-32: Wellington and Resistance

To be opposed to reform, at a time when ninety-nine in a hundred of the nation are for it, is no trifling matter.<sup>1</sup>

... he spent his whole life in resistance. It was his true nature, it proved his mission. In the first part of his life he resisted Napoleon, who for him was the representative of revolution and conquest; during the second part, he resisted the spirit of Reform, and the progress of democracy.<sup>2</sup>

When the duke of Wellington resigned on 16 November 1830 he was associated in the public mind with resistance to all reform. His actions between March 1831 and May 1832 ensured that he was regarded as the pre-eminent leader of the ultra-Tory faction in British politics. Whatever the merits and limitations of the terms 'ultra' and 'reactionary',<sup>3</sup> to the people out of doors, Wellington became synonymous with the perceived definition of these labels. To reformers they signified an unyielding determination to resist positive change and to thwart the people by a selfish disregard for public opinion, which enabled aristocratic privilege and greed to continue in the face of overwhelming opposition. Wellington was the personification of these traits. One historian may have described the duke as a 'pragmatist',<sup>4</sup> but his actions, the motivation behind these actions and the popular perception of them, reveal little of the pragmatist. He resisted reform until the very last moment. However, he did possess a mandate from the people who wrote to him supporting his stance. Wellington

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<sup>1</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 3 March 1831

<sup>2</sup> J. Lemoine, *Wellington. From a French Point of View* (1852) pp. 25-6

<sup>3</sup> See Bradfield, Richard Vyvyan; J. J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative. Reaction and Orthodoxy in Britain, c. 1760-1832* (Cambridge, 1993); McGee, Fall of Wellington; Douglas Simes has recently stressed the differences between the ultras and Wellington, 'The Great Apostate': Ultra-Tory antagonism to the duke of Wellington', unpublished conference paper, Southampton (1998)

<sup>4</sup> G. Finlayson, 'Wellington, the Constitution and the March of Reform', Gash (ed.), Wellington

was determined to resist the Whig measure, and believed it was a legitimate function of the House of Lords to reject proposals which it thought were unsound in order to stimulate greater discussion and to give elected representatives a chance to change their minds.<sup>5</sup>

This is not the place to review the contentions and machinations of the Reform Bill crisis, or to assess the role of public opinion in aiding the passage of the Bill. Rather I will seek to shed greater understanding on Wellington's position by referring to the correspondence he received, which may help us to understand why he adopted the political position he did.

The Whig measure introduced by Lord John Russell in March 1831 may have been 'greeted with open arms'<sup>6</sup> by the country at large, but Grey and his colleagues had not prepared themselves, or William IV, for the long protracted battle that ensued. They underestimated the strength of the opposition to their comprehensive measure and had to dissolve the Commons that had ousted Wellington to get the Bill through the Lower House. This does not mean that the Tory party followed Wellington's lead, or that he was in touch with the sentiments of his party. Rather, 'Wellington's intransigence', to quote Professor Sack, had more in common with a marginal Whig tradition than the 'neo-Tory or Pittite traditions dominant on the right in the early nineteenth-century'.<sup>7</sup> Right until the committee stage in the Lords in April 1832, Wellington distanced himself from the activities of the 'waverers' who were attempting to engineer an acceptable compromise with the Whigs. It was only the futility of his position, and not reasonable argument, that convinced the duke to back down.

Michael Brock has stated that Wellington 'did not grasp the force of the reform movement'<sup>8</sup>. This may be true, but it misunderstands the duke's political philosophy. Even if he had acknowledged the force of public opinion there is no indication that it would have

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<sup>5</sup> This has a contemporary feel to it. At the time of writing (August 1998) the House of Lords had just thrown out the Crime and Disorder Bill because it contained a clause lowering the age of consent for homosexuals. The Peers claimed to have public opinion on their side, and one cited his correspondence to support the fact.

<sup>6</sup> Cannon, *Reform*, p. 217

<sup>7</sup> Sack, *Jacobite to Conservative*, p. 149

<sup>8</sup> Brock, *Reform Act*, p. 239

changed his mind. As Wellington stated in a speech in March 1831, the fact that the majority of people supported the measure was not a sufficient reason for adopting it. There was no constitutional precedent for the acknowledgement of public opinion.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Emancipation had been passed against the wishes of the majority. Wellington simply did not see the need for reform. He was fundamentally attached to the old constitution (which he considered had been saved by Catholic Relief) and saw any reform as ruinous. In the press similarities were often drawn between Wellington's conduct over Emancipation and reform. The implication was that the duke would withdraw his opposition to reform from necessity, as he had done over Catholic relief. But Wellington never believed that Britain was ungovernable under the existing system. The demand for reform was a temporary result of the French Revolution which the Whigs had exploited to gain power, and he had been ejected from office because Emancipation had split the Tories. Wellington saw his role as resisting reform for as long as possible until Ministers and the people came to their senses. A sufficiently large minority of people supported this position which gave some credence to Wellington's stand.

It must have seemed that Wellington was fighting a losing battle. The length and breadth of the country the people appeared to be in favour of reform. A massive petitioning campaign gave ministers a popular mandate, which must have strengthened their resolve. In circumstances such as these, according to Brock, 'the opposition could make no headway with the public'.<sup>10</sup> And as far as the public was concerned, the opposition was more often than not, the duke of Wellington himself.

In the ministerial and pro-reform press Wellington was seen as the antithesis of the people. To *The Times* he was 'unteachable' over reform and 'ignorant of the people'. He sympathised with faction, borough-mongering and military style government. When the Bill was thrown out of the Lords in October, Wellington was at the head of the '41' (the majority which rejected the second reading) against the people. The *Morning Chronicle*

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<sup>9</sup> See Wellington's memorandum, WP 1/1207/12, and comments in the press on his speech, for example, *The Times*, 26 March 1831

<sup>10</sup> Brock, *Reform Act*, p. 166. For the petitioning campaign see, Cannon, *Reform*, p. 214, Brock, *Reform Act* p. 78, and *Commons' Journals*

often reiterated the Polignac charge, and asked how two former ministers (Wellington and Peel) could 'make a covenant against the King and against the people'. The *Courier* stated the axiom that 'the duke, and such as the duke, are not the people of England'.<sup>11</sup>

Wellington's reported hostility to the people meant that he had 'sunk very low in general estimation'. Wellington's popularity was at its lowest ebb. He was hooted and booed in the streets, and on at least two occasions in 1831 the windows of Apsley House were smashed by angry mobs. By February 1832 the duke was thoroughly disenchanted with life in London.<sup>12</sup>

Unlike in November 1830, this hostility is not reflected in Wellington's correspondence. While some authors do refer to the duke's unpopularity in the country, the number of threatening or critical letters he received was very small. Almost all the letters received in 1831 on the reform question (the most common months being March, September and October) express hostility either to reform in theory or to a specific clause. However much Wellington may have disliked the idea, he was now perceived to be at the head of a faction. He was no longer a minister of the crown, and this helps to explain the absence of threatening letters. As a minister in the public service, it was expected that Wellington act for the public good in general. In 1831, he was out of power and became the focal point, the rallying cry, of people who did not want reform. By standing out against the majority of the people, Wellington encouraged the correspondence of fellow anti-reformers who felt ignored and excluded from the popular political process. He was their voice.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *The Times*, 7, 12, 24, 26, 31 March, 17 October 1831; *Morning Chronicle*, 21, 30 March 1830; *Courier*, 25 March 1830

<sup>12</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 17 March 1831; *The Times*, 12 October, thought that the vandalism was the act of thieves and their ilk, whereas the *Standard* adopted a different perspective, 14 October 1830; Wellington tried to get compensation from the parish for the 24 broken panes, costing £59 12s., WP 1/1182/29; also see Thompson, *Wellington after Waterloo*, pp. 115-6, 119, 121

<sup>13</sup> Correspondents who wrote to Lord Melbourne on the Political Unions felt that they were not dangerous. Wellington's correspondence, on the other hand, states the opposite. People obviously wrote to the politician who would be most inclined to believe their information. See N. LoPatin, 'Wellington and Political Unions: Rumours, Misinformation and the Great Reform Act of 1832', unpublished conference paper, Southampton, (1998). I would like to thank Dr LoPatin for giving me a copy of her paper.

I have divided the letters Wellington received in 1831 into four groups. The first are those sending intelligence about people, petitions, meetings or publications, in an attempt to discredit the reformers' arguments. Another group wrote describing the influence of the press on popular feeling, and argued that the people were turning against reform. Wellington was convinced of this also, and these letters clearly influenced his thinking. A third set of correspondence discussed the theory behind resisting reform and echoed Wellington's praise for the existing constitution. Fourthly, some writers took up a pragmatic position. While anti-reformers in disposition, they acknowledged the necessity, in the circumstances, of adopting a moderate measure and called upon Wellington to do likewise. Finally, the correspondence for 1832 will be analysed. This is not straightforward, as most of the originals have not survived. An idea of their contents can, however, be obtained from other sources, and this reveals a striking similarity with letters written in 1831.

## I

Some of Wellington's correspondents were alarmed and appalled at the apparent lawlessness of the reformers. John Debenham of the Royal Navy considered Hume, Bentham and Burdett to be Jacobins and traitors and sent information regarding their personalities and careers. He was directed to the Home Office. Debenham wrote again later in the year (also sending letters to the Home Secretary and the duke of Bedford) transmitting a copy of a seditious placard on the National Political Union, which the writer thought was recruiting for a revolutionary army, and the *Republican* newspaper containing an article on the Lords and the people.<sup>14</sup> Mr Bartlet also considered it his duty to send a copy of the *Newark Times*, a 'vile paper', which contained an article attacking Wellington. The duke replied that he never read the paper and cared little for what it said.<sup>15</sup>

Not all writers sought the prosecution of newspapers or direct action against individuals. Many wished to discredit the reform movement by undermining its perceived

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<sup>14</sup> WP 1/1179/18, 25 March 1831; 1201/20, 9 November 1831

<sup>15</sup> WP 1/1198/34, 13 October 1831

high level of support. Thus, as with Catholic Emancipation, people wrote with familiar complaints against reform petitions: that they did not represent the real feelings of the community or that they were signed under duress, or by children, rogues and villains.<sup>16</sup> There are also attacks upon the political unions, who were alleged to be seeking revolution not reform, and letters providing information about reform meetings: how they were not well attended, or if they were, that women and children, or hangers-on who could not hear/understand the resolutions, made up the audience.<sup>17</sup>

This correspondence had a dramatic influence on Wellington. He was particularly sensitive to the activities of the Political Unions, whom he regarded as unconstitutional bodies bent on discrediting the existing authority of parliament and local magistrates, in order to force parliamentary reform on an unwilling legislature. The duke was especially galled that the government took a soft line with them, and worse, was even communicating with some of the leaders of popular agitation. Nancy LoPatin has shown how he used the information (on arming and their revolutionary intent) provided by his correspondents in order to discredit the political unions with the government and the King. When this failed, he endeavoured to agitate the Tory shires by disseminating this intelligence (which though unproved rumour, was treated as fact) to local aristocrats. Rather than ignoring public opinion, Wellington wanted opponents of reform to meet and petition to 'challenge the political unions in their claims - and the government's - that they represented public opinion'.<sup>18</sup>

From the beginning Wellington had been sceptical about the strength of popular feeling for reform. His actions were designed to stall the Bill until another issue came along that would capture the public imagination. When the Lords rejected the Bill in October, Wellington believed that the ensuing delay could be used to change public opinion.<sup>19</sup> The

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<sup>16</sup> WP 1/1198/8, 1 October 1831; 1198/25, 6 October 1831; 1179/42, 31 March 1831. Other writers asked Wellington to present anti-reform petitions to the Lords, which he was happy to do, WP 1/1175/34, 15 February 1831; 1196/35, 30 September 1831

<sup>17</sup> WP 1/1198/28, 7 October 1831; 1198/27, 6 October 1831

<sup>18</sup> LoPatin, *Wellington and Political Unions*, pp. 13-15.

<sup>19</sup> Brock, *Reform Act*, pp. 238, 245

reports in his correspondence would have strengthened this conviction. Many anti-reform writers were anxious to stress the declining popularity of the reform issue. In August and September, B S Escott writing from Exeter informed Wellington that 'the excitement is gone & people of all parties are tired of the question'.<sup>20</sup> While highlighting the change in opinions, only a few writers were prepared to play the numbers game. Correspondents preferred to stress that people of intellect, property and respectability were all against reform - 'in short all who have anything to lose'.<sup>21</sup> These sentiments were echoed in the right wing press. In leading articles and letters from correspondents, the *Standard* highlighted the reaction against the Reform Bill as shown by the poor turnout at reform meetings.<sup>22</sup> The role of the press in sustaining this agitation, and how it reported the issue, was the subject of much debate in Wellington's correspondence.

On the 8 March 1831 the *Morning Chronicle* analysed the opinion of the newspaper press on reform. Ten of the London daily papers were said to be for reform, with only three against, while of the sixty country papers consulted, fifty-three supported the measure. Public opinion, as mentioned above, was on the side of the ministers. Both *The Times* and *Morning Chronicle* went to great pains to show the strength of popular feeling. For example *The Times* in March: 'our tables are crowded - are loaded - with notices of meetings, petitions, resolutions, addresses, in support of the bill for a reform of parliament', and the *Chronicle* in September: 'if we had ten times the space we possess now at our disposal, it would not suffice to give an idea of the proceedings of the people throughout the country'.<sup>23</sup>

While the weight of evidence is in favour of a national pro-reform movement, it is worth bearing in mind that this is not the whole picture. In the press there was a battle over terms of reference - especially 'the people' - and newspaper reports are not neutral investigations. For the 1790s Dror Wahrman has drawn attention to differences in the newspaper reporting of government speeches, and Wellington's outburst on 2 November

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<sup>20</sup> WP 1/1192/11, 7 August 1831; 1195/8, 9 September 1831

<sup>21</sup> WP 1/1198/7, 1 October 1831; 1205/10, 24 December 1831

<sup>22</sup> *Standard*, 22, 23, 26 September 1831

<sup>23</sup> *The Times*, 8 March 1831; *Morning Chronicle*, 28 September 1831. Also see *The Times*, 21 September 1831, and *Courier*, 7, 10, 12, March 1831



contains subtle differences in *The Times* and the *Standard*.<sup>24</sup> It was in the interests of *The Times* and *Chronicle*, as supporters of the measure, to stress the national support for reform. But sections of the working class and ruling elite felt differently, and 'the people' and 'public opinion' were also employed on the side of reaction. For instance, the *Morning Post* noting that Brougham was guided by public opinion, asserted: 'he already feels its weight and its effect upon his bankrupt scheme. The alarm is sounded'. Wellington and Peel's enemies were the country's enemies also and the paper praised their speeches which influenced the public mind.<sup>25</sup> The *Standard* mocked the suggestion that the House of Lords would have to give way 'to the expressed will of the people. They of course assume that the expression of that will is unequivocal' of which 'nothing can be more false'.<sup>26</sup>

The person who read the *Morning Post* and the reader of *The Times* would have had a fundamentally different perspective of what was going on around them. But anyone consulting a wider range of sources would soon realise where the weight of numbers lay. Wellington daily perused a selection of papers, but he could easily ignore this evidence. *The Times*, *Morning Chronicle*, or the Whigs in general, had an agenda and it was in their interests to see it succeed. Wellington had made his mind up on reform and on the press, and many of his correspondents shared his resolution.

Wellington was not short of people informing him that the press had got it wrong. Francis Lloyd from Birmingham thought that the provincial press greatly exaggerated the excited state of the kingdom, sentiments repeated by an anonymous writer from Edinburgh. According to the press, all of Scotland was in favour of reform. In fact, it was only the weavers and 'whores, thieves & scum of the towns' who supported the Bill. Wellington

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<sup>24</sup> D. Wahrman, 'Virtual representation: Parliamentary Reporting and Languages of Class in the 1790's', *Past and Present*, 136, (1992). The differences are, admittedly, slight, but important. For example, *The Times*, 3 November 1830, reports that Wellington's statement that the representation could not be 'rendered more satisfactory to the country at large than at the present moment' was met with 'laughter from the opposition and cross benches'. The *Standard*, 3 November, omits this observation, thus rendering a different interpretation on how the speech was greeted in the Lords.

<sup>25</sup> *Morning Post*, 18, 30 March 1831, also see 12 October 1831

<sup>26</sup> The *Standard*, 28 September 1831. The language used in Wellington's correspondence is considered later.

replied to the Lloyd that 'the information which you gave me is very interesting and tends to confirm the opinion which I have formed founded upon intelligence from other [sources]'. This opinion was that the press 'has great influence over the minds of the people and [was] the principal cause of the excited state of public feeling'.<sup>27</sup> Wellington's reply is further evidence that his correspondence did have an influence upon him. Mr E Kemp from Norfolk lamented the misrepresentations of the press that greatly exaggerated the amount of pensions and sinecures received by MPs, thus increasing the demands for reform. Wellington concurred but could not see a solution: 'these misrepresentations have been frequently contradicted and their falsehood proved. But to no purpose. They are repeated again and credited'.<sup>28</sup>

Two writers wanted to redress this imbalance. N T Haines from London called on anti-reformers to expose the trickery of mock liberals by publishing pamphlets and writing to the editors of London and country newspapers.<sup>29</sup> T Barker from Southampton wanted to go further and establish a constitutional journal, which used the best writers and best intellect of the country. The *Morning Post* and *Standard* did 'not come up to the mark' and were no equal to *The Times* or *Herald*, which gave the reformers a massive advantage as they had the 'uncontrolled direction of the public mind'. The writer was unaware that Wellington and others had already recognised this fact and had tried to rectify the situation.<sup>30</sup> The duke's reply to this letter is worth quoting in full, as it shows not only his well known hostility to the press, but offers an insight into the success of *The Times* and the working of public opinion:

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<sup>27</sup> WP 1/1199/5, 17 October 1831; 1199/8, 19 October 1831; 1199/9, 19 October 1831; 1209/10, 20 August 1831; 1192/11, 7 August 1831

<sup>28</sup> WP 1/1198/39, 14 October 1831

<sup>29</sup> WP 1/1198/40, 16 October 1830

<sup>30</sup> For example see, WP 1/1199/10, where Wellington remarks that the Tories had tried to come to an arrangement with the *Herald*, and money had changed hands. Rev G. R. Gleig, an acquaintance of the duke's, also proposed the establishment of local anti-reform newspapers. See Gleig, *Reminiscences*, p. 93, and Aspinall, *Politics and the Press*, pp. 466-487, for Tory attempts to influence public opinion through the press.

I have frequently lamented the influence of the press, and particularly of those parts of it to which you refer. Their system is one of entire falsehood or of exaggeration and misrepresentation for the purpose of a particular political object. It cannot be denied that it would be very desirable to counteract this system. But I confess that I don't see any way clearly to the attainment of the object.

I think that you are mistaken in thinking that the mischief which is done is attained by good writing. I conceive that a newspaper such as *The Times* or the *Morning Herald* is a great mercantile concern and is carried on upon the principle of such a concern. Great expense is incurred to procure intelligence of all descriptions to suit all descriptions of readers; and the newspaper contains upon which any man can desire to have information; besides the best reports of every parliamentary or other publick discussion.

The intelligence it conveys would alone insure its sale even if it did not take a part in a discussion upon a question which at the moment might excite much publick interest.

The part which these papers take in such discussions is calculated to increase the excitement of its readers. But I suspect that the choice of that part is founded upon the views of advantage for the concern rather than upon any interest of a political or publick nature in favour of the political question of the moment.

If these views are correct, as I suspect they are, I am afraid that it follows that if the best writers in England were to contribute to any newspaper not founded and conducted upon the same principles, such newspaper would not be read and the writings in it would produce no effect.<sup>31</sup>

These letters strengthened Wellington's conviction that the people were not all in favour of reform, that they had been deluded by an interested press and were now seeing the error of

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<sup>31</sup> WP 1/1199/9, 19 October 1831

their ways, but he failed to convince either the government or the King of this. Wellington and the Lords remained defiant to the last, until forced to back down by the impossibility of proposing an alternative. Even a slight acquaintance with Wellington's writings leaves the reader in no doubt as to his opinions in 1831. 'I am opposed to all reform' he informed the duke of Buckingham in April 1831.<sup>32</sup> To Rev G R Gleig, Wellington admitted mistakes over his management of the press when in office, and sought to clarify the meaning of his 2 November speech, but he remained resolute against a reform in the Commons. The conduct of government would be impossible if brought under greater popular influence. The unrepresented great towns already benefited from the constitution without having to bother with the costs and agitation of elections, and the rotten boroughs would always provide members willing to protect property and the Church of England. Wellington recognised that he would be popular if he changed his mind on reform, but he could not. He believed that the unreformed system worked for the benefit of all and could not countenance any change, even if the majority of people disagreed.<sup>33</sup>

## II

Wellington's eulogy of the constitution was by no means unique, and a number of correspondents also spoke out against the need for reform. One, B S Escott, a barrister, wrote to Wellington on at least five occasions and published anti-reform pamphlets. He felt that parliamentary reform would 'remove at one blow all those delicate checks & controls' of the constitution. Escott hoped the Bill would be thrown out of the Lords, enabling a long period of reflection, after which the clamour would die down. It has already been shown that Wellington agreed in full with these sentiments.<sup>34</sup>

The existing system had brought happiness, liberty, prosperity and glory to Britain, and to change it would only bring disaster. Many writers agreed with Wellington's

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<sup>32</sup> WP 1/1183/1, 2 April 1831

<sup>33</sup> WP 1/1183/6, 6 April 1831; 1183/7, 11 April 1831

<sup>34</sup> WP 1/1178/33, 18 March 1831; 1192/11, 7 August 1831

assessment of the people and popular influence.<sup>35</sup> Escott believed that a Commons of the people would fundamentally alter the constitution and result in conflict with the Lords: 'the danger is not from the violence of the people governed as they are. The danger is from making them your lawgivers'.<sup>36</sup> An anonymous writer considered that the constitution was already too much influenced by low popular opinion, and

the commonly prevalent notion that no man is a free man who is subject to any law or tax to which he has not either by himself or his representative ... given his own consent, is the most absurd notion that ever was entertained.<sup>37</sup>

Democracy was a dirty word: 'the law in this country gives a right to elect, but not to dictate to the elected'. Another anonymous correspondent, writing in August 1831, also refuted the argument that popular demand meant an issue had become law. Indeed, much of what he said on reform, the people, and the pernicious influence of the French Revolution, prefigured what the duke himself said in October. Wellington's memoranda and speeches in the autumn of 1831 reveal his deep suspicion of popular influence upon the legislature, and his unsolicited correspondence for the same period is filled with similar sentiments and suspicions.<sup>38</sup>

A small number of Wellington's correspondents, although hostile to reform, recognised the futility of out and out resistance. In the words of George Craik in October 1831, 'I fear the state of public opinion will make it impossible to carry on a government on the principle of resistance to all reform'.<sup>39</sup> This fact was recognised by Wellington: 'I know that I exclude myself from political power by persevering in the course which I have

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<sup>35</sup> WP 1/1198/37, 14 October 1831; 1209/10, 20 August 1831

<sup>36</sup> WP 1/1147/18, 29 October 1830; 1178/33, 18 March 1831. Emphasis in original.

<sup>37</sup> WP 1/1198/4, 1 October 1831

<sup>38</sup> WP 1/1209/10, 20 August 1831. Also see 1179/1, an anonymous ironic attack upon the Reform Bill which Wellington considered to be very good. For Wellington's opinion of the people see 1207/12, 14, 15/1, and the Press in October 1831 attacking his position, for example *The Times*, 6 October: 'His Grace's whole objection to the Bill may be resolved into this - that popular control over a legislative body is prodigiously inconvenient to a despotic minister'.

<sup>39</sup> WP 1/1198/32, 11 October 1831

taken'.<sup>40</sup> Thus some writers proposed moderate measures of reform which Wellington might see fit to endorse, and get back into power. Joseph Merry of Coventry wanted to see a gradual reform, whereby two boroughs would be disenfranchised at a time. Only if this worked satisfactorily would reform be permitted to continue. Other writers suggested that MPs should be chosen by lottery from a list; or that the £10 qualification be raised, or that the new towns be enfranchised without any boroughs losing their seats. It pained William Palmer from London to witness Wellington's unpopularity - 'in reality you are England's pride' - and he tried to convince the duke to modify his stance on reform.<sup>41</sup> These letters may have been well-meaning attempts at compromise, but neither the Whigs nor Wellington and the ultras (the waverers excepted) were prepared to give way in any meaningful sense. It is true that Wellington did come round to accepting, in theory, a 'moderate' measure, but this was not the Whig proposal which he remained hostile to until May 1832. His ill fated attempt to form an administration in that month showed how unpopular he had become with the majority of the country who supported the Whig Reform Bill.

### **III: The Days of May, A Note**

When the Reform Bill was defeated in committee in the House of Lords on 7 May 1832, prompting the Whig ministers to resign when William IV would not accede to their request for a creation of new peers, Wellington became embroiled with attempts to form a Tory government. By the 15 May it was clear to the duke and others that there was no chance of creating a ministry staffed by people who had previously been hostile to Reform, and the King was forced to recall Grey. The measure finally passed the Upper House on 4 June. The duke of Wellington won few friends in his attempt to fashion a government. Both within the House of Commons and on the streets of the major towns, Wellington was mercilessly attacked for his office seeking, sacrifice of principle and open hostility to the people. Although the role of public opinion in thwarting Wellington in May should not be

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<sup>40</sup> WP 1/1183/7, 11 April 1831

<sup>41</sup> WP 1/1178/19, 13 March 1831; 1196/28, 28 September 1831; 1189/19, 16 July 1831; 1202/32, 28 November 1831; 1198/14, 2 October 1831

exaggerated<sup>42</sup> and Peel's decision to have nothing to do with the foolish attempt to govern was more central to the duke's failure, an analysis of Wellington's correspondence, and of the newspapers, does reveal the terms of this reaction to the would-be Prime Minister.

On 26 March 1832 *The Times* saw fit to mount a qualified defence of Wellington against a letter written by 'Radical'. Mentioning Catholic Emancipation, which guaranteed they would feel a measure of respect and gratitude for the duke, the paper went on to say that 'the Duke's great defect is his imperfect knowledge of the state of public opinion'. This, however, the paper blamed on poor advice. Wellington despised the people because he did not know them. He should mix more in society. In the opinion of 'Philo-radical' the duke relied too heavily upon information from foolish, vain and artful ladies.<sup>43</sup> He was indifferent to the people through ignorance, rather than malice.

This was a rather charitable approach when one considers Wellington's actions over the preceding year, and shows that *The Times* was trying to refrain from adopting an unequivocally hostile position. This changed when Wellington attempted to form a ministry.

To the pro-reform press a Tory ministry, staffed by people who had previously opposed reform, was anathema. Wellington was accused of tergiversation of the highest order. The duke was believed to be thirsting for office and honours. The price of admission to Wellington's cabinet was 'principle and reputation', a charge repeated by the *Morning Chronicle*: Wellington displayed an 'utter disregard of consistency and abandonment of principle'. Both papers used the Polignac analogy - the *Chronicle* called the duke 'Polignac-Wellington' - and they (along with the *Courier*) warned their readers about the threat of military government.<sup>44</sup>

The King's invitation to Wellington was even more incredible because only two weeks before he had entered a formal protest against the second reading of the Reform Bill, signed by seventy-three other peers. With this document Wellington clearly showed that he was still against a reform of parliament. The *Morning Post* was alone in claiming that every

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<sup>42</sup> Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform*, pp. 238-40

<sup>43</sup> *The Times*, 26 March, 12, 13 April 1832

<sup>44</sup> *The Times*, 10-15 May; *Morning Chronicle*, 14 May; *Courier*, 10 April, 14 May 1832

friend of the constitution greeted the duke's protest.<sup>45</sup> The popular perception of Wellington and his colleagues at this time can be shown by a parody of the protest published in the *True Sun*:

Dissentient,

First - Because the Bill professes

To give the people back their dormant rights,

To ease their burdens, and relieve distresses

occasioned by our glorious foreign fights

...

Fifthly - Because the people have petitioned

In every town and city, near and far,

For this same Bill - though very ill-conditioned,

and not enlightened, as their Prelates are.

...

Ninthly - Because (this reason's very strong)

We find all other opposition vain;

Lord Grey has already been in too long,

And Lyndhurst wants the woolsack again.<sup>46</sup>

Wellington was not only seen as being against the people, but was also vain, greedy and office seeking. When the attempt to form an administration failed, the anti-reform press tried their best to rescue Wellington's reputation. The *Standard* believed that the Tory cabinet would have been strong, patriotic and popular. Wellington and a handful of others were the only people not to desert the monarch in his hour of need: 'His Grace's conduct has been truly noble through the late transactions ... does a man really sacrifice character by an inconsistency, the motives of which are manifestly honourable'. The *Morning Post* also

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<sup>45</sup> *The Times*, 17 April; *Morning Post*, 17 April 1832

<sup>46</sup> *The Times*, 19 April 1832



believed that the proposed administration was ‘supported by all the respectability, loyalty, and intelligence of the kingdom’, and praised ‘the gallantry of the duke in stepping forward at this perilous juncture, to prevent, by a personal sacrifice, the overthrow of the monarchy’.<sup>47</sup>

This, too, was how the duke of Wellington defended his actions. In a speech on 17 May Wellington stated that it was only ‘dutiful devotion’ to the monarch that prompted him to try to form a ministry: ‘no private consideration, shall prevent me from making every effort to serve the King’.<sup>48</sup>

Unfortunately, very little remains of the duke’s unofficial correspondence for 1832. Either destroyed, misplaced or damaging beyond repair, it is simply not available for the researcher. Within the Wellington archive there are contemporary index volumes for all of the duke’s correspondence. These give the name, date and a brief (rarely more than one sentence) description of the contents of the letters.<sup>49</sup> It is therefore possible to deduce what people wrote about in a given year, although not the details of their correspondence or the terms of reference they used. A small minority of the letters has been published in Wellington’s *Despatches, Correspondence and Memoranda*. This is by no means representative of the whole, and letters from the people tend to feature only rarely. Far more prevalent is official correspondence. Both these sources have been analysed for letters written in May 1832, to gauge how people reacted to the defeat of the Reform Bill, Wellington’s attempt to form a ministry and the disturbances that this created.

The duke of Wellington received sixty-seven letters, plus another seven anonymous ones, on reform during May 1832. This is a staggering number when one takes into consideration letters received on other issues and all his official communications as well. The pattern of these letters is very similar to those received in 1831. Wellington is seen as the head of the party committed to resistance to reform, and his correspondence reflects this.

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<sup>47</sup> *Standard*, 15, 18 May; *Morning Post*, 15, 17 May 1832

<sup>48</sup> See *The Times*, 18 May; Thompson, Wellington after Waterloo, pp. 124-7

<sup>49</sup> WP 6/3/5. The entries are arranged alphabetically

The most common type of letter provided information on people, meetings, or areas of the country. Meetings at Bristol, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Leeds, Manchester and Nottingham were reported. Placards, handbills and newspapers were transmitted. The general state of the country and petitioning were discussed. For example Rev Richard Freer wrote from Birmingham reporting on a reform meeting. Rather than the 200,000 people alleged to have attended, the actual number was more like 30,000. The town was 'far from being radical', with all the respectable persons being Tories.<sup>50</sup> Although it is hard to generalise about the motivation of these writers, it seems likely, especially in the context of the letters discussed for 1831, that these people were supporters of the duke's stance, and they provided him with intelligence to strengthen his resolve.

The next largest category of correspondence was those written by anti-reformers. These people either complained about the principle of reform in general (B S Escott, who wrote in 1831, features in the index), or were hostile to a particular clause or proposal. By May 1832 Escott had modified his stance. He was prepared to accept that some members should go to the great towns, but still resisted any disfranchisement unless delinquency had been proved.<sup>51</sup> Other writers urged Wellington to defeat the Bill, and he was sent a circular written for the friends of the constitution. Mr Anderton informed the duke that the £10 qualification was still unpopular with the respectable classes of society.

From the index it is not always clear what stance the author held on Reform. For example, a number of entries simply state 'reform' or 'sends observations upon the Reform Bill'. Some writers did propose a moderate plan of reform and suggested alterations. The index does not always specify the proposal, but in many cases it was the qualification for voting which caused concern.

As would be expected there are a number of letters relating to Wellington personally. Obviously his attempt to form an administration was commented on. For example both Mr Wentworth and Mr Williams recommended certain people for office. The duke also received messages of support, and letters from people offering to protect him. For

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<sup>50</sup> WCD, Vol. viii, pp. 318-9

<sup>51</sup> WCD, Vol. viii, p. 327

instance, Mr Pentico who congratulated Wellington upon taking office, and Mr Hamilton, who begged the duke to be careful as there were plots against his life. Hamilton, who had also written on Catholic Emancipation 'and on other occasions', feared that Wellington had 'everything to apprehend from the radical and the assassin. The French radicals look upon you as their evil genius'. The duke replied that Hamilton should send his information to a magistrate, but only after careful consideration as these overheard conversations usually contained a 'certain degree of exaggeration'.<sup>52</sup> There are some warnings about assassination, and one critical letter from Mr O'Connor who informed the duke how universally despised he was, but the hostility to Wellington, as shown by the press, does not get a chance to break through in the short descriptions provided. Occasionally writers referred to the general feelings of the people: 'I hear the poor on one side, and the mistaken on the other, ascribing the miseries of the multitude to the bad counsels of government, and the watchword of Reform inciting to open rebellion'.<sup>53</sup> And 'R.H', though a supporter of Wellington, urged him, due to 'public consistency', to let Lord Harrowby become Prime Minister and introduce a Bill.<sup>54</sup> But in general the writers were supportive of Wellington's stand. It is probable that the anonymous letters, which do not have a description of their contents, could be threatening letters, but this is by no means certain.

In general it seems that the correspondence follows the pattern of 1831, rather than that of November 1830. People wrote to the duke because he was recognised as the leader of the anti-reformers. Some writers would undoubtedly have been very critical, and without actually reading the letters, conclusions must necessarily be speculative. But from the index entries, and in some case from the names of correspondents, it is possible to draw some tentative conclusions. It is likely that most correspondents were supporting Wellington, and offering advice, rather than attacking him to prevent a Tory ministry being formed.

#### IV

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<sup>52</sup> WCD, Vol. viii, pp. 305, 335

<sup>53</sup> WCD, Vol. viii, p. 333

<sup>54</sup> WCD, Vol. viii, pp. 312-3

The preceding analysis of Wellington's correspondence shows that the battle for parliamentary reform cannot simply be discussed by placing the Whigs and public opinion on one side, with Wellington and the ultras offering futile resistance on the other. The situation was more nuanced than that. Wellington felt that he was representing a public opinion, one that was too quiet for his liking and one which he tried to stir into activity. Again, the vast majority of his correspondents received a reply, but more importantly, he used their letters to justify a course of action. The duke was convinced that the mania for reform was temporary, and the letters he received informed him that support for reform was on the wane. He was convinced that the political unions were dangerous and unconstitutional, and his correspondence confirmed this view. He then used the information they provided to try and influence the King, the Whigs and then finally Tory opinion, but to no avail.

These people wrote to Wellington because of his opposition to reform. He was not a mirror that reflected the sentiments of the country, but a focal point for a certain group. His correspondence is very one sided. What he would have done had his mailbag been filled with pro-reform letters is pure speculation. In this instance it reflected what he believed, and not what was necessarily the reality. It was a self-fulfilling prophecy. People wrote to Wellington because he was an opponent of reform, and he used their letters to justify his course of action

Rightly or wrongly, Wellington was perceived to be an ultra-Tory, unwavering in his opposition to the people. His ideal of unswerving service to the monarch, without regard for political consistency, was an outdated notion in an era of growing accountability to the Commons and the people out of doors. His out and out resistance to all reform between November 1830 and May 1832 did not benefit the monarchy, the Tory party, the House of Lords, the economy or his reputation. Wellington may have been a unique celebrity, but as a politician in these years he offended the sensibilities of most of the nation. The duke may have felt that he was acting in the best interests of the country, his intentions may have been honourable and based on deep seated beliefs, and his correspondence confirmed that he had some support out of doors, but he was clearly out of step with opinion. For a former Prime Minister, who should have been aware of the difficulties and intricacies of governing, to

adopt such an intransigent position against the vast majority of his countrymen, is really quite remarkable. He was not even consistent. In May 1832 he would have tried to pass a reform measure if a Tory administration could have been formed. And the justification he used was service to the King. That this aroused so much opposition is evidence of how little this stance was shared, or appreciated, by contemporaries. On parliamentary reform, Wellington really did represent a bygone age. A very small minority of die-hards, many of whom provided the misinformation upon which he based his resistance, shared the stand he took against reform.

## Part Two: Perceptions of the duke of Wellington

The duke of Wellington occupied a unique position in British society. As the conqueror of Napoleon, the personification of Britannia's greatness, he was a celebrity who the public wanted to know about long before he was Prime Minister. The press catered for this need, providing a mass of information about the duke, detailing the dinners he attended, the meetings he spoke at, any illnesses he was suffering from, retelling anecdotes from old acquaintances and carrying advertisements for products he supposedly endorsed. As many enterprising individuals discovered, Wellington's fame could be very profitable.

Through the 'Court Circular' (*The Times*) and the 'Mirror of Fashion' (*Morning Chronicle*) Wellington's meetings with the King and cabinet ministers were reported. This is also where remarks on the duke's health can be found, such as details of his 'severe cold' on 8 March 1828 and an account of his accident (in this case falling off a horse).<sup>1</sup> Stories like these, while not just the preserve of Wellington (for example the duke of Bedford's 'paralytic attack' was also reported), encouraged a good number of people to write to the duke expressing sympathy, or suggesting remedies for his ailments.

The attendance of Wellington at public functions was eagerly reported. His presence at the anniversary dinner of the Pitt Club and the Lord Mayor's banquet were described in full.<sup>2</sup> The anniversary of Waterloo was covered without fail. For example in 1828 there were reports of the celebration at Vauxhall Gardens and the Waterloo regatta on the Thames (which the duke attended for just over an hour amidst 'loud cheering from the people' and the strain of 'see the conquering hero comes'). In 1829 it was noticed that the duke did not attend Gold Cup day at Ascot races, although the crowds were compensated by the King's presence.<sup>3</sup> The *Leicester Herald* reported that while staying at Bradby, the seat of the earl of Chesterfield, inhabitants of the neighbourhood 'endeavoured by different means to get a

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<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 25 June 1828

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, 30 May 1828, 10 November 1827

<sup>3</sup> See *The Times*, 19 June 1828, 19 June 1829, *Standard*, 19 June 1828

sight of the ‘great captain of the age’’. Some even managed to talk with him.<sup>4</sup> When the duke inspected the approaches to the new London Bridge, ‘he was immediately recognised and surrounded by a crowd’.<sup>5</sup> Wellington’s charitable role was also reported. On the 10 March 1819, the duke presided over the anniversary dinner of the ‘Society of Friends of Foreigners in Distress’ which was a remarkable success.<sup>6</sup> It was announced that the duke was to stage a fete early in July 1828 ‘for the benefit of the Spanish and Italian exiles’, and Wellington’s work in establishing King’s College London, including a large donation, was also described.<sup>7</sup>

The image one gets from reporting such as this, is of Wellington the celebrity. He was a member of the aristocracy, and a famous man, who, befitting his station, patronised charitable functions and attended important public events. People were interested in how he spent his time, where he went, what he did, and whether he was enjoying good health. It is the image of a prestigious man doing the social rounds. At the height of his political career (1827-34) this image was successfully challenged, and the unpopular minister was portrayed as a self-serving Tory who longed for office and its rewards. But in later life his political sins were forgotten and at the time of his death the newspaper and street literature concentrated almost entirely on his military successes.

The letters considered in this section are those which tried to exploit this celebration of the duke of Wellington. Requests for patronage, the giving of gifts and offering goods for sale, dedication requests and enquiries from societies and charities, letters from inventors and those suggesting medical remedies, all sought to gain by association. Until 1827 this type of letter dominates the Wellington papers, and reveals how many people perceived the duke before his ascent to high office. From 1828 to 1832 the volume increases dramatically because he was at the head of affairs. As will be seen, other politicians also received this kind of correspondence. It was the price of holding high political office. But generally, Master Generals of the Ordnance would not be so burdened. Before 1828 (and probably

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<sup>4</sup> *The Times*, 9 November 1827

<sup>5</sup> *The Times*, 6 July 1829

<sup>6</sup> *The Times*, 9 & 11 March 1819

<sup>7</sup> *The Times*, 26 & 28 June 1828

after) this correspondence was not a function of Wellington's office, but a result of his unique military achievements.

However, not every writer sought to exploit the duke's name. Many people wrote to Wellington just to praise him, or thank him, for his deeds. It is these people – the 'Hero-Worshippers' – who provided a market for the celebration of the duke. This section concludes by analysing the letters of these people, to ascertain what they felt for him and how they described his character. In short, how they perceived Britain's foremost living military hero during a period of economic and political upheaval.



## Patronage

Men living in society are liable to the pressure of a vast number of appeals which it is very difficult to resist - the appeals of blood, and friendship, and gratitude; of flattery, of fear and political ambition...<sup>8</sup>

Like Liverpool before him, Wellington habitually rejected patronage requests.<sup>9</sup>

The duke of Wellington was a patron. His titles, honours and posts - whether as Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire, Prime Minister or member of the Lords - conferred obligations as well as rights. His immense prestige and a pre-eminent position in society ensured that people would write to him for assistance. Theodore Dury, from Keighley, though not seeking patronage, asked Wellington to pardon the intrusion 'as you are in the habit probably of receiving begging letters.'<sup>10</sup>

Most of these letters were job applications - asking for a nomination or recommendation to a post - but there are also letters asking for aid of a more general nature. These people wanted a variety of favours, whether it was help to establish a school for the children of Irish poor or remission of a jail sentence for an old soldier. Military requests, and letters from women, feature prominently.

This study is not concerned with requests for patronage from within the ruling elite. For example the letter from Lord Powis, forwarding a request from Edward Green for assistance for his son is not included.<sup>11</sup> The numerous letters from Sirs, Lords and Ladies

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<sup>8</sup> T. Chalmers, *An Appeal to Patrons on Their Solemn Responsibility before God and Man for the Religious Exercise of Their Sacred Trust*. p. 14

<sup>9</sup> P. Harling, 'Rethinking Old Corruption', *Past and Present*, 147 (1995) p. 149

<sup>10</sup> WP1/1004/21, the letter dealt with Wellington's duel in 1829

<sup>11</sup> WP 1/614/12, 17 January 1819. See 5/2/1, Wellington's patronage book, for other 'official' patronage requests, and 919/14, for a patronage letter forwarded by Palmerston, and 947/13 for one from Peel.

requesting aid for their sons have likewise been excluded. The focus of this section is the speculative requests made by members of the general public.<sup>12</sup>

Patronage has been described as the ethos of the nineteenth-century political system.<sup>13</sup> The essence of this ethos was inequality, reciprocity and intimacy. These characteristics are also associated with the social outlook of paternalism. Paternalists were authoritarian and hierarchical whose duties included ruling, guiding and helping those below them. It was also a reciprocal relationship as the poor had a duty to perform conscientious service, to be polite and to be deferent.<sup>14</sup> The exercise of patronage was conservative for it implied belief and acceptance of the present system. The patron - client relationship was fundamentally unequal and both had duties to perform (although the clients were invariably the genteel poor and middle class rather than the working class). In short, both patronage and paternalism were based on the positive use of power.

This power lay principally with the English ruling class. Of course patronage existed at all levels of society, but the real power, the real benefits, started at the very top. In the pamphlet literature of this time it was believed that this power was being misused, corrupted. This was especially the case with regard to church patronage. The author of *An Appeal to Patrons on their Solemn Responsibility before God and Man for the Religious Exercise of their Sacred Trust*, recognised that church preferment was a 'marketable commodity' (like army commissions) and sought to remind patrons of 'the responsibility annexed to their power'. References to power and the abuse of duty were common:

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<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of official patronage and Wellington's experience in this field when Chief Secretary for Ireland, see K. Robson, 'Military patronage for political purposes: the case of Sir Arthur Wellesley as Chief Secretary for Ireland', C. M. Woolgar (Ed.), *Wellington Studies I* (Southampton, 1996)

<sup>13</sup> Bourne, Patronage.

<sup>14</sup> D. Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England*. (1979) pp. 1, 6. This 'duty', however, was obviously imposed from above. For a rather different view of paternalism, and the challenges from 'below', see E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (1993): 'The same man who touches his forelock to the squire by day - and who goes down to history as an example of deference - may kill his sheep, snare his pheasants or poison his dogs at night'. (p. 66). For Thompson, paternalism as an 'ideology' breaks down in the 1790's, but only loses credibility after Peterloo (1819) and Swing (1830).

When a nobleman, or other member of the Aristocracy, in exercising his patronage, is moved solely by his private or party interest in electioneering matters - when his choice is determined merely by the poverty of a dependent, or the urge to aggrandize a family connexion - or when he is influenced by a desire to gratify a boon companion - all such motives, we say...serve only to pollute the act.<sup>15</sup>

Another pamphlet on church patronage highlights the distinction between the ruling class as patrons and the people. The 'demands of the people' and 'popular opinion' are set against the actions of patrons: 'the measures of the patrons and the wishes of the people' were at odds, as in so much of the popular political rhetoric of the day.<sup>16</sup>

For radicals, especially John Wade and William Cobbett, the abuse of patronage through pensions, sinecures and reversions was what sustained the corrupt system of government. Patronage and Old Corruption were inseparable. But as Philip Harling has demonstrated, this critique was, by the second quarter of the nineteenth-century, already becoming outdated as a succession of reforms removed the worst abuses of the system. This meant that Prime Ministers like Liverpool, Wellington and Peel were extremely cautious in their distribution of patronage, as misuse was a political liability that did not fit with the image of probity.<sup>17</sup> It is against this background that an analysis of the letters Wellington received must take place.

Most patronage requests asked for Wellington's influence in obtaining employment, either for the writer or for a friend or dependent (usually a son). This type of request falls into two categories: letters concerning civilian matters and those dealing with the army. Wellington's help was requested for a wide variety of non-military appointments. There are a couple of instances where the writer wished to work specifically for Wellington, for example as a

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<sup>15</sup> Chalmers, *Appeal to Patrons*

<sup>16</sup> T. Chalmers, *Remarks on the Right Exercise of Church Patronage* (n.d)

<sup>17</sup> See Harling, *Rethinking Old Corruption*. Jupp has stated that 'with regard to patronage the Duke had less to do than his predecessors because he either refused to make it available or had none to give', *Politics on eve of Reform*, pp. 47-8

bailiff at Stratfield Saye or as an agent for his estate in Spain.<sup>18</sup> But most writers sought Wellington's influence in obtaining a post that had no connection with him. Maria Oakes of London requested a civil service post in England for her husband.<sup>19</sup> Another writer wanted a nomination to a writership in Bombay for his son.<sup>20</sup> John Hall Hindmarsh from Edinburgh wrote four times seeking an appointment in the post office or excise office, but gave the impression that he would take anything.<sup>21</sup> Some writers requested ecclesiastical appointments, for example Rev. Benjamin Maddy of Northamptonshire wanted to obtain the Benefice of Fitz,<sup>22</sup> and others wanted jobs in Ireland.

Isaac Burke Bethal, an Irish Barrister living in London, wished to return to Dublin to work in the Irish police department, a post he believed Wellington had promised him in 1808, after Bethal had supported the duke over the Convention of Cintra.<sup>23</sup> Edward Hendrick sought a promotion to a commissioner on the board of paving and lighting in Dublin.<sup>24</sup> An old soldier wanted an appointment to the new Irish preventative water guard, although he had never served in the navy.<sup>25</sup> Whereas Charlotte Dixon of London, in a rather stern letter, sought an Irish government post for her son even though Wellington had provided for him in the past. He did not do so again.<sup>26</sup>

There are two letters that do not mention any specific request and they are from women. Ann Cheslyn, from Kennington (Surrey) 'a truly unfortunate lady' whose husband had lost money and property and then killed himself, requested 'some idle employment or an asylum however humble' so that she would no longer have to rely on friends to bring up her orphan niece.<sup>27</sup> The second was far less scrupulous. Mrs Gorges of Dublin offered to

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<sup>18</sup> WP 1/613/15, 9 January 1819, Edmund Murphy of Waterford; 1/762/2, May 1823, Mr Booth

<sup>19</sup> WP 1/621/12, 25 March 1819

<sup>20</sup> WP 1/634/1, 1 November 1819, G. H. Bellasis, Kendal

<sup>21</sup> WP 1/821/9, 2 May 1820, 19 March 1825, 19 May 1825, 23 June 1826

<sup>22</sup> WP 1/654/10, 16 October 1820; also see 1/821/6, 20 June 1826

<sup>23</sup> WP 1/614/21, 23 January 1819

<sup>24</sup> WP 1/657/2, 2 December 1820

<sup>25</sup> WP 1/722/13, 8 September 1822, W. Hamilton, Rutland

<sup>26</sup> WP 1/820/11, June 1825

<sup>27</sup> WP 1/818/6, 11 May 1825

repay a (fictitious) debt to Wellington of £300 on behalf of her husband if her two sons were provided for. The unspecified positions must have been lucrative<sup>28</sup> and it was not the only time Wellington was offered money.

It is no surprise that Wellington received letters asking for military patronage. As Master General of the Ordnance some people wrote for jobs under his jurisdiction. H. C. Jenning sought to put his improvement in the casting of ordnance into practice by working in the 'mechanical part of your grace's department'.<sup>29</sup> Silas Neville of Norwich, who also wrote to other members of government, asked if there 'may be situations of storekeeper, barrack master or other situation of a similar nature' available for his protégé.<sup>30</sup> There is a quasi-official justification with these letters, in that they deal with areas where Wellington had a legitimate influence and patronage entitlement. Others hoped to use this influence in another way: to obtain army commissions.

After January 1827 Wellington would have a legitimate influence in this area also as Commander-in-Chief. But before that time (and even after it) he refused to act for people he did not know and could not recommend. As the victor at Waterloo Wellington could have obtained commissions, but for the above reason and the prevailing attitudes among public men discussed at the beginning of this chapter, he chose not to use his power in this way.

The writers of these letters did not want a commission for themselves. Three were requests for sons and one was for a nephew, and women wrote three of them. Only one of the letters mentions the actual purchase of a commission - 'the money is ready'<sup>31</sup> - which must have been quite considerable (£500 for an ensigncy in an infantry regiment<sup>32</sup>). The other writers were hoping that the duke's name would be sufficient on its own without any financial consideration. In an era of retrenchment and army cutbacks, it would have been very hard for an unconnected person to obtain a commission even if the money was there.

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<sup>28</sup> WP 1/885/20, 24 March 1827

<sup>29</sup> WP 1/615/21, 29 January 1819

<sup>30</sup> WP 1/618/4, 16 February 1819. Emphasis in original.

<sup>31</sup> WP 1/621/13, 26 March 1819, Ann Hewitt, Bristol

<sup>32</sup> Bourne, *Patronage*, p. 91

Other correspondents sought promotions for their sons. Margaret Holmes from Dublin wanted Wellington to recommend her son to Marquis Wellesley ('who I understand is to be our new Lord Lieutenant') as his ADC.<sup>33</sup> She obviously thought the family connection had potential. Unfortunately for her claim there was no connection between the young Holmes and Wellington. A similar fate befell Richard Roche of London and his request for a letter of recommendation to Sir Edward Paget, Commander-in-Chief of the army of India, on behalf of his two sons.<sup>34</sup>

Wellington also received letters from old servicemen and their relatives or friends. Margaret Wilson, wife of a missing soldier, wanted Wellington to use his influence to restore her stopped pension of £40 a year.<sup>35</sup> James Dewhirst wrote hoping to gain a remission of a prison sentence passed on James Watson, an old soldier, but to no avail.<sup>36</sup> And Philip Mores, who had been a soldier spy in America in 1811, wrote hoping to get some relief from the distress he and his family were suffering since landing in England. Wellington could only refer him to the appropriate office.<sup>37</sup> Ex-soldiers wrote on any subject that they considered important. Capt. John Jebb wrote many times with complaints against several officers of the Horse Guards and concerning his unjust court martial.<sup>38</sup> An anonymous writer, who had 'not worn a military uniform since the year 1786', was anxious to improve the military communications in Ireland.<sup>39</sup> Other people wrote on military themes, such as a complaint against soldiers wearing swords when off duty, and the danger to soldiers of a fever hospital being placed next to the main guard in Limerick. Wellington had this last letter investigated, and concluded that the proximity of the writer's house to the hospital was the real grievance.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> WP 1/688/5, 5 December 1821

<sup>34</sup> WP 1/756/6, 8 February 1823

<sup>35</sup> WP 1/661/2, 1 February 1821

<sup>36</sup> WP 1/859/7, 10 July 1826

<sup>37</sup> WP 1/645/8, 15 May 1820

<sup>38</sup> WP 1/865/27, 29 November 1826; 932/11, 13 May 1828; 2/177/18-48, February 1834 - November 1837

<sup>39</sup> WP 1/907/18, n.d. (1827)

<sup>40</sup> WP 1/973/20, 29 December 1828, Jacob Robson, London; 1192/7, 5 August 1831, Mrs J Tennell, Limerick

The remaining letters concern a variety of requests. Among these are two asking for Wellington's patronage to help establish schools for the children of the poor in Ireland.<sup>41</sup> There are also two letters (excluding the one mentioned above) dealing with money. In January 1819 Wellington received a letter from Jonathan Burke Hugo, inmate of St Pancras workhouse and 'Prince of Scotland', asking the duke to provide him with three guineas a week so that he may 'live in decent privacy'.<sup>42</sup> It was returned in a blank cover. Four years and two months later, William Bromley offered Wellington £10,000 if he could secure a peerage for his friend, Mr Hope, who had helped him in the past.<sup>43</sup> (Hope, in a separate communication, assured Wellington that he knew nothing of this request.) Such a practice may not have been uncommon (although the amount offered is sufficiently large to suggest a degree of madness). Lord Liverpool was offered £1,000 for a baronetcy.<sup>44</sup> When Prime Minister Wellington was offered 300 acres of 'excellent bog' in exchange for employment for the writer's father, the duke replied that 'He cannot traffick in employment under govt.' This letter is interesting in another way also. The writer, Elizabeth Mary Drought, being an industrious beggar, had printed a circular which 'earnestly appeals to a generous Public, and entreats the benevolent assistance of the affluent and humane to rescue her from utter destitution'. This concluded with a list of addresses where subscriptions could be received.<sup>45</sup> Wellington was also asked to present a petition to the King from Paul Lemaitre praying for a 'measure of justice'. Lemaitre had been a Jacobin in the 1790s, and imprisoned without trial in 1794-5, 1796 and 1798-1801. He was also involved in the Westminster committee of 1807. Wellington returned the petition.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> WP 1/699/20, 20 February 1822, John Fitzsimmons, Aldermanbury (Ireland); 1/762/1, May 1823, P. O'Numan, Kildare

<sup>42</sup> WP 1/614/19, 21 January 1819

<sup>43</sup> WP 1/758/18, 14 March 1823

<sup>44</sup> Harling, *Rethinking Old Corruption*, p. 148

<sup>45</sup> WP 1/1016/17, 9 May 1829

<sup>46</sup> WP1/1024/11, 7 June 1829; Thompson, *Making*, p. 506

The people who wrote to Wellington for patronage were making an application. For this application to be successful, the writer had to put up a strong case to prove that the applicant was worthy of assistance. This worth was judged by the writers' credentials and, more importantly, their connections.

Few of the letters merely stated a request without offering either credentials or connections. A fundamental tenet of patronage was intimacy; if not between the patron and the recipient, then between joint acquaintances, friends of friends. A chain of connection was necessary so that various people could vouch for the individual concerned. But such relationships were increasingly becoming insufficient on their own. With ministers wishing to portray a positive image of themselves to an increasingly dynamic public opinion, and the subsequent curtailment of patronage, a name alone was rarely enough. Talent, and more specifically ability to do the job, was becoming more important. That said, early nineteenth-century Britain was not a meritocracy. Only the truly exceptional could prosper with ability alone. Therefore both credentials and connections were crucial, but only a minority of applicants offered both. Most writers provided connections alone, with only a few relying on just their credentials. This, perhaps, shows the perceived relative importance of these endorsements.

One connection has already been alluded to: old soldiers associated with Wellington because he was a military man. It would be hard to deny that Wellington felt some sympathy with the common soldier. In the reply to Dewhirst's request for a remission for James Watson, Wellington wrote 'that there is no ground whatever for a remission of his punishment excepting his former service as a soldier'.<sup>47</sup> Sympathy was one thing, active assistance another. There were thousands of soldiers who served under Wellington, not to mention the hundreds of thousands who served in the Napoleonic wars. Therefore common soldiering was not sufficient. Families of heroic, dead or wounded officers possessed a

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<sup>47</sup> WP 1/859/7, 10 July 1826. For an eighteenth-century perspective on the role of patronage in the criminal law, especially the role of pardons and mercy, see D. Hay 'Property, Authority and the Criminal Law' in Hay et al, *Albions Fatal Tree*, p. 45: 'Mercy was part of the currency of patronage'. Generally this applied to capital cases, which underwent considerable reform in the early nineteenth-century. Also see L. Radzinowicz, *History of the English Criminal Law*. Vol. 2 (1956)



much better claim. Sarah Gore from Bristol, soliciting a commission for her son, was the widow of Colonel Gore 'of whom your grace purchased the Majority of the 33rd Regt'.<sup>48</sup> While G. H. Bellasis hoped that Wellington would get him a job in the East India Company because 'of the friendship that existed between your Grace and my late father, General Bellasis of Bombay' (there is also an India connection here).<sup>49</sup> Personal connections such as these were also important outside the military sphere. Ann Hewitt's brother was the late Advocate General of Bengal and had known Wellington<sup>50</sup> and Maria Oakes' husband, 'who had the honour of being known to your Grace', was a member of the Madras civil service.<sup>51</sup>

Wellington's past, whether in India or in the army elsewhere, was coming back to haunt him. Anyone who had served under Wellington or had even been introduced to him believed they had a claim on the duke's time. Wellington 'was continually persecuted by anyone who could summon up the claim of kinship or dependency, however remote',<sup>52</sup> and he tried to ensure that those with bona fide claims were considered first:

The Duke regrets much that he cannot apply to His Royal Highness the Commander-in-Chief for a commission for any person till all the volunteers who served in the army lately under his command will be provided for.<sup>53</sup>

Some writers provided connections which, while not directly associated with Wellington, they hoped would add credence to their application. John Fitzsimmons enclosed a letter to William Joseph Denison MP, in support of his scheme to establish a school for the children of Irish poor.<sup>54</sup> Ann Cheslyn, whose husband had been acquainted with the King when he was Prince of Wales, provided Wellington with a list of 'referees', one of

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<sup>48</sup> WP 1/624/2, 4 June 1819

<sup>49</sup> WP 1/634/1, 1 November 1819

<sup>50</sup> WP 1/621/13, 26 March 1819

<sup>51</sup> WP 1/621/12, 25 March 1819

<sup>52</sup> Bourne, *Patronage*, p. 66

<sup>53</sup> WP 1/621/13, 26 March 1819, Wellington's reply to Ann Hewitt

<sup>54</sup> WP 1/699/20, 20 February 1822

which was William Wright, surgeon aurist to the late Queen Charlotte.<sup>55</sup> However, these connections were less impressive (to Wellington at least) than those which involved the duke personally.

By stressing credentials the writer hoped to demonstrate that they could perform the job applied for or appear worthy of Wellington's influence. Edward Murphy seeking the position of Wellington's bailiff stated that he had 'managed a large farm of my own with great success and some credit, having obtained several premiums from the farming society...and the society's medal for what they were pleased to term in their report the best piece of forest planting ever executed in this kingdom', adding as a postscript 'my family who are of the established church are well known to Lord George Beresford'.<sup>56</sup> Maria Oakes' husband was fit for a civil service post because he had served loyally and diligently in India for a number of years.<sup>57</sup> Edward Hendrick was qualified to work as a commissioner of paving and lighting in Dublin because he had worked in a junior position and felt deserving of promotion.<sup>58</sup> Whereas for the old soldier who had carried out spying activities in America, his credentials for relief were his past heroic activities. Surely 'it cannot accord with the national faith of Great Britain that one who has rendered such services and run such risks should be left unrequited'.<sup>59</sup> Unfortunately it did. Other writers provided rather vague credentials or offered to furnish Wellington with them if they received a favourable reply.<sup>60</sup>

For a job application to stand any degree of success it must have suitable references (connections) and proof of capability to do the job (credentials). But the tone of the letter and the language used must also be appropriate. These writers hoped to gain from the present system, and their letters were fundamentally conservative. They are also requesting a favour. These people were not asked to write in and apply for patronage. Therefore the

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<sup>55</sup> WP 1/818/6, 11 May 1825

<sup>56</sup> WP 1/613/15, 9 January 1819

<sup>57</sup> WP 1/621/12, 25 March 1819

<sup>58</sup> WP 1/657/2, 12 December 1820

<sup>59</sup> WP 1/645/8, 15 May 1825

<sup>60</sup> For example, WP 1/654/10, 16 October 1820, Benjamin Maddy

letters were polite, even subservient and praising (allowing for the conventions of the day). Rudeness is totally absent. Only one letter is stern with Wellington, and then it is a reply to a previous application that had been unsuccessful.<sup>61</sup> Even when a deferential tone is not explicit in the letter, the very nature of the communication implies an unequal relationship within the hierarchical status quo.

This deferential tone usually manifested itself in the writer playing down the request, almost making it a 'trifle' in comparison to the great man they were addressing. Thus James Reilly from Cavan (Ireland) presumed 'to lay a feeble state of his brother's business before your excellency'.<sup>62</sup> 'Humility' was a favourite word: 'an humble individual like myself presuming to address so distinguished and illustrious a personage as your Grace'.<sup>63</sup> The writers also implored Wellington 'to pardon the liberty I have taken' in writing to him and taking up so much of the duke's valuable time. In some cases the writer used praise to help achieve their aim. These sentiments may have been genuine (indeed such sentiments may have been why they wrote to Wellington in the first place) or mere sycophancy. When Edward Murphy applied to be Wellington's bailiff he made it clear that salary was no object: 'the ambition of serving your Grace which I would consider a greater honour than serving any Prince in Europe'.<sup>64</sup> And whatever the fate of Rev. Maddy's attempt to secure an ecclesiastical appointment 'I shall [join] with the people of England in sincere gratitude for the benefits we daily enjoy through your graces valour'.<sup>65</sup> This did not stop Wellington from writing across the top of the page: 'Return the enclosure in a blank cover'.

The draft replies and comments to his secretaries that Wellington wrote across the letters tell us the fate of these requests. Wellington replied to a large majority of these letters and wrote comments on several more. These were rarely more than a few sentences long.

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<sup>61</sup> WP 1/820/11, June 1825, Charlotte Dixon

<sup>62</sup> WP 1/613/3, 1 January 1819

<sup>63</sup> WP 1/859/7, 10 July 1826

<sup>64</sup> WP 1/613/15, 9 January 1819

<sup>65</sup> WP 1/654/10, 16 October 1820. Emphasis in original.

Despite connections, credentials, tone, deference and praise, none of these letters received a favourable reply.<sup>66</sup> The reasons given by Wellington offer an insight into the workings of patronage. Intimacy was crucial. A letter to Wellington from a close acquaintance, from within the ruling class even, stood a much better chance of success than one from a commoner: 'It is impossible for the Duke to give a letter of recommendation...to any gentleman with whom he is not acquainted & of whom he has no knowledge'.<sup>67</sup> Requests dealing with offices outside his jurisdiction were also turned down. On occasion Wellington would refer a worthy request on to the correct person or department.<sup>68</sup> But even when the request fell under his influence it was invariably refused, usually with this simple statement: 'it is impossible for the Duke to make any promise for the disposal of any office in the department under his direction'.<sup>69</sup> Patrons had to be rather conscientious with the use of their power and influence.

If Wellington suspected an attempt to trick or deceive him he was exacting in his search for proof of a claim. Isaac Bethal, mentioned above, believed he had a claim against Wellington arising from a 'private letter' written in 1808. Wellington retorted 'if this letter is supposed to contain any engagement the Duke will be glad to see it'. No favourable response was forthcoming and the duke did not reply a second time.<sup>70</sup> Wellington had to warn a persistent nuisance (Conway Montgomery) 'that this is the last answer he will receive from him'.<sup>71</sup> The duke also checked on sincere applicants. R B Williams had been led to believe that he had a genuine claim. Wellington asked his secretary if he was a

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<sup>66</sup> Wellington was, however, a very useful patron of Sir Marc Isambard Brunel. The duke helped Brunel with his claim against the treasury and to obtain his release from gaol for debt, as a result of the collapse in demand for the military boots he was making. Brunel was one of Wellington's most prolific correspondents. Aside from patronage requests he sent him thoughts on bridge design. The two men were also brought together over the Thames Tunnel. For Brunel see, DNB and L. T. C. Holt, *Isambard Kingdom Brunel* (1957). For Thames Tunnel, see below.

<sup>67</sup> WP 1/756/6, 8 February 1823, reply to Richard Roche

<sup>68</sup> For example, WP 1/645/8, 15 May 1820

<sup>69</sup> WP 1/618/4, 16 February 1819, reply to Silas Neville

<sup>70</sup> WP 1/614/21, 23 January 1819; 1/615/8, 27 January 1819

<sup>71</sup> WP 1/769/22, 15 August 1823

member of parliament, to which he got this reply 'he is a constituent of Mr Lushington at Canterbury & has some influence there... He has been once refused by you'. Unfortunately for Williams he was refused again.<sup>72</sup>

One form of patronage not discussed in this section is the patronage of the arts and the use of Wellington's name. This will be considered next. But it is worth quoting in full a reply Wellington wrote in August 1824 to a request that he patronise a musical work. It shows just how burdened Wellington was with this type of correspondence:

I must observe, however, in apology for myself that a publick man in this country, particularly one of any note, stands in a very disagreeable position. Every person who thinks proper to publish anything calls upon him for what is called his patronage, and with or without consent sends him a copy or copies of his work. His table is loaded, as mine is, with the task and his time is occupied in giving complementary answers to those who think proper thus to honor him. It is not astonishing that a man who has really other matters to attend to should be anxious to avoid this troublesome intrusion.... I am very sorry if Mr Anstey has suffered any inconvenience from this state of things, but I assure him that any inconvenience he may have suffered does not equal one tenth of that which I suffer daily from this kind of intrusion.<sup>73</sup>

'This kind of intrusion' increased with Wellington's elevation to Prime Minister in January 1828. As the duke replied to Elizabeth Zinck who was seeking a job for her husband:

It is perfectly true that the duke has but little time and the little time he has is more painfully employed in reading applications with which those who make them know that he ought not and cannot comply, and in writing answers which must displease those who receive them.<sup>74</sup>

This can be shown by the number of letters surviving in the Wellington papers. There are

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<sup>72</sup> WP 1/1050/8, 10 October 1829, he wrote from Llandilo in Wales

<sup>73</sup> WP 1/798/2, 2 August 1824, reply to T. Antsey, Bristol

<sup>74</sup> WP 1/997/30, 21 February 1829

over seventy letters dealing with patronage for the years 1828 to 1830 compared with forty-five for the period 1819 to 1827. This burden came with the job, and other politicians also suffered. During Peel's first weeks in office, patronage requests occupied him six hours a day.<sup>75</sup> Even when Home Secretary, Peel's mailbag was filled with this type of letter. Lord Liverpool and Lord Palmerston were no different.<sup>76</sup> As members of government they were all asked for positions over which they might have some influence. For the Prime Minister that meant a whole range of appointments, whereas Palmerston at the Foreign Office received more correspondence asking for consulships, clerkships or messengerships. Some of this correspondence then was dependent on the office held, and some was more concerned with the individual.

## Gifts and Dedications

Compliments. The Duke is much obliged to him....

The letters sending gifts or seeking to dedicate books and poems to the duke of Wellington can be regarded as the nineteenth-century equivalent of fan mail. Today stars of film and music receive letters asking for membership of their club and requesting a signed photograph. Wellington received letters accompanied by gifts and letters requesting the use of his name as a dedication. The existence of these letters is testimony to the popularity of Wellington with a certain section of the people.

The variety of gifts Wellington received is staggering. These include: membership of a tennis club that boasted the duke of York as a member;<sup>77</sup> a picture from Berlin and a box

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<sup>75</sup> Bourne, *Patronage*, p.58

<sup>76</sup> See Peel's correspondence for 1825, for example BL Add. Mss. 40372, f12, 2 January 1825; Also see Liverpool's papers, BL Add. Mss. 38269, f10, 2 November 1817. The whole MPC series in the Palmerston archive is filled with patronage requests.

<sup>77</sup> WP 1/647/12, 24 June 1820, Robert Lukin

from Holland;<sup>78</sup> an Irish woollen coat from Nolan Shaw & Co. of Kilkenny who had also presented their wears to the King and the Commander-in-Chief;<sup>79</sup> an Eskimo dog and a 'sample of the biscuit & two canisters of the preserved meats which have been aboard one of the ships' during a voyage to the arctic seas;<sup>80</sup> four barrels of American apples from Maryland;<sup>81</sup> and the skin of a lion shot in Africa.<sup>82</sup> Perhaps the most interesting though is a letter dated 12 February 1822. 'Several of the merchants and bankers of London were desirous of having the honor to offer to you some mark of their gratitude for the splendid services which you have rendered to your country in the several signal victories obtained during the late war'. They presented Wellington with 'a shield and two columns, upon which are recorded the several engagements up to the year 1813'.<sup>83</sup> This is the Wellington shield that can be seen in the Wellington Museum at Apsley House

Not surprisingly there are other gifts that have a military theme. Edwin Dudley presented Wellington with some pecan nuts from a tree on a 'battlefield in the neighbourhood of New Orleans' under which the remains of Sir Edward Pakenham were placed.<sup>84</sup> A more conventional gift however was the sketch of Waterloo, which Wellington decided to have framed.<sup>85</sup>

Wellington also received a large number of books, many of which have a military subject. There are works praising Wellington himself, such as the poem 'to celebrate the glorious success of His Majesty's arms under Your Grace's command at the memorable battle of Waterloo'<sup>86</sup> and the series of medals and companion volume to commemorate 'a succession of events which have astonished the age'.<sup>87</sup> There are also books of a more

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<sup>78</sup> WP 1/657/10, 21 December 1820, Charles Rose, Cambridge; 1/663/12, 26 March 1821, John Hall

<sup>79</sup> WP 1/679/16, 25 September 1821

<sup>80</sup> WP 1/775/2, 3 November 1823, John Hill

<sup>81</sup> WP 1/812/22, 25 February 1823, Mr Murdoch

<sup>82</sup> WP 1/823/7, 12 July 1825, Major Denham

<sup>83</sup> WP 1/699/11, 12 February 1822, William Manning

<sup>84</sup> WP 1/859/2, 3 July 1826

<sup>85</sup> WP 1/709/1, 11 May 1822, Lt. Col. Evans

<sup>86</sup> WP 1/762/11, 11 May 1823, A. C. Campbell, Canterbury

<sup>87</sup> WP 1/653/1, 1 September 1820, James Mudie, an engineer and writer from London

general nature. These include the memoir of Colonel Patrick Walker of the Madras cavalry who served under Wellington,<sup>88</sup> a book on the attack and defence of fortified places<sup>89</sup> and a work on the Portuguese revolution of 1820.<sup>90</sup> Other works deal with the county of Sussex, the Christian religion in India and the reign of George III.<sup>91</sup>

Wellington received these gifts, as with the more expensive ones he accepted from continental monarchs, as marks of respect for his endeavours. The Wellington shield should be seen in this light. However, the main motivation behind sending these gifts to Wellington was the kudos surrounding his name. Having a gift accepted by the duke, and receiving his compliments for it, carried prestige and this prestige could sell more books or more of Nolan Shaw & Co.'s wool coats. It was, with crown patronage, the highest endorsement in the land. Perhaps this is why, in reply to Miss Cope who had sent Wellington a copy of her work, he stated that 'the Duke cannot accept presents; and he begs that Miss Cope will not send him any more of his [sic] work as she does not intend to accept payment for them'.<sup>92</sup> By paying for a good Wellington undoubtedly wished to become just another consumer, but of course this was not the case.

A distinction needs to be made between gifts that were merely signs of appreciation for Wellington's deeds, and those that intended to exploit his name for commercial reasons. Membership of the tennis club (which reflected Wellington's position in society), the sketch of Waterloo, the medals and the Wellington shield can be placed in the first group. The numerous books and gifts like Nolan Shaw & Co.'s coat, however, were sent to make money. In February 1829 G. Coniglio of London sent Wellington a snuffbox 'as a small specimen of his work' in the hope that the duke's patronage 'would enhance the merit of the work itself'. Coniglio would then be happy to receive orders from Wellington for a variety

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<sup>88</sup> WP 1/621/1, 22 March 1819

<sup>89</sup> WP 1/804/9, 11 November 1824, C. S. De Malortie, Woolwich

<sup>90</sup> WP 1/891/19, 30 June 1827, J. M. Browne, Sandhurst

<sup>91</sup> WP 1/620/10, 7 March 1819, John Fuller, London; 1/766/7, 15 July 1823, Abbe J. A. Dubois, London; 1/699/2, February 1822

<sup>92</sup> WP 1/827/28, September 1825



of goods including vases and bracelets. The snuffbox was returned.<sup>93</sup> This type of commercial activity (that is using a specimen of a work, sent to a prominent person, as advertisement) was well established by this time. Its pioneer in the eighteenth-century had been Josiah Wedgwood who realised that through free specimens, special orders and one off's to royalty or the aristocracy a considerable amount of prestige could be obtained for the whole product range. Once a prominent patron had been acquired the money from the middle class, and possibly the working class, would soon follow. For Wedgwood it did. Other businessmen, artists, sculptures and writers used his techniques in the hope that they would obtain similar riches.<sup>94</sup> The duke may have been an especially useful endorsement, but other prominent people also received this type of attention, although one suspects to a lesser extent. For example, in 1825 Peel received a scarce book (because of his lead in defending the established religion) and an engraving. In 1847 Edward Turnerelli, an artist, sent Palmerston a copy of his work.<sup>95</sup>

In a couple of letters Wellington was approached to become a subscriber to publications, and in these cases he was happy to do so.<sup>96</sup> Palmerston was also content to subscribe, although Liverpool turned down one request because 'it would be most charitable not to encourage him to print his verses [on Princess Charlotte] as nobody would buy them'.<sup>97</sup> The list of subscribers was usually published, thus advertising Wellington's name (along with other notable persons) as being associated with the work.<sup>98</sup> This in turn encouraged other, less prominent, people to become subscribers. In the search for status

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<sup>93</sup> WP 1/995/21, 9 February 1829

<sup>94</sup> N. McKendrick, J. Brewer and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society. The Commercialisation of Eighteenth Century England* (1982), pp. 108-132

<sup>95</sup> Peel papers BL Add. Mss. 40372, f223, 26 January 1825; 40376, f76, 13 May 1825; Palmerston papers MPC 1505, 22 September 1847

<sup>96</sup> WP 1/620/10, 7 March 1819, John Fuller; 1/802/18, 29 October 1824, John Lickman

<sup>97</sup> See MPC 247, 448; Liverpool papers BL Add. Mss. 38269, f30, November 1817

<sup>98</sup> The publication of a list of subscriptions was also a means of thanking people for their contributions and, especially with radical endeavours, of showing people how they fitted in with a wider movement and experience.

‘one of the most effective devices for self-advertisement was the subscription system’.<sup>99</sup> Even lowly contributors were placed on the same list as the prominent, and their image as benevolent individuals gained by this association. Subscription lists were vitally important for public works and charitable activity (considered below) but for the written word the ultimate association (and accolade) was a formal permission to dedicate. To this request Wellington always replied, ‘Give him the usual answer’.<sup>100</sup>

The vast majority of literature published carries a dedication. This is usually to a family member, close friend or influential acquaintance. It is a means of thanking, acknowledging and showing respect. These factors also apply to the letters written to Wellington, but there are important differences. In most cases the writer had no association with Wellington, and while they might wish to praise him, the dedication implied a reciprocal obligation.

A medical book about the eye, a map of Hampshire and a translation of a French poem were some of the works which writers wished to dedicate to Wellington. But again there is a prominent military theme, with poems about Waterloo and other battles. One poet, James Grocott of Liverpool wanted his ‘Almedo’ to be ‘adorned by the name of its illustrious patron’, because it was set near Saragossa, scene of one of the duke’s battles.<sup>101</sup> Connection, however tenuous, was important. This is the case with military books, or poems about Waterloo. Geographical nearness was also a factor. N. L. Kentish wished to dedicate his new map of Hampshire to Wellington because ‘Your Grace is Lord Lieutenant of the county, and one of the greatest landed proprietors in it’.<sup>102</sup>

However most writers (and writings) had no connection with Wellington. Some sought a dedication as a means of paying respect. Kentish stated that even if Wellington ‘had not an acre in Hampshire’ he would still wish the duke’s name to be on his work because ‘no single man in England’ could match his greatness. One writer professed

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<sup>99</sup> P. Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance. Culture and Society in the Provincial Town* (Oxford, 1989) p. 251

<sup>100</sup> WP 1/769/9, 7 August 1823, reply to Dr G. Guthrie of London

<sup>101</sup> WP 1/625/7, 26 May 1819

<sup>102</sup> WP 1/722/5, 2 September 1822

‘unfeigned and ever lasting gratitude’ for Wellington’s achievements,<sup>103</sup> while Peter Coxe of London longed for the opportunity of ‘publicly showing my respect for the service your grace has done, not only to the nation, but the world at large’.<sup>104</sup>

Wellington may have found these sentiments embarrassing and even annoying for he was not fond of emotional outbursts. But for the writer it was probably exaggeration to dress up the request, flattery to obtain a favour. One poet sought protection under Wellington’s name. George Lempriere’s (from Bristol) former publications had been under pseudonyms. He now wished to use his name but lacked confidence: ‘I implore for the cover of the humblest muse the protection of those wings which have soared beyond any other terrestrial glory’.<sup>105</sup> R. W. Fisher of Liverpool was equally honest about his motivation. After praising Wellington he remarked ‘your Grace must be perfectly aware of the advantages which would accrue to me by this permission’.<sup>106</sup> The prestige surrounding a poem about Waterloo containing the name of the Prince of Waterloo, of literature being associated with victory and national greatness would be considerable. But Wellington would not allow this connection to be made.

The duke of Wellington declined these requests. He did so because a formal permission would create an obligation:

The permission given by any individual to dedicate a work to him implies either an empty compliment & is nothing; or it is something and deceives the publick unless it implies that [the] individual is acquainted with the author; his knowledge of the subject & his talents, or that he has perused the work & vouches for it & its contents.... This has been the Duke’s view of this subject ever since he has been a person to whom authors have been desirous of dedicating their work; and the Duke has no recollection of having given a formal permission to any work which be dedicated to him.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> WP 1/699/13, February 1822

<sup>104</sup> WP 1/767/4, 23 July 1823

<sup>105</sup> WP 1/709/11, 11 May 1822

<sup>106</sup> WP 1/663/15, 30 March 1821

<sup>107</sup> WP 1/764/4, 30 July 1823, reply to Peter Coxe

This obligation was not to the author, but to the ‘publick’ whom he did not wish to deceive with the misuse of his prestige. Palmerston, too, declined a permission to dedicate ‘for various reasons connected with general political consideration’.<sup>108</sup> An author could dedicate a work to Wellington without his permission (on which the duke would ‘say nothing’) as N. L. Kentish did. However, much of the force of the dedication would be lost. It was tantamount to admitting refusal or unwillingness to ask in the first place, and the author ran the risk of meeting with Wellington’s disapprobation.

### **Goods for sale**

Related to the letters sending gifts, though less common, is the correspondence offering to sell various items to Wellington. These goods included rare coins, pictures, poems and horses. The motivation of some of these writers has already been discussed. The duke was a glowing endorsement of a product. His ‘great kindness and consideration’ in purchasing a product could be used as an advertisement. However, there were other reasons why people wished to sell their goods to the duke of Wellington in particular.

Perhaps the main reason to sell something is the need for money. Miss Cope, after apologising for the rudeness in charging for her poem due to the persecution of a printer and publisher, admitted that she ‘should not have charged anybody but your grace so much for the copy’ (£3) thinking Wellington would be offended if she said less.<sup>109</sup> William Whaley from county Wicklow had bred a couple of foals ‘one intended for the Hero of the present times’, and probably intended to make a gift of one but ‘now my affairs are not in the most

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<sup>108</sup> MPC 1038, 13 August 1839, the book was on Serbia. Peel also received letters seeking to dedicate books to him, see BL Add. Mss. 40379, f204; 40380, f193

<sup>109</sup> WP 1/782/2, 17 January 1824

prosperous situation' he was offering a sale.<sup>110</sup> Another gentleman was compelled 'thro' necessity' to sell his rare coins 'to raise a little money'.<sup>111</sup>

However, this writer had heard that Wellington collected rare coins. His offer was not entirely speculative. Indeed nearly half the writers tried to make some sort of connection between Wellington and the good being offered for sale, and this connection was invariably war. One correspondent wished to engrave a picture of Wellington to complement the one of Napoleon that he had in his possession.<sup>112</sup> Specific battles were also important: 'The presumption it is hoped will be deemed pardonable since the purport of the address relates to Waterloo'. The offer in question was the 'chapel piece of the chapel of Hougoumont'.<sup>113</sup> Wellington was also offered a picture of the storming of Seringapatam (May 1799) for 250 guineas. The duke instructed one of his secretaries to enquire where it might be seen.<sup>114</sup>

In this letter, John Dryer from London was writing to Wellington to give him the first refusal on the painting. This was also the case with another picture, the Nativity by Corregio: 'I take the liberty of addressing your Grace on this occasion to give you the earliest opportunity of seeing and of possessing the picture'.<sup>115</sup> This picture was obviously rather different from the last in that only a few people would have been in the market for an old master. The seller might also have known that Wellington had at least one other Corregio in his collection.<sup>116</sup> In this way the writer could justify his offer while also appearing to be doing Wellington a favour.

A couple of letters have the air of a normal business transaction about them. Peter Turnerelli (father of Edward Turnerelli, above, who wrote to Palmerston) wrote in May

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<sup>110</sup> WP 1/718/3, 6 August 1822,

<sup>111</sup> WP 1/620/5, 4 March 1819, Henry Munro, London

<sup>112</sup> WP 1/628/4, 7 July 1819, Mr Bell, London

<sup>113</sup> WP 1/818/1, May 1825, J. Harwood

<sup>114</sup> WP 1/663/13, 27 March 1821

<sup>115</sup> WP 1/654/11, 18 October 1820, John Setree. Palmerston was also offered works of art, MPC 346, 1530. Of course, most of the aristocracy would have been purchasers of art.

<sup>116</sup> J. Voak, *The Wellington collection at Apsley House*, The Eight Wellington Lecture, University of Southampton (1996). For Corregio (1489-1534) see J. Turner (Ed.), *The Dictionary of Art* (1996), Vol. 7, pp. 885-893; *Encyclopaedia of World Art* (1960) Vol. III, pp. 818-829

1819 chasing payment for a bust of the king that Wellington had apparently commissioned.<sup>117</sup> While six months later Thomas Webb informed Wellington that he had £10,000 to £30,000 worth of stocks that he would be happy to sell to the duke at any time. Wellington thanked Webb for his communication.<sup>118</sup>

The only pattern regarding Wellington's draft replies is that he did not accept outright any of the goods offered to him. Indeed Wellington declined all bar two of the offers, whatever the motivation or product. And these two - the picture of Seringapatam and the stocks - were not acceptances. Wellington was keeping his options open without committing himself to a purchase. Wellington knew what he liked and was very choosy how he dispensed his largesse, thus limiting his endorsement of products.

## Societies and Charities

There is no satisfaction equal to that of feeling and knowing that we are either by our advice or assistance, promoting the happiness and welfare of our fellow beings.<sup>119</sup>

I am highly flattered by the desire of the society that I should be their patron...<sup>120</sup>

Voluntary societies and charities were formed to tackle a variety of perceived needs. The majority responded to the problems created by industrialisation and urbanisation, and sought to provide poor relief, medical aid, moral reform and a whole range of other worthy

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<sup>117</sup> WP 1/625/9, 29 May 1819. He had also made a bust of Wellington for one of the temporary celebrations in 1815, A. Yarrington, *The Commemoration of the Hero 1800-1864: Monuments to the British Victors of the Napoleonic Wars* (1988) p. 169

<sup>118</sup> WP 1/634/21, 19 November 1819

<sup>119</sup> H. Gregson, *Suggestions for Improving the Condition of the Industrious Classes by Establishing Friendly Societies and Saving Banks, in Co-operation with Each Other* (1830) p. 3.

<sup>120</sup> WP 1/799/9, 23 August 1824, Wellington's reply to Hampshire Benefit Society.

activities. Previously the family or similar unit would have provided these services, while in the future the state would increasingly intervene on the people's behalf. In the middle of this development existed the voluntary societies.<sup>121</sup>

According to R. J. Morris, the voluntary societies possessed three distinctive features: the membership was primarily middle class, with the societies being dominated by the elite of that class; they existed independently of government aid and authority; and they were urban based.<sup>122</sup> These associations (the largest group of which were the friendly societies) sought to work within the system, and hierarchy was reflected in their internal structures: patron, president, vice-presidents to various grades of membership.<sup>123</sup> Their aims were essentially paternal: to 'check the progress of human misery ... [and] augment the stock of national virtue and happiness'.<sup>124</sup> One source speculated 'that there are perhaps between twenty and thirty thousand of these public charities in the kingdom', when almshouses, small pox institutions, lunatic asylums, lying-in hospitals, public infirmaries and organisations like the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (of which Wellington was a member from 1819), missionary societies and other bible associations are included.<sup>125</sup> One of Wellington's correspondents writing in 1829 put the figure at nearly fifty thousand.<sup>126</sup> At the beginning of the nineteenth-century parliamentary returns gave the number of friendly societies alone at 9,672 with 704,350 members in England and Wales.<sup>127</sup> One way or another a considerable number of people were involved with this type of activity.

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<sup>121</sup> See R. J. Morris, 'Voluntary Societies and British Urban Elites, 1780-1850: An Analysis', *The Historical Journal*, 26 (1983)

<sup>122</sup> Morris, *Voluntary Societies*, p. 96

<sup>123</sup> Morris, *Voluntary Societies*, p. 102

<sup>124</sup> J. T. Becher, *The Constitution of Friendly societies, upon Legal and Scientific principles ... for the Government of the Friendly Institution, At Southwell* (1824) p. 47

<sup>125</sup> [Anon.] *A letter to the Right Hon. Sir Wm. Scott ... in answer to Mr Brougham's letter to Sir Samuel Romilly Upon the Abuse of Charities and ministerial Patronage* (1818) pp. 19-22.

<sup>126</sup> WP 1/1030/26, 6 July 1829, David Harvey, London

<sup>127</sup> Becher, *Constitution of Friendly Societies*, p. 49; P. H. J. H. Gosden, *The Friendly Societies in England 1815-1875* (Manchester, 1961) p. 5

The duke of Wellington received 57 letters regarding societies and charities from 1819 to 1832. These were very common in 1819 reflecting the fact that Wellington had only just returned to Britain. Morris has stated that ‘very few of the aristocracy were involved in these societies, except as patrons and except in the metropolitan based societies of Edinburgh and London, where these societies had ambitions for national influence’.<sup>128</sup> The following discussion is based on these societies. This correspondence can be divided into two groups: letters from associations with which Wellington was already involved requesting attendance at a ceremony or event; and letters asking Wellington to join a society in some capacity.

Wellington was associated with a large number of societies and charities. A selection from those mentioned in his correspondence (which is not exhaustive) shows that he was president of Bath penitentiary, the Society of Friends of Foreigners in Distress and the Lying-in charity; a vice-president (and trustee) of the Royal Academy of Music (the duchess was one of twenty-five visitors), the London hospital, the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge in the Highlands and Islands, the Middlesex hospital, the Caledonian Asylum, the Shakespeare Society (for erecting a monument to the bard); and an honorary fellow of the Medico-Botanical Society. This list must be seen as representative of the duke’s benevolent interests.

Being a president or vice-president of a society conferred certain obligations upon the office holder apart from a hefty subscription.<sup>129</sup> The most important of the active duties (rather than simply allowing their name to be used for promotion) was attendance at functions and ceremonies, especially the anniversary festival or dinner.

The anniversary dinner was part meeting, part fund-raiser and part celebration of the past year’s achievements, and the presence of a ‘distinguished personage’ was vital to its success. In March 1819 Thomas Thompson wrote on behalf of the stewards of the Lying-in

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<sup>128</sup> Morris, *Voluntary Societies*, p. 96

<sup>129</sup> For example Wellington subscribed £105 to the Royal Academy of Music and an annual donation of £5 5s. to the Bath penitentiary. *Address to the Public on behalf of the Royal Academy of Music* (1824); *Bath Penitentiary. Ninth Report and an Alphabetical list of Subscriptions and Donations during the year 1824* (Bath, 1825)



charity soliciting Wellington's attendance at the dinner. The charity was established in 1757, a time when Britain was concerned about its security and manpower. Fears that Britain's population was in decline when cannon fodder was needed more and more led to 'a cult of prolific maternity' shown by 'the spate of maternity hospitals established for the benefit of the poor in London and elsewhere from mid-century onwards'.<sup>130</sup> Thompson urged the duke to attend - 'a distinction that will be highly beneficial to the charity' - which had faced increased applications ('1573 women delivered last year') thus rendering 'necessary that the anniversary should be made as advantageous as possible'.<sup>131</sup> Despite this need Wellington had to decline the offer.

One festival Wellington did attend was the annual dinner of the Society of Friends of Foreigners in distress on 10 March 1819 at the City of London Tavern, when 'upwards of three hundred of the governors and their friends attended'. Tickets were 20s. and £877 15s. was raised by voluntary donations and new subscriptions. A vote of thanks was passed by the board of directors for Wellington's attendance but they had to do without him the following year.<sup>132</sup> Lord Ellesmere has recorded the duke's opinion of events such as this. The following quote is attributed to 19 March 1819:

These (charity) dinners are the strangest fancy; a few people take it into their heads to be charitable, and then in order to obtain charity they have an anniversary dinner, which is very bad and costs each individual who goes there about as much as the charity ....

Wellington obviously felt that this was a duty to be endured rather than enjoyed.<sup>133</sup>

Other events that Wellington was asked to attend include the preaching of a sermon on behalf of the British lying-in hospital for married women and a church service for the

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<sup>130</sup> Colley, *Britons*, pp. 87, 240

<sup>131</sup> WP 1/621/10, 24 March 1819

<sup>132</sup> WP 1/618/20, 25 February 1819; 1/621/8, 24 March 1819; 1/643/15, 29 April 1820

<sup>133</sup> Ellesmere, *Personal Reminiscences*, p119; also see Gleig's comment, *Reminiscences*, p. 322 that Wellington felt obliged to the public to attend society balls. This duty was also endured by Peel (Add. Mss. 40378, f293) and Liverpool (Add. Mss. 38275, f34)

Caledonian asylum which the duke of York was to attend.<sup>134</sup> In 1825 the proprietors of the royal gardens at Vauxhall invited Wellington to attend a celebration of Waterloo. Inducements such as a private carriage, entrance and withdrawing room ‘exclusively appropriated to the Duke & Duchess of Wellington & their distinguished guests, free from any entrance or interruption from the other visitors to the gardens’ met with the rebuke: ‘I cannot consent to make myself an item at Vauxhall’.<sup>135</sup>

Wellington was a celebrity in demand and could not attend every event he was invited to. A typical reply to these requests was: ‘The Duke...begs to inform Mr [...] that having already engaged himself to attend many publick dinners in this session he is anxious to avoid to engage himself in any more’.<sup>136</sup> He must have received many more requests of this nature that have not survived.

The second group of letters are requests for Wellington to become either a patron, steward or subscriber. The patron is the figurehead of a society or charity and as such has to be a suitably prestigious person. He was of course not alone in receiving this type of request. Members of the royal family and of the aristocracy were obvious favourites. For example, Lord Sidmouth was asked to become a vice president of the Royal Universal Dispensary for Children.<sup>137</sup> Two of these requests concern the duke’s name. In Stockport the Wellington Birthday society, consisting of ‘near a hundred members of the most respectable gentlemen’ was formed to honour the duke’s birthday each anniversary of Waterloo. There were annual and quarterly meetings that celebrated ‘true loyalty and attachment to the throne’ while ‘cherishing the Glories of our country’. What better than to have ‘the first Hero of the world at our head’, and the writer provided credentials and connections (including Sidmouth) to back their application. But Wellington declined the offer because

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<sup>134</sup> WP 1/665/4, 3 April 1821; 1/696/6, 9 January 1822

<sup>135</sup> WP 1/820/7, 10 June 1825

<sup>136</sup> WP 1/621/10, 24 March 1819, reply to Thomas Thompson

<sup>137</sup> HO 44/7/344, April 1821. See 44/7/113-6, February 1821 for one of the many requests for royal patronage. Peel was also asked to become a vice president of a society, BL Add. Mss. 40380, f200, 22 July 1825

‘the subject of their institution is to celebrate the anniversary of battles in which the Duke has had too much concern’.<sup>138</sup>

However, four years later Wellington received a letter from the Stockport Wellington club stating that ‘under your illustrious name are now enrolled upwards of five hundred loyal and patriotic members’. Enclosed in this letter is a resolution announcing the annual dinner of the club, at the top of which is Wellington’s coat of arms. It also contains the name of the writer of the letter written in 1819 (John Lloyd). It seems likely then that the society changed its name while continuing to use Wellington’s with or without his permission. The former is probably the case as Wellington replied to the second letter in a favourable manner: ‘The Duke is much obliged to him [the secretary] for the information which the letter contains & he wished an increase of prosperity to the gentlemen of Stockport’.<sup>139</sup>

The second letter to concern Wellington’s name deals with the town in Somerset where his title comes from. The newly formed Wellington Missionary Society for Africa and the East existed ‘to assist in carrying the blessings of our holy religion to the idolatrous nations of the earth’. The duke’s name as patron would help them achieve their aim.<sup>140</sup>

Wellington was also asked to patronise the Waterloo Union, a friendly society formed in London in 1815 to provide sickness and unemployment insurance. The writer observed that similar institutions benefited greatly ‘from their being patronised by persons of distinction, and thereby inducing numbers of citizens & others to join them to the great advantage & strengthening of the funds’. The society therefore requested the ‘sanction of your name as patron to so loyal an institution’. The name of the patron was thus considered very important indeed. But, as Wellington recognised, for a ‘distinguished personage’ to put their name to a society some connection, or interest, must exist:

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<sup>138</sup> WP 1/625/8, 27 May 1819

<sup>139</sup> WP 1/764/11, 12 June 1823. The Stockport Wellington Club was one of the ultra-Tory protestant associations, such as the Pitt Clubs, that were particularly active in 1828-9. See J. J. Sack, ‘The Memory of Burke and the Memory of Pitt: English Conservatism Confronts its Past, 1806-1829’, *Historical Journal*, 30 (1987)

<sup>140</sup> WP 1/633/16, 27 October 1819, Robert Jarratt, Wellington, Somerset

The Duke can be of no use to this benefit society; & he does not see what connection can exist between them & him excepting that he commanded the army which won a battle in the neighbourhood of Waterloo; & that their society has thought proper to call themselves the Waterloo Union.<sup>141</sup>

Wellington also declined a request from Ralph Watson that he patronise a government insurance association with this reply:

The Duke has long determined that he would belong to no association whatever, and in fact he belongs to but one, that for constructing a tunnel under the Thames, and this principally for the purpose of promoting specifick object of great public utility.<sup>142</sup>

However he was patron of the East London Pension Society, although he could not attend their anniversary dinner due to commitments at parliament.<sup>143</sup>

Wellington was also approached (by the MP for Hampshire John Fleming) to become the patron of the proposed Hampshire benefit society in 1824, one of the County societies that were run by honorary members out of a paternal interest for the working man. Wellington's reply, which concerned his liability for potential losses, provides a glimpse of how he perceived these institutions:

The great object of us all ought to be to endeavour to prevail upon the lower classes to consider a little of their own affairs and situation, and to provide in some degree for the future, and that the exertion to make such provision ought to be that of the individual himself, and not that of his society, his fellow traders and above all his parish...<sup>144</sup>

This is a classic exposition of the doctrine of self-help. Paternalism dictated that the upper class should assist (as did the desirability of keeping the workers off the parish rates) but ultimately it was for the working class themselves to improve their position. Wellington

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<sup>141</sup> WP 1/712/17, 28 June 1822, reply to William Wolff. Emphasis in original.

<sup>142</sup> WP 1/882/10, 10 February 1827

<sup>143</sup> WP 1/1146/12, 19 October 1830

<sup>144</sup> WP 1/799/9, 23 August 1824

donated £100 (the same amount was donated by Lord Palmerston) and offered a security of £2,000 that was not required.<sup>145</sup>

As Prime Minister, Wellington was even more desirable as a patron, not only because of the added prestige but also due to his potential usefulness. In March 1829 William Brooks wrote from London with a plan to form a society that intended to solve the problems in Ireland by establishing peasant communities. He wanted Wellington to become patron not because he was 'the King's chief minister' nor even due to his membership of the House of Lords, but merely 'as a member of the family of man'. However, this particular family member was also to be the breadwinner, for the society wished the government (through Wellington) to make them a grant of land. Wellington declined.<sup>146</sup> The duke's fondness for the arts, however, resulted in him accepting the position of patron of The Society of Art in Birmingham. This was despite the duke's reservations that because he resided nowhere near Birmingham he did not see what use he could be to the society.<sup>147</sup> The usefulness of his name, however, did not depend on geographical proximity.

Wellington received requests that he act as a steward at various functions. These included a musical festival to raise funds to rebuild Westminster hospital and the annual dinner of the Hampshire Society for the Education of Infant Poor in the Principles of the Established Church.<sup>148</sup> He was too busy to attend these events.

The duke was also approached for his money. Subscriptions were collected for a wide variety of activities, from the sale of books to the erection of public works.<sup>149</sup> Primarily concerned with tapping the funds of the middle class, and thereby allowing them to exert an influence in the community far greater than their individual incomes, the involvement of the rich and famous was also valuable. Their names on the subscription list were often more important than the money given. This was because their names, prestige and respectability encouraged others to subscribe. Benefactors would gain status by being associated with

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<sup>145</sup> WP 1/798/13, 25 August 1824

<sup>146</sup> WP 1/1001/12, 3 March 1829

<sup>147</sup> WP 1/1011/26, 21 April 1829

<sup>148</sup> WP 1/672/13, 16 July 1821; 1/647/4, 1 June 1820

<sup>149</sup> McKendrick, *Consumer Society*, pp. 224-228

prominent members of society. All could be seen to be contributing (however small) to the public or civic good when the subscription list was published and the progress of the campaign could be followed as the list was updated. In the smaller provincial towns local notables fulfilled this function, but in the capital or for national campaigns, far bigger figures were needed. Peel's name was requested to 'open the subscription' to a picture gallery, which he acceded to. He was also asked to subscribe to monuments to James Watt and Sir Thomas Picton (Wellington's donation of £50 was the second largest on the list).<sup>150</sup> In March 1820 as a result of a 'General meeting of the merchants and others, concerned in the trade with the Netherlands' Wellington was approached for a donation 'for the relief of the sufferers by the inundation's in the Netherlands'. The Prince of Waterloo (how the letter was addressed) sent £20, which the list of subscriptions shows was quite generous.<sup>151</sup> Wellington also subscribed to a monument for Shakespeare and gave £50 to the Mendicity society.<sup>152</sup> He gave £5 5s. to Bath penitentiary in 1823, 1824 and 1825; £105 to the Royal Academy of Music (plus £10 10s. for the duchess and £5 5s. annually) and £100 to the Travellers club.<sup>153</sup> Such generosity does not appear to have been uncommon, although he could be very touchy about the subject.<sup>154</sup> He also had to be vigilant.<sup>155</sup> Michael Melville wrote in February 1831 to get the outstanding balance of £110 (including £30 interest) of the duke's subscription to the national monument for Scotland. Wellington asked him to call the next day, and a day after that Melville wrote again explaining his error and justifying the

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<sup>150</sup> BL Add. Mss. 40372, f146-9, 18 & 25 January 1825; 40374, f95, 18 February 1825; 40377, f215, 29 April 1825

<sup>151</sup> WP 1/641/2, 1 March 1820

<sup>152</sup> WP 1/672/11, 12 July 1821; 1/705/1, 1 April 1822

<sup>153</sup> Bath Penitentiary; Royal Academy of Music; WP 1/921/2, 1 March 1828

<sup>154</sup> See Longford, Wellington, p. 75

<sup>155</sup> There is (anecdotal) evidence that Wellington was the victim of fraudsters who pretended to be wives of army officers. As Wellington wrote to Lady Salisbury in 1852, 'I attribute the great success of these begging letters ... to the meddling of the Mendicity Society, the publication of the stories about my being imposed upon, and their prosecution of some of the impostors! People must think that I'm very ready to give!' Quoted in M. Wellesley, *Wellington in Civil Life. Through the eyes of those of knew him* (1939)

interest charge.<sup>156</sup> When James Rawlinson, as treasurer of the Middlesex hospital, asked Wellington, as a former vice-president, to become a subscriber, the duke penned a note to his secretary asking him to confirm if he was already giving money. He also wanted to see a list of subscribers and the accounts.<sup>157</sup> This case shows two things. Firstly the duke's watchfulness in donating money, even to an institution that he knew quite well, and secondly, that Wellington had to confirm who he gave money to, probably due to the large number of undertakings he supported.<sup>158</sup>

An affair in November 1827 shows the importance with which Wellington regarded his name. The duke received a prospectus from N. W. Cundy advertising the proposed Grand Imperial Ship Canal from London to Portsmouth.<sup>159</sup> The problem was that Wellington's name had already been included as president. He responded with this sarcastic and scathing reply:

I send you the enclosed paper as I see your name advertized as secretary, altho it is just possible that there may be as little authority for the advertizement of your name as secretary as there is for mine as president for the time being. I beg leave to protest against such use of my name and against my being supposed in any manner connected with the transaction...<sup>160</sup>

Cundy informed Wellington that a copy of the prospectus had been sent to Apsley House five weeks previously and that acceptance had been assumed. But his name would be withdrawn. However, he did not comply with Wellington's wish for this to be 'ratified by you to the public',<sup>161</sup> by which he meant a public apology. As a result Wellington directed

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<sup>156</sup> WP 1/1175/4, 3 February; 1145/11, 5 February 1831

<sup>157</sup> WP 1/1025/16, 13 June 1829

<sup>158</sup> Stocqueler, Wellington, vol. II p. 298, states that Wellington 'gave freely - but his right hand knew not the actions of the left'. However, he also comments that Wellington abhorred ostentatious benevolence, but as the above has shown, his charity was very public. That was its usefulness.

<sup>159</sup> WP 1/901/5, 5 November 1827

<sup>160</sup> WP 1/902/1, 2 November 1827

<sup>161</sup> WP 1/902/3, 8 November 1827

that a statement be published in the *Courier*, *Standard*, *Morning Post* and *The Times* refuting any association between himself and the proposed canal. This made it very clear that they had used Wellington's name without his knowledge.<sup>162</sup>

The proprietors had taken a great liberty with a famous name by associating Wellington with a scheme that was at best ambitious, and at worse totally impracticable. It had also happened before. In September 1825 the Leitrim and Slicbhan Erin Mining Association printed a prospectus with Wellington's name on it as honorary president. No permission had been given. Perhaps the only thing that prevented them having to publish an apology was that the prospectus had not been circulated. Wellington still insisted that all the people associated with the mining company be informed of his displeasure.<sup>163</sup>

## Inventors and Engineers

The greatest invention of the nineteenth century was the invention of the method of invention.<sup>164</sup>

The anecdotes about Wellington's attitude to the 'race' of inventors are many and well known. One, from March 1830, is typical:

There are thousands of them at present in England, as well as I believe elsewhere; the offspring of the march of intellect. Their object is money; which, please God, they shall not get from the publick treasury.<sup>165</sup>

It has been customary to ignore this correspondence that Wellington received. If used, it is usually to illuminate the duke's characteristics by citing an amusing reply. But the business of invention was a serious one. Economic historians have long acknowledged the role

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<sup>162</sup> WP 1/901/7, 10 November 1827

<sup>163</sup> WP 1/827/32, 29 September 1825, John Beare, writing from London

<sup>164</sup> A. N. Whitehead, quoted in I. Inkster, *Science and Technology in History. An Approach to Industrial Development* (1991) p. 11

<sup>165</sup> Quoted in Longford, Wellington, p. 205



played by inventions in the industrial revolution. For example, Nick Crafts 'views 'inventive activity', 'better machines' and 'improvements' in organisation as the keys to the growth of the British economy in the later eighteenth century.'<sup>166</sup> There was a culture of inventiveness. The success of the well-known symbols of the industrial revolution - spinning machines, steam engines, Tarmacadam roads - encouraged ordinary people to think of ways of improving society. In the words of H C Beales, 'new inventions were, so to speak, in the air, the environment was favourable to industrial progress'.<sup>167</sup> As Wellington recognised, the march of intellect was responsible.

There was of course a commercial angle. A successful invention could be very profitable. Not necessarily as a result of government money, but by making the costs of production lower or by improving the quality of a product. The people who wrote to Wellington, however, like many already discussed, were also trying to get the duke's support. They were seeking the use of his name and prestige as an endorsement for a new product and this was not dependent on his cabinet rank. They wrote to him before he became Prime Minister. This exploitation was successful in at least one instance.

These letters confirm Donald McCloskey's statement that 'ordinary inventiveness was widespread in the British economy 1780-1860'.<sup>168</sup> Some of these writers were cranks with madcap schemes, but some were bona fide engineers and inventors. Whatever the merits of the schemes suggested, this correspondence was the product of fertile and active minds.

In 1820 and 1821 Marc Brunel sent Wellington letters and drawings explaining his theory of bridge design, and in 1830 he sent the duke a print of the suspension bridge to be built across the Avon at Clifton. Brunel believed that Wellington possessed a good 'knowledge of these subjects'.<sup>169</sup> The duke was also informed about McAdam's system of road making. His son, James McAdam, wanted a commission to build roads for the

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<sup>166</sup> Quoted in Inkster, *Science and Technology*, p. 66

<sup>167</sup> Inkster, *Science and Technology*, p. 80

<sup>168</sup> Inkster, *Science and Technology*, p. 66

<sup>169</sup> WP 1/637/2, 6 January; 645/14, 31 May 1820; 679/8, 13 September 1821; 1187/11, 4 June 1831

ordnance.<sup>170</sup> Wellington, of course, received many military inventions. He referred two correspondents who suggested improvements in the manufacture of gunpowder, to the Master General of the Ordnance. W D Holmes, who invented a new piece of ordnance, was similarly advised, whereas the duke merely congratulated John Norton on his invention of a rifle percussion shell.<sup>171</sup> A steam-powered cannon was also suggested to the duke.<sup>172</sup> Palmerston, too, received details of an invention for a new mortar from Frederick Barry a civil engineer.<sup>173</sup>

The construction of a new London bridge, widely commented on in the press, prompted people to write. One writer was concerned about flooding when the barrier protecting the construction was removed. It was believed that the foundations of Waterloo Bridge were decaying, and to guard against that happening in future Peter Jeffrey proposed an iron bridge over the Thames. One writer, who had worked on Apsley House, suggested that the new bridge should have foundations of granite stone mixed with mineral fisible cement. He also recommended it for the duke of York's monument. Wellington replied to Jeffrey that Waterloo Bridge was private property 'and the duke has nothing to say to it'.<sup>174</sup>

A couple of writers were concerned with the consequences of fire. William Lawrence of Suffolk had invented a machine for rescuing people from burning buildings, but he had competition. Capt. G W Manby, who had also invented a harpoon for whaling, wrote to the Home Office with a similar invention. If all else failed, William Kent of Cornwall offered to insure the duke's property against fire.<sup>175</sup>

Other correspondents were preoccupied with the problems of water travel. One discovered a variation in the compass 'arising from an hitherto unknown motion in the earth

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<sup>170</sup> WP 1/682/10, 18 October 1821. In 1825 Peel received details of a new plan for road making. BL Add. Mss. 40379, f379

<sup>171</sup> WP 1/1033/24, 24 July 1829; 1027/8, June 1829; 1182/3, 18 April 1831; 1181/13, 8 April 1831

<sup>172</sup> WP 1/973/3, 27 December 1828, James Zinch, Middlesex

<sup>173</sup> Palmerston papers ND/E/16, 18, April 1855

<sup>174</sup> WP 1/1032/11, 17 July 1829; 1027/20, 27 June 1829; 1037/10, 4 August; 1039/15, 20 August 1829, *The Times* 6, 17 July 1829

<sup>175</sup> WP 1/1025/28, 16 June 1829; HO 44/7/196, March 1821; 44/19/203, February 1830; WP 1/1230/27, 17 August 1832

to the east'. Wellington advised him to write to the Admiralty. William Lester wrote to Sidmouth in May 1821 with an invention for determining latitude and longitude on sea or land. Whereas Charles Broderip, a marine engineer, corresponded extensively with Palmerston between 3 October 1820 and 3 October 1823 on steam boats.<sup>176</sup>

Travel on land by steam was a favourite topic. Maxwell Dick wrote Wellington on at least two occasions, and sent a pamphlet, on his suspension or elevated railway. He had also corresponded with the Home Office. Dick hoped that the duke would be able to see his model before it was taken down.<sup>177</sup> Wellington did inspect Goldsworthy Gurney's steam carriages. Gurney, who also had the support of other gentlemen, sought Wellington's help in obtaining a charter to secure more capital for the development of his idea. The duke could not do this, but he had allowed himself to be associated with Gurney's experiments.<sup>178</sup>

Wellington's association with inventors is more complex than a simple dismissal. In one case his name was used to advertise a product. Ellesmere has recalled that Wellington 'was an early purchaser of a patent razor for safe shaving'. The inventor was so pleased with the sale that he framed the cheque instead of cashing it. Money could be made in other ways. In *The Times*, under the account of the funeral of Countess Nelson (the wife of Lord Nelson's brother) was placed an advertisement for the 'Wellington Military Razor Strap', an ideal compliment to the 'Wellington Military Razors, made of a very superior material, which retains the edge much longer than the usual steel.'<sup>179</sup> It is speculation whether these two razors were one and the same.

Wellington also endorsed the Thames Tunnel. The story of the Thames Tunnel has been told elsewhere.<sup>180</sup> Amidst disaster, loss of life and wrangling over finance and design,

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<sup>176</sup> WP 1/814/16, 26 March 1825; HO 44/7/422, May 1821; Palmerston papers GC/BR/38-42

<sup>177</sup> WP 1/1136/4, 16 August 1830; HO 44/20/369, July 1830

<sup>178</sup> WP 1/1041/7, 31 August 1829; WCD vol. vi, pp. 45, 48, 64; He also wrote to Peel in 1826, BL Add. Mss. 40387, f294. Also see J. Herapath, *Letter to ... the duke of Wellington, on the Utility, advantages, and National Importance of Mr Gurney's Steam Carriage* (1829)

<sup>179</sup> *The Times*, 23 April 1828; Ellesmere, *Reminiscences*, p. 78. Also see Stocqueler, *Wellington*, Vol. II, p. 246: 'To the advertisements of new objects and inventions he paid particular attention'.

<sup>180</sup> For example in Rolt, *Brunel*, pp. 40-61

the tunnel, hailed as a wonder of the age, took eighteen years to complete (March 1825 to March 1843). Marc Brunel, because of his patented tunnelling shield, was involved from the start as chief engineer, although his son, Isambard Kingdom, did most of the work. However, neither played much of a part after 1835 due to illness (Marc) and other commitments (Isambard). The duke of Wellington was also involved from an early stage. This was no ordinary undertaking and Wellington became involved because he believed it to be of great public benefit. As he informed Brunel:

I subscribed to the Tunnel because I wished to encourage in this country the performance of an enterprise which appeared to me so extraordinary and the construction of a work the example of which was calculated to be so advantageous to this as well as to other countries, besides being very useful in the spot in which it is placed.<sup>181</sup>

This was written in reply to a letter from Brunel who was campaigning against a change of design, and engineer, after another set back. This set back ensured that no work was done on the tunnel between 1828 and 1835. During this period Wellington was kept informed of all the machinations surrounding finance (it was only completed with a government loan) and design.<sup>182</sup> As well as receiving resolutions from the Thames Tunnel Committee and letters from bankers, Marc Brunel kept the duke informed of his own position and of his plans for the tunnel. Members of the public also became involved. Francis Fortune sent the duke maps and plans of his proposal to finish the tunnel. He was driven to do so after reading in a newspaper how much the tunnel would cost to complete, and assured the duke that his plan was much cheaper.<sup>183</sup> The desire to save the Government money also induced Sarah Barbar to write to Wellington. She believed a ferry steam bridge, similar to the one that operated between New York and the Jersey shore (as seen in an edition of the *Monthly Magazine*), would be just as good as a tunnel, and considerably cheaper.<sup>184</sup> Wilbraham Liardet from Bexhill in Sussex also believed the tunnel could be completed by a bridge over the

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<sup>181</sup> WP 1/1039/12, 19 August 1829

<sup>182</sup> From 1828 to 1831 there are 22 letters surviving dealing with various aspects of the Thames Tunnel

<sup>183</sup> WP 1/1003/15, 16 March 1829

<sup>184</sup> WP 1/1038/9, 11 August 1829

remainder of the river.<sup>185</sup> Obviously inspired by the Thames Tunnel, Peter Mackenzie thought a railway tunnel under the Mersey would be a good idea. He enclosed a letter from the *Morning Advertiser* describing the rejection of his scheme.<sup>186</sup> None of these suggestions were adopted and the tunnel was finished to Brunel's specifications. Originally intended for foot passengers, it was later adapted for railway use and formed part of the London Underground.<sup>187</sup>

## Medical Advice

Wherever money was to be made out of medicine, the opportunity was seized.<sup>188</sup>

Many people were interested and concerned by Wellington's afflictions. Such letters (and newspaper stories) can be used as a measure of the duke's popularity, although private motives did exist. The man or woman who could stand up and proclaim 'I cured the duke' would be very noteworthy indeed. And while none of them appear commercial, in that the writers are not selling remedies, if Wellington was aided by any of their suggestions, this could certainly be used in later marketing the product. Georgian and Victorian newspapers were filled with 'advertisements parading the services of itinerant dentists, oculists, electrifiers, mesmerists and the like; or promoting a welter of nostrums'. Cobbett published medical advice, and people wrote to the *Gentleman's Magazine* with quack treatments. There was a vibrant consumer market for such remedies.<sup>189</sup> People dispensed advice to one

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<sup>185</sup> WP 1/1056/30, 15 November 1829

<sup>186</sup> WP 1/1150/25, 11 November 1830

<sup>187</sup> Rolt, Brunel, p. 405

<sup>188</sup> D. Porter & R. Porter, *Patients Progress. Doctors and Doctoring in Eighteenth century England* (Cambridge, 1984) p. 24

<sup>189</sup> Porter & Porter, *Patients Progress*, pp. 26, 96-97; R. Cooter (ed.), *Studies in the History of Alternative Medicine* (1988) pp. 8-12

another. Wellington suggested remedies to his friends, and they returned the compliment.<sup>190</sup> And so did complete strangers.

On 8 December 1838 Wellington wrote to William Holmes, the Tory whip, to request the editor of the *Morning Post* not to print articles stating that the duke was ill unless he was positive this was the case. Despite feeling fine, the duke had received 300 letters on his health since an article appeared a week previously. While this is probably an exaggeration, it does show how burdened Wellington was with this kind of letter.<sup>191</sup>

There are six letters dealing with Wellington's health, specifically his ear complaint, written between September 1824 and February 1825. Wellington was in fact deaf in one ear.<sup>192</sup> A spate of newspaper stories regarding his ear led to a flurry of letters offering treatments. Thomas Mulock from Newcastle suggested an incision at the back of the neck 'slightly touched with caustic'.<sup>193</sup> One writer offered M. La. Beaume's (medical surgeon and electrician) remedy of a warm air bath.<sup>194</sup> A woman believing Wellington to have cancer of the ear implored him to go to America for treatment.<sup>195</sup> But the prize for the most unusual remedy goes to T. I. Ireland, who suggested placing a large warm roasted red onion next to the infliction.<sup>196</sup> The duke was still receiving suggested cures for deafness in 1830.<sup>197</sup> Wellington replied to two of these letters. He assured Mrs Beresford that he did not have cancer of the ear, and he replied to Thomas Mulock 'in consequence of the interest which you were pleased to express about me'. However, Wellington was 'so tired of being the subject of the comments of the newspapers of the day that I request you will keep this

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<sup>190</sup> See, Wellington and his Friends p. 41; Hibbert, Wellington, p. 367; Longford, Wellington, pp. 108-9; WP MS 69/4/19, 20, 22, 23

<sup>191</sup> WP MS 272/1, 3, 8 December, 22 December 1838. The index volume for the whole year lists 1500 letters. The letters Wellington referred to could have been destroyed before the index was compiled.

<sup>192</sup> Longford, Wellington, pp. 100-101

<sup>193</sup> WP 1/800/23, 28 September 1824

<sup>194</sup> WP 1/802/2/2, 24 November 1824, Edward Ollitt from London

<sup>195</sup> WP 1/812/11, 15 February 1825, Mrs Beresford, Lewes

<sup>196</sup> WP 1/805/24, 27 November 1824. For a list of quack remedies see, M. Chamberlain, *Old Wives' Tales. Their History, Remedies and Spells* (1981)

<sup>197</sup> WP 1/1088/6, January 1830

communication to yourself'.<sup>198</sup> These letters show that Wellington's health was a matter of public record.

Other prominent persons also received health advice. Many people in 1829 and 1830 wrote to Wellington concerned about the King's health. In 1788 George III received masses of letters suggesting cures for madness.<sup>199</sup> Remedies suggested to Wellington included an elixir which had never failed before; cold water and coarse brown soap rubbed in the eyes; and a blood transfusion.<sup>200</sup> Writers thought the King was suffering from dropsy or asthma, and recommended doctors. One, a philosophical chemist and renovating nurse, and 'no ordinary man', recommended himself. Wellington thought him mad. The standard reply to these letters stated that the duke was not the King's physician, and could not recommend treatments or people about which he knew nothing.<sup>201</sup> It is clear from the comments in these letters that newspaper stories about the King's health had encouraged people to write to Wellington as the King's minister.

Wellington also received general medical suggestions. The duke was sent pamphlets on gout, dissection, fumigation, homeopathy, rabies, cholera, and dentistry amongst many others. Cures for cholera and rabies feature prominently in both the Home Office and Wellington papers. John Haslewood of Maidstone wrote to Wellington about a woman in Birley who had a cure for rabies. She refused to make the recipe public but sold medicines for a guinea. Haslewood believed the recipe should be available for all, and suggested an annuity for life for the woman to encourage her to divulge the ingredients. She had already turned down £500. Wellington informed Haslewood that he could be of no assistance in this matter. Mr Forster was one of many writers who suggested a treatment for cholera. The

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<sup>198</sup> WP 1/803/1, 28 September 1824

<sup>199</sup> A. Wear (ed.), *Medicine in Society* (Cambridge, 1992) p. 101

<sup>200</sup> WP 1/1005/13, 28 March 1829, Daniel MacQueen, Liverpool; 1046/22, 26 September 1829, J. Carmichael, Stirling; 1120/8, 17 June 1830, John Fesenmeyer, London

<sup>201</sup> WP 1/1112/11, 3 May 1830, Mr Farrar, London; 1120/16, 19 June 1830, W. Harwood; 1164/2, n.d., Sam Rogers; 1159/66, 17 June 1830; 1159/67, 24 June 1830; 1159/68, 24 June 1830, T. W. Andrews

patient should be wrapped in dough and placed in a large oven and ‘bake him till the bread be risen according to the strength of the patient’.<sup>202</sup> It is unlikely that this was ever tried.

These may well have been quack remedies but quack remedies were extremely common during this period. As a prominent individual, Wellington’s health was bound to interest the general public, but as Prime Minister he was also the focus for public health concerns. Whatever the ailment or disease, an endorsement from the duke would undoubtedly work wonders for sales.

## Miscellany

People attempted to use Wellington’s name in smaller, individual ways and wrote to him with a variety of requests. The most common concerned their correspondence. One writer wanted a return of his papers so that he could use them to aid his present distress.<sup>203</sup> Marcus Crosbie requested a copy of a letter written in March 1813. This most ‘desirous a document’ concerned the writers’ plan to transmit intelligence from France by printing it in the newspapers. Wellington believed the plan to be flawed as the French newspapers operated under severe restrictions, and he declined to have his papers searched so that a copy could be found, especially as it appeared that the writer already had one.<sup>204</sup> William Cobbett was not unique in wanting Wellington to forward his letters on to some one else.<sup>205</sup> While other correspondents wanted to know what had happened to their previous letters or manuscripts.<sup>206</sup>

A personal interview with the duke was highly desired. P. M. Eastwick from Bracknell had received ‘favourable sentiments’ from Wellington in ‘former times’ and

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<sup>202</sup> WP 1/1176/5, 18 February 1831; 1208/8, n.d.

<sup>203</sup> WP 1/631/7, 7 September 1819, J. Hamilton

<sup>204</sup> WP 1/636/3, 24 December 1819

<sup>205</sup> WP 1/949/4, 26 August 1828. This was a very common request. See 1115/10, 23 May 1830, Robert Croker, Waterford

<sup>206</sup> WP 1/988/8, 6 January 1829, John Rogers, Dublin; 1178/11, 10 March 1831, Thomas Hoseason, London; 1179/5, 21 March 1831, Jason Bailey



requested a personal audience to discuss these old times.<sup>207</sup> Thomas MacGrath, writing from London, was 'very desirous of being admitted to the honour of a personal interview' to discuss 'two important propositions', one of which concerned the government the other a branch of Wellington's family, the Long-Wellesleys. Further details were not forthcoming. Wellington therefore referred MacGrath to Mr Wellesley and the Home Secretary. It was no business of his.<sup>208</sup>

George Gilchrist made a very different type of request. He desired 'a specimen of your Grace's handwriting', although the reason is not mentioned in the letter acknowledging Wellington's refusal (first letter wanting). Wellington had been very suspicious of the request. Although Gilchrist believed Wellington's precaution 'characteristic of a soldier' he assured the duke that 'Newcastle is not very celebrated for characters against whom your Grace is so much guarded'.<sup>209</sup> A secretary wrote Wellington's refusal.

Francis Fraser from Aberdeen made an even more intimate request. Due to his 'high admiration' of Wellington he wished to have his son baptised with the 'respected name of Arthur Wellesley', with the duke standing godfather by proxy. Despite Fraser's insistence that he possessed no private motives, only a desire to celebrate a famous name, Wellington had to decline. Firstly, since there were 'so many officers and soldiers who have claims upon me', and secondly because it would have created an obligation. 'As it is really out of my power to undertake to do anything for him at any time', the request was refused.<sup>210</sup>

Wellington's name had a variety of uses. P Aniching wrote to the duke concerning Charles Singleton, who had worked in the Ordnance department, had been tried for embezzlement and acquitted. Aniching was extremely displeased with Singleton because he had twice run off with his wife. Singleton claimed to be Wellington's nephew. He also

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<sup>207</sup> WP 1/632/11, 7 October 1819

<sup>208</sup> WP 1/639/13, 25 February 1820. See 1159/31, 8 February 1830; 1195/5, 6 September 1831 for other interview requests.

<sup>209</sup> WP 1/775/1, 2 November 1823

<sup>210</sup> WP 1/620/21, 16 March 1821. Wellington's name, along with other notable persons, also appeared on the petition accompanying the People's Charter of 1848. R. D. Altick, *Punch. The Lively Youth of an British Institution 1841-1851* (Ohio, 1997) p. 297 says 19 times; Longford, Wellington, p. 380, states 17.

claimed to possess a letter from the duke testifying to his innocence. Wellington assured Aniching that neither of these assertions was true.<sup>211</sup> Daniel Ramsay of Edinburgh had gone to see a portrait of the King at a gallery, but fearing that he might not look respectable enough, he had taken a letter from Wellington with him to show to the porter. It was not needed.<sup>212</sup> Ramsay obviously felt very happy with his letter from Wellington, and believed it could be useful to him. But if the door to respectability was opened by a letter from the duke of Wellington, then a large number of people held the key.

## Summary

People wrote to Wellington on any issue which concerned them, whether it was Cleopatra's needle or the proposed route of the new Holyhead road.<sup>213</sup> He also received letters from the mentally deranged.<sup>214</sup> But most correspondents fit into a context. The correspondents discussed above wrote to Wellington in the hope of gaining something from their letters. Their primary motivation was to exploit the duke of Wellington's name and prestige for personal, commercial or benevolent reasons. The duke was burdened with trivial and odd requests, but most of the correspondence had a definite purpose.

Subscription lists, sample gifts as advertisements and dedication requests attempted to exploit Wellington's name for commercial gain. The duke was a very good endorsement. These letters were also about obtaining status as someone worthy of the duke's notice. Status was also conferred by being associated with benevolent activities, and with these requests Wellington often allowed himself to be used. This is not to say that the duke was

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<sup>211</sup> WP 1/954/16, 22 September 1828; 958/34, 23 September 1828

<sup>212</sup> WP 1/1213/9, 7 January 1832

<sup>213</sup> WP 1/1086/12, 19 January 1830, William Beck, London; 1159/53, April 1830, Anonymous

<sup>214</sup> WP 1/1172/1-61. Joseph Mould wrote 61 times between July 1829 and December 1832, describing the unfortunate state he was in as a result of his ability to see visions. He requested the duke's help in obtaining the King's protection - 'can it be supposed my Lord, that God would make me a spectator of the events I have detailed, merely that their results should affect my worldly peace and comfort' 1172/48, 16 August 1831

unaware of what was going on, or that he underestimated the importance of his name. If anything he was very protective of his name if used improperly. In general Wellington allowed his name to be used for charitable institutions that reflected his own benevolent interests.

This correspondence shows the relationship between a section of the people and a member of the ruling elite. This was an unequal relationship and it is evident from the above discussion that the duke of Wellington remained in control of his name, influence and prestige. But this control was limited, as his name, actions and even health were in the public domain. It is clear from the correspondence that many people believed themselves to be acquainted with Wellington although they had never met him. There are frequent references in the correspondence to the duke's character: to his 'goodness', his 'known condescension and benevolence'. The duke was also 'known' to assist those 'who fought and bled in the service of their country'; he was the soldier's friend.<sup>215</sup> Of course these expressions can be attributed to mere flattery to achieve a beneficial result from a communication. But it must be remembered that for many years Wellington had been in the public eye. Through the newspapers people became acquainted with the duke. The demand for stories about him sold more copy. This process ensured that Wellington was always in the news. And because of this people wrote to him.

Wellington often grew irritated with newspaper reports about himself and frequently advised correspondents not to believe what they read, and yet a large number of people were induced to put pen to paper for that very reason. For example, Mrs Beresford became aware of the duke's ill-health through 'the Lewes paper of the 9<sup>th</sup> instant' and Nathaniel Forth, after reading that Wellington was to entertain the duke of Orleans, wrote soliciting the Frenchman's aid in his claim against the Treasury.<sup>216</sup> There are many other examples of this relationship between the press and the act of letter writing.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> For examples of these sentiments see WP 1/613/3, 1 January 1819, James Reily, Cavan, Ireland; 1/722/13, 8 September 1822, W. Hamilton, Rutland; 1/756/6, 8 February 1823, Richard Roche, London

<sup>216</sup> WP 1/812/11, 15 February 1825; 1/1019/23, 23 May 1829

<sup>217</sup> This will be considered in full later in the study

Wellington was a public figure who enjoyed varying degrees of popularity throughout his life, and this can be shown by his correspondence and by newspaper interest in him. The type of correspondence considered above indicates that this popularity was open to exploitation, and that a significant number of people were sufficiently motivated to attempt this.

## Celebration and Exploitation

When the duke of Wellington died at Walmer castle on 14 September 1852 it was the military victor and saviour of Europe that was mourned, not the Tory Prime Minister and leader of the Lords. His 'direct political involvement rather tended to be written off as something of an aberration' and in the literature of the streets, it was Wellington the popular hero that people wanted to read about, not Wellington the anti reformer.<sup>218</sup>

This development had begun during the 1830s. According to Longford, Wellington's popularity with the people was again evident as early as 1833, although he still had an active part in politics to play with Peel's hundred days during 1834-35.<sup>219</sup> As the duke was perceived to take a less active role in parliamentary politics, the memories of 1829-32 faded while the celebration of Waterloo continued. Because Wellington lived well into old age, even before his death he became an institution, a living monument, 'a sort of consecrated object', and the subject of veneration and respect.<sup>220</sup> Wellington ended his public life as it had begun, as a soldier.

Early biographers bemoaned Wellington's 'descent' into party politics, and most concentrated on the duke's military achievements. As early as 1845, George Francis in the introduction to his *Maxims and Opinions of Field Marshall his Grace the duke of Wellington* (a cut and paste job from contemporary sources), justified yet another work on the great man by stating that most were 'almost exclusively occupied with the military exploits of the duke ... while his political career, which may be said to have constituted a

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<sup>218</sup> I. Pears, 'The Gentleman and the Hero: Wellington and Napoleon in the Nineteenth Century', R. Porter, (ed.), *Myths of the English* (1992) p. 220; V. Neuburg, 'The Literature of the Streets', H. J. Dyos, & M. Wolff (eds.), *The Victorian City. Images and Realities* Vol. 1 (1973) p. 201

<sup>219</sup> Longford, Wellington, p. 285

<sup>220</sup> D. Read, *Peel and the Victorians* (Oxford, 1987) p. 304; Longford, Wellington, p. 314; Lemoine, Wellington, p. 6; F. C. Mather, 'Achilles or Nestor? The duke of Wellington in British Politics 1832 - 46', Gash, Wellington, has argued that Wellington remained an important figure in Conservative politics during the 1830s and 1840s, and was crucial to Peel's success by controlling the Lords. But the duke was generally perceived to be above party in this period.

second life ... has completely been neglected.' One year previously, Bonar set aside only 37 pages out of the total 407 for a discussion of Wellington's life after Waterloo. The reason was that his political achievements were still remembered, 'too near to view dispassionately'. Even in 1931, Guedalla noted that 'when Waterloo is passed, they [biographies] nearly always falter, and the story dies away in a desultory stream of anecdote'. Guedalla's heavily anecdotal account of Wellington's political career, still only takes up a third of the book.<sup>221</sup>

It is generally accepted that Wellington lost popularity with his 'incursion into politics'. Gleig, who greatly admired the duke for his military achievements, was critical of his decision to become a party politician. Even modern scholars use Wellington's martial characteristics to apologise for, or explain, his weaknesses and failings as a Prime Minister. Cooper, while discussing the first two years of Wellington's Premiership in less than a page, called the duke a terrible politician, his reasoning being that soldiers make bad politicians.<sup>222</sup>

The correspondence and newspaper reports discussed in Part One has revealed the nature of this unpopularity. The *Nottingham Journal* reported that 'Mr Jarratt, of the duke of Wellington public-house, at Sutton, in Ashfield, in this county, has taken down his sign of the noble Premier, and publicly burnt it.'<sup>223</sup> This was in March 1829, after the Catholic Relief Bill had been introduced. This kind of reaction was extremely common during the

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<sup>221</sup> G. H. Francis, *Maxims and Opinions of Field Marshall his Grace the Duke of Wellington* (1845); A. Bonar, *Life of Field Marshall the Duke of Wellington, Down to the Present Time* (Halifax, 1844); P. Guedalla, *The Duke* (1931, 1940); G. Hooper, *Wellington* (1899) concentrates exclusively on Wellington's military achievements; L. Cooper, *The Age of Wellington. The Life and Times of the Duke of Wellington 1769-1852* (1964) uses 240 pages out of 300 to discuss the period to Waterloo; W. O'Connor Morris, *Wellington, Soldier and Statesman, and the Revival of the Military Power of England* (1905) leaves the last 80 pages for Post-Waterloo. There are exceptions. Stocqueler (1852-3) wrote a two volume account, as did Longford, one for the period to Waterloo, the other after; Muriel Wellesley's hagiograph (1939), and Neville's Thompson's more balanced, though apologetic, account, exclusively deal with the period after Waterloo. Most biographies are very sympathetic to the duke (with the exception of Cooper), including the most recent, Hibbert's anecdotal, populist *Personal History*.

<sup>222</sup> Gleig, *Wellington*; Gash, *Wellington and the Premiership*; Cooper, *Age of Wellington*; Morris, *Wellington*

<sup>223</sup> *Political Register*, 21 March 1829

period 1829-32. In November 1830 'Veritas' wrote to *The Times* describing 'one of the most disgraceful scenes imagination can picture to Englishmen' - a mob surrounding and hooting at the duke. On 12 October 1831 Wellington, not for the first or last time, was burned in effigy.<sup>224</sup>

By passing Emancipation, Wellington shocked and outraged the ultra-Tories and the mass of his Protestant countrymen. Despite cutting taxes and retrenchment in government departments, his perceived unwillingness to aid people during economic slumps and his denial that distress was 'general' alienated all those who felt themselves to be suffering from Tory economic mismanagement. This alienation was completed in November 1830, when Wellington ruled out a government reform measure and cancelled the King's visit to the city. The threatening letters he received are testimony to this hostility. He then further antagonised the people by acting as a focal point for all those committed to resisting the Whig reform proposal. As the Black List and innumerable over broadsides, handbills and tracts demonstrate, Wellington's image was of a selfish aristocrat, who cared little for the wishes, needs and opinions of the people.<sup>225</sup>

This was also how his foreign policy was perceived. After discussing Wellington's opposition to parliamentary reform, John Wade, in the 1832 edition of his *Black Book*, criticised the duke for being 'the steadfast partisan of the Turk, Don Miguel, Ferdinand, and the Holy Alliance'. Both domestically and abroad, the 'confederacy' to which Wellington belonged subjugated the wishes of the people.<sup>226</sup> The threatening letters he received in November 1830 made similar accusations: 'The public will have it that you are encouraging

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<sup>224</sup> *The Times*, 8 November 1830, 12 October 1831

<sup>225</sup> The British Library has many examples of these. For example see *The Waterloo Soldier Defeated* and *Bob and Nosey's Lament at the passing of the English Reform Bill* (1832). The first starts:

My name is Arthur, I'm known quite well,  
And a pretty story I have to tell,  
Through every place, wherever I goes,  
They frown upon me and my Waterloo Nose.

<sup>226</sup> Wade, *Black Book*, pp. 583-4

& supporting that dishonest tyrant Ferdinand of Spain and the usurper Miguel'.<sup>227</sup> Wellington was perceived to be an opponent of 'enlightened' diplomacy and a friend of the absolutists. Again, these criticisms were popularised versions of debates which were occurring in parliament and the press.

As Prime Minister, cabinet member and European diplomatist, Wellington was responsible for, or the servant of, policy which was not going to be popular with everyone, especially as he was a rather austere Tory aristocrat. But this was only one side of the popular perception of him. A consistent theme running through his correspondence, and in newspaper stories about him, is the hero worship, respect and gratitude that was felt for the duke. We have already seen how people tried to exploit his celebrity for personal, charitable or commercial reasons, but this exploitation was only possible because he was praised and commemorated for his victories on the Continent. As the eulogies upon his death noted, first and foremost he was a military hero. Famous and well known people in their own right - Disraeli, John Wilson Croker, Charlotte Bronte, even George IV - tended to be in awe of the revered Field Marshall,<sup>228</sup> not to mention the numerous, faceless, ordinary people across the country who, until now, are often not taken into consideration.

The cult of Victorian hero worship has been ably elucidated by Walter Houghton. The realities of the Napoleonic wars were more of a stimulus to hero worship than the intellectual background of Homer, Virgil, Milton or Walter Scott and Lord Byron.<sup>229</sup> In Britain, Wellington and Nelson 'were not regarded simply as men who had helped achieve military and naval victories over the French, but became secular saints who symbolised national virtues'.<sup>230</sup> The loyalism as described by Colley required these great men to act as

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<sup>227</sup> WP 1/1159/138. Also see 1159/81, 87, 160 (November and December 1830). Wellington's association with Polignac has already been discussed.

<sup>228</sup> Croker called him the 'real hero', B. Pool (ed.), *The Croker Papers 1808-1857* (1967, 1st ed. 1884); Charlotte Bronte, in *Shirley* (Oxford, 1979), berates the men of Manchester for scoffing at a 'demigod', p. 728

<sup>229</sup> W. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870* (1957) p. 308

<sup>230</sup> Yarrington, *Commemoration of the Hero*, p. xiii. For an example of the type of letter Nelson received see BL Add. Mss. 34930, f14, 131



examples, and their biographies (for instance Southey's Nelson) sold very well and were used as moral inspiration. Yarrington argues that Nelson 'because of his physical frailty epitomised patriotic self-sacrifice', while Houghton states that Wellington, in no small measure due to his longevity, 'was the greatest single argument for Victorian hero worship'.<sup>231</sup> This worship expressed itself in newspaper stories, poems, novels, caricatures, commemorative pottery or Toby jugs or snuffboxes, and portraits and statues. As Donald Read comments, 'the Victorians liked to have lasting physical reminders of their heroes, large statues in public and small artefacts at home'.<sup>232</sup>

Long before his death Wellington had become a thriving industry. With the furore over the nude Achilles from the ladies of London and the massive equestrian Wellington statue which topped the arch on Hyde Park corner, contemporaries felt that the duke was 'rather over used' with regard to statues. Punch remarked that 'London is becoming a sort of livery stable, where the hero of Waterloo and his horse are being constantly put up'. Both Lemoine and Stocqueler in 1852 stated that Wellington had statues in 'every town in the slightest degree connected with him' and in many that were not.<sup>233</sup> He was a household figure, his distinctive image being reproduced countless times on all manner of goods - snuff boxes, tankards, pottery, medals and clocks. He sat for over 200 portraits, and there were thousands of popular prints and caricatures that flooded the market in times of political excitement.<sup>234</sup> All these products were designed to make money, and it is blatantly obvious

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<sup>231</sup> Yarrington, *Commemoration of the Hero*, p. 331; Houghton, *Victorian Frame of Mind*, pp. 309, 325

<sup>232</sup> Read, *Peel and Victorians*, p. 287

<sup>233</sup> Altick, *Punch*, pp. 573-7. Altick also draws one's attention to the likeness of Punch to Wellington; Lemoine, *Wellington*, p. 36; Stocqueler, *Wellington*, vol. II, p. 302

<sup>234</sup> This study is concerned with the written word, and Wellington's letters especially, therefore an analysis of caricatures is beyond its scope. In any case, it has been done elsewhere. But it is worth noting that the popular themes for caricatures were similar to those discussed above: Catholic relief, with Wellington the lobster, dressed in a rosary fighting a duel; Wellington and Peel out of work complaining of 'partial distress'; and the threatening letters sent in November 1830 warning the duke not to attend the Mayor's dinner. The influence of these caricatures can only be guessed at. For examples of caricatures of Wellington see Jupp, *Politics on eve of Reform*; Longford, *Wellington*; Hibbert, *Wellington*; V. Perceval, *The duke of Wellington. A Pictorial Survey of his Life* (1969). There is a small selection at Apsley House.

that there was a large market for celebrations of Wellington and Waterloo.<sup>235</sup> In this, Wellington was far from unique. The popularity of public events and figures had been exploited by Josiah Wedgwood in the eighteenth-century.<sup>236</sup> Royalty, politicians, stars of entertainment and war heroes (past and present) were all used to make a profit. The 'business of remembering Robert Peel', for example, is remarkably similar to that of commemorating Wellington.<sup>237</sup>

Wellington's name also belonged to the public.<sup>238</sup> We have already seen how his name was appropriated for literature, societies and charities and for endorsements such as the 'Wellington Military Razor strap'. According to Hibbert his name also adorned trees, chests, chairs, coats, hats and trousers, besides the obvious 'Wellington Boot'. All kinds of public works - streets, bridges, a railway terminus - celebrated his achievements, as did Public Houses.<sup>239</sup> The duke's celebrity, then, had a variety of guises with afforded ample opportunity for exploitation. But it is also evident that Wellington was genuinely revered. People flocked to see him at social events, or bowed to him in the streets, or purchased a plate with his likeness on it, and this kind of adulation comes across in the correspondence. It acts as a counter-balance to the perceived negatives of his political career. To many loyal writers (some of whom warned him of dangers to his person in 1830)<sup>240</sup> Wellington was a

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<sup>235</sup> See Hibbert, *Wellington*, pp. 329, 331, for a longer list of 'Wellington' products; Yarrington, *Commemoration of the Hero*, p. 40; A. Berkeley, 'Wellington's victory at Waterloo remembered in commemorative porcelain and pottery', unpublished conference paper, Southampton (1998); Stratfield Saye, Walmer Castle and Apsley House have small collections of various celebratory products. His image is still used today. For example, Franklin Mint offers a duke of Wellington penknife at £29.95. This type of exploitation has been discussed at greater length above.

<sup>236</sup> McKendrick, *Consumer Society*, p. 132: 'He exploited not only their loyalty to the crown but their patriotism, their pride in their national heroes'.

<sup>237</sup> Read, *Peel and Victorians*, pp. 287, 294 - 302, 304 - 5. The close proximity of their deaths (1850 and 1852) ensured that, as in their political careers, Peel and Wellington were compared and celebrated together - but for different reasons - by the Victorians. Peel was considered the man for peacetime, Wellington the saviour during war.

<sup>238</sup> It had after all been given to him and paid for from the public purse

<sup>239</sup> Hibbert, *Wellington*, p. 346

<sup>240</sup> WP 1/1149/22, 6 November 1830; 1150/5, 8 November 1830

military hero, whatever government policy he may have been responsible for, and because of this he inspired respect and adulation, or at least tolerance.

The police reports of 24 April 1828 show how adulation could go too far. Colonel O'Brien was suing Mr Laurie. The former had bought a piece of 'virgin gold' and gave it to Laurie to examine. While doing so he managed to damage it. The problem was that the Colonel had purchased the ore because of its remarkable likeness to the duke of Wellington. Mr Laurie 'appeared to have sliced away a Prime Minister's nose and chin with as little compunction as he would feel in lopping off the corner of a brass candlestick'. The magistrate agreed that it was 'a serious accident to destroy the nose and chin of an illustrious warrior', but compensation was limited to the price of the missing piece.<sup>241</sup>

A number of letters bear testimony to this kind of adulation. Some writers offered general praise - 'profound veneration and respect', 'gratitude, admiration and respect' - or wished Wellington comfort, happiness and a long healthy life.<sup>242</sup> Inevitably, sentiments such as these were the product of Wellington's military achievements. The various poems and books celebrating the duke's victories have already been discussed,<sup>243</sup> and Wellington received other marks of favour. For example William Folliott from Chester sent the duke a lithograph impression of a drawing, 'emblematical of the victory of Waterloo', which showed a British lion standing atop a French eagle. Wellington thanked Folliott for the lithograph, which he considered 'very creditable to the young artist who produced it'.<sup>244</sup> Most writers did not display that kind of artistic flair, and simply showed their appreciation by inserting a line of praise in their letters for the duke's 'glorious and unparalleled

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<sup>241</sup> *The Times*, 24 April 1828

<sup>242</sup> WP 1/954/21, 23 September 1828; 971/26, 15 December 1828; 938/27, 30 June 1828; 1011/4, 18 April 1829; 1099/15, 4 March 1830; 1150/19, n.d. (1830); 922/5, 12 March 1828; 1041/8, 31 August 1828

<sup>243</sup> For a typical effort see 647/16, 28 June 1820, a poem by a school boy, printed in a newspaper, which contained this verse:

'Twas Wellington, whose more than mortal name

Will stand forever on the rolls of fame:

His greatest pride was to deserve the smile

That welcom'd his return to Britain's Isle.

<sup>244</sup> WP 1/1134/38, 17 August 1830

achievements'. Wellington had the nation's gratitude for raising Britain's glory, he was the 'preserver of the European part of the universe from despotism' and his gallantry and military genius ensured that he was regarded as the 'hero of the present times, the greatest captain the world will know'.<sup>245</sup>

Some correspondents praised Wellington's 'invaluable services to your country' whether in the field or in the cabinet.<sup>246</sup> He transcended the military and civil spheres of glory. In 'peace and war' Wellington had 'guided Europe', rendered eminent services as a statesman and a soldier. 'The victor of Europe and the popular minister of the first empire in the world' possessed 'laurels that are imperishable'. As 'God's appointed instrument' the duke had the strength and vision not only to beat Napoleon, but to solve Britain's problems as well.<sup>247</sup> Some recognised the difficulty of this task, and hoped that Wellington would (eventually) become as popular a minister as he was a soldier.<sup>248</sup>

People who praised Wellington's civil successes were inevitably already supporters of the duke or beneficiaries of a measure. The best example is Catholic Relief. Due to Wellington's 'deeds of glory' (Emancipation) 'your grace stands on a pinnacle, my Lord, next to the King'. The duke had rendered 'splendid services to this nation'.<sup>249</sup> Only *his* administration could bring prosperity to the country, and Wellington *alone* possessed the strength to tackle the Irish poor law.<sup>250</sup> Some praised the Prime Minister in more general terms: 'I am addressing the mighty statesman of a mighty nation'. Wellington was the

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<sup>245</sup> Glory and gratitude were common terms of reference see, WP 1/620/10, 7 March 1819; 621/12, 25 March 1819; 632/11, 7 October 1819; 649/2, 4 July 1820; 653/1, 1 September 1820; 718/3, 6 August 1822; 1147/15, 27 October 1830; 1187/44, 24 June 1831

<sup>246</sup> WP 1/1121/5, 24 June 1830; 1017/23, 14 May 1829

<sup>247</sup> For these sentiments see WP 1/988/13, 6 January 1829; 989/18, 14 January 1829; 1025/38, 17 June 1829; 1043/24, 7 September 1829; 1088/14, 28 January 1830; 1135/29, 24 August 1830; 1142/4, 23 September 1830; 1179/4, 20 March 1831

<sup>248</sup> WP 1/1066/24, 10 May 1829; 992/19, 31 January 1829

<sup>249</sup> WP 1/973/2, 27 December 1828; 972/11, 22 December 1828; 1018/13, 17 May 1829; 1153/20, 27 November 1830; 1004/13, 21 March 1829

<sup>250</sup> WP 1/1102/18, 20 March 1830; 1102/25, 20 March 1830; 1016/24, 8 May 1829; 1018/14, 17 May 1829; 1044/24, 21 September 1829; 1179/28, 28 March 1831

distinguished leader of a ‘popular and powerful administration’, and one writer prayed to God to keep the duke at the head of affairs. To another correspondent he was the ‘ruler of this great empire’. Upon hearing of Wellington’s resignation in 1831, ‘Amicus’ from Lima grieved for the country’s loss.<sup>251</sup>

As a living hero, it was inevitable that Wellington would be compared with other great men, ancient, modern and contemporaneous. After his death, in sermons and books, it seemed important to place Wellington’s life in context by discussing other heroes. Napoleon and Marlborough were obvious choices, and Wellington himself made the comparison in a memorandum prepared on 18 September 1835.<sup>252</sup> The conclusion seems to be that Napoleon was the greater ‘hero’, who possessed imagination and flair, while Wellington was a dutiful common-sensical general of genius. The fundamental distinction, which the duke also made, was that Bonaparte was a ruler who could not serve, while Wellington was a citizen who made selfless service a virtue. Lemoigne thought the Wellington could not be a real hero because they ‘burn quickly and die young’. The Rev. Cumming turned this argument to Wellington’s advantage: ‘Caesar, Napoleon, Alexander were the creatures of nature’ whose vain, selfish egos ensured that they died in the prime of life. Nelson too died young, and the Reverend may well have seen this as punishment for his immorality.

During his lifetime, Wellington’s correspondents had rather different motives for making these comparisons than appraising his life for moral instruction. Because of the duke’s military and political roles, the comparison with Caesar was an obvious one to make.<sup>253</sup> Charles Yorke of Hertfordshire, looking forward to a measure of Catholic relief rejoiced:

I never doubted for an instant that your Grace would, like Julius Caesar, be found equally great and eminent in the civil administration as in the military protection of your admiring country’.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> WP 1/961/14, 20 October 1828

<sup>252</sup> WP 2/192/52

<sup>253</sup> Caesar was also mentioned in the threatening correspondence

<sup>254</sup> WP 1/988/23, 28 December 1828; also see Bonar, Wellington, p. 395. Emphasis in original.

The comparison between Marlborough and Wellington was made in the press when discussing the constitutional precedent of one man being both Commander-in-Chief and in control of civil government. Lt. Gen. Donkin sent the duke a work entitled 'A parallel between Wellington and Marlborough'.<sup>255</sup> One writer stressed 'the bravery of our sailors the glory of our soldiers, our Wellingtons our Nelsons and our other immortal heroes' to highlight the plight of the ordinary servicemen who suffered under the weight of heavy taxation.<sup>256</sup> This aside, comparisons with Marlborough and Nelson are rare in the correspondence.

Writers tended to use the names of other heroes as weapons to persuade Wellington to adopt a certain course. William Greene declared that 'the names of Marlborough, Nelson and other eminent heroes of our country' would not compare with Wellington's if he were to solve the pauper problem. John Rooke invoked the names of Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar, Marlborough and Napoleon to induce the duke to alter the currency, and Jeremy Bentham believed that Wellington would be 'greater than Cromwell' if he embarked on legal reform.<sup>257</sup> Comparisons of successful commanders in different epochs is a common pastime among military historians and tacticians, but for the purposes of this study the relative merits of heroes is of less importance than how Wellington was perceived by his country, and how his character traits became a symbol for aristocratic, or 'Wellingtonian Englishness'.<sup>258</sup>

In 1852 Lemoine astutely described Wellington as 'more of a great Englishman than a great man'.<sup>259</sup> Commentators were quick to see in Wellington a shining example of all that made Britain great. The *Daily News* concluded that 'he had, combined in himself, in a singular degree, the national qualities on which the English people pride themselves'. He was, in contrast to Napoleon, the model subject, who had risen by his talents and was

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<sup>255</sup> WP 1/1152/25, 21 November 1830

<sup>256</sup> WP 1/1088/9, 27 January 1830, Charles Maitland

<sup>257</sup> WP 1/1041/10, 31 August 1829 (Greene); 1046/14, 24 September 1829 (Rooke); 1061/16, 12 December 1829 (Bentham)

<sup>258</sup> Pears, *Gentleman and Hero*, p. 218

<sup>259</sup> Lemoine, *Wellington*, p. 35

remarkably rewarded for his 'service'.<sup>260</sup> The term 'duty' appears everywhere. To Cumming, 'Wellington was the creation of a deep and solemn sense of duty'. Disraeli called him 'the sovereign master of duty'. Stocqueler stated that 'duty was his polestar'.<sup>261</sup> Wellington may have lacked the charisma of a Napoleon or a Nelson, and might have suffered in the public imagination as a result,<sup>262</sup> but the duke was rather successful in cultivating an image of himself as a dedicated public servant, willing to do the sovereigns bidding, and this is the image often portrayed in biographies.<sup>263</sup> But as Iain Pears has shown, 'abundant material existed for an unfavourable portrait at the time of his death or afterward, had anyone wanted to make use of it'. He appeared disdainful of honours and titles, but acquired many. He was a conscientious public servant, who received vast monetary rewards, and was perceived to be above party despite being a Tory Prime Minister and influential member of the Lords for three decades.<sup>264</sup> Wellington could just as easily be portrayed as a man of resistance, rather than the saviour of European liberty.<sup>265</sup>

It is interesting to compare what contemporaries felt Wellington's character traits to be, in contrast with the image created after his death. Leaving aside the negative aspects of his image which have been discussed elsewhere - ignorance of the wants of the people, resisting reform, receiver of large emoluments during a depression - even the positive attributes of his character, as perceived by the people, offer a challenge to his post-1832 image. As Read rightly says, Wellington reached the position of neutral, popular elder

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<sup>260</sup> *Daily News* quoted in J. Cumming, *Wellington. A Lecture* (1853) p. 44; this conclusion is a common one, also see Lemoine, Wellington; Stocqueler, Wellington; Gleig, *Life of Wellington*; Guedalla, Wellington; J. Strawson, *The Duke and the Emperor. Wellington and Napoleon* (1994) p. 271

<sup>261</sup> Cumming, *Lecture*, p. 5; B. Hertz, 'Disraeli & the Duke', *Cornhill Magazine* (1975) p. 220. Disraeli flattered Wellington in his early books, but criticised him in *Conningsby* (1844), probably because the duke had ignored him, pp. 223-33; Stocqueler, Wellington, pp. 281-90

<sup>262</sup> Strawson, *Duke and Emperor*, pp. 270-1

<sup>263</sup> For example, see Wellington's justification for attempting to form a ministry, 17 May 1832, widely reported in the press on 18 May

<sup>264</sup> Pears, *Gentleman and Hero*, p. 222

<sup>265</sup> Lemoine, Wellington, p. 8

statesman by ceasing to act upon his own opinions.<sup>266</sup> The duke's defence of his attempt to form a ministry in May 1832, made much of his notions of duty, but were treated with derision by opponents who charged him with office seeking.

It has already been seen how opposition and Tory newspapers perceived his character upon becoming Prime Minister: integrity, firmness and duty were common summaries. Other commentators made similar assessments. For Lemoine the duke was honest, plain and straightforward, for Cumming he was temperate and unostentatious. Creevy too praised 'the beau's' 'uniform frankness and simplicity'.<sup>267</sup> One finds the same terms in his correspondence. Wellington possessed 'courage' to 'investigate other subjects too large for common minds' (distress); he showed 'decision and determination' and 'firmness of mind and soundness of judgement' over Emancipation; the nation had benefited from the duke's 'firmness' of character; while one writer noticed a 'love of duty to your country'.<sup>268</sup> A number of points need to be made about these terms of reference. They are all subjective. Notions of duty differ. To anti-reformers, it was Wellington's duty to resist the measure for as long as possible. To the mass of the country it was a painful, costly and damaging delaying tactic. His duty should have been to the country at large (which of course he thought it was). Likewise 'firmness' and 'manliness' - in the sense of having strong convictions which are stuck to - is not necessarily a positive attribute. Secondly, these letters are not neutral testaments to Wellington's character. They are either praising him for adopting a measure which the writer favoured, or they were trying to induce him into taking such a course. This is especially the case with letters trying to exploit the duke where writers attribute traits to Wellington that are not seen elsewhere - humility, benevolence to all ranks, condescension, goodness, kindness, generosity, courtesy and

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<sup>266</sup> Read, Peel and Victorians, p. 304

<sup>267</sup> Lemoine, Wellington, p. 32; Cumming, Lecture, pp. 2-4; H. Maxwell (ed.), *The Creevy Papers* (2 Vols. 1903) p. 287

<sup>268</sup> WP 1/955/21, 30 September 1830; 987/25, 3 January 1829; 989/13, 13 January 1829; 1066/10, n.d. (1829); 1016/11, 7 May 1829



mercy.<sup>269</sup> Wellington may have possessed many of these qualities, but these terms of reference were inserted in letters not to evaluate his personality, but to get a beneficial result from a communication.

What can be concluded from these letters? It would be hard to deny that many people honoured, worshipped and supported the duke. They cared for his person, were in awe of his military achievements - some were even grateful - and agreed with his political sentiments. These people were loyal subjects, who in a culture of hero worship and secular saints, invested something of themselves emotionally in venerating a man most of them had never met.

But they would have seen his image on all manner of goods. They would have admired, and maybe even subscribed to, the statues of him, the books celebrating his deeds and purchased the numerous items associated with his name. For Wellington's celebrity was openly exploited by people with a commercial, personal or charitable agenda. This takes nothing away from the real fondness people had for Wellington (or at least the successfully cultivated image), because without this there was no market, no usefulness for the duke's endorsement. Wellington endeavoured reasonably successfully to control the use of his name - which societies he supported, who he gave money too or provided positions for, his refusal to permit formal dedication requests - but he was perceived to be public property. His health was of 'national interest'. When duelling his life 'belongs to your country' and his 'good name ... is at all times national property and that species of wealth which England can least afford to give up.'<sup>270</sup>

The unsolicited correspondence itself, whatever the object and subject matter of the letter, is testimony to the public ownership of the duke of Wellington. The truly remarkable thing about these letters is the over-riding preoccupation with Wellington himself. They are addressed to him personally, not to His Majesty's government, not to the cabinet, and not to

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<sup>269</sup> As well as the above section, *passim*, see in particular: WP 1/614/19, 21 January 1819; 620/21, 16 March 1819; 663/15, 30 March 1821; 688/5, 5 December 1821; 961/14, 20 October 1828; 1010/9, 15 April 1829; 1017/23, 14 May 1829; 1102/22, 20 March 1830; 1128/18, 28 July 1830; 1132/1, 1 August 1830; 1181/17, 13 April 1831

<sup>270</sup> WP 1/812/11, 15 February 1825; 1004/28, 24 March 1829; 760/16, 29 April 1823

the Prime Minister.<sup>271</sup> They express confidence in his ability to correct wrongs, to initiate policy and in general to make a difference to people's lives. Conversely, when people had grievances, trivial or national, they felt that Wellington could, and perhaps, should, alleviate their problems. In turn, Wellington replied to them, forwarded their letters if appropriate and acted upon them if necessary. It has been shown that this type of correspondence was not unique to Wellington. People wrote to other politicians with similar advice and expressing the same concerns. There was a culture of letter writing and it did express an opinion of the public. But the fundamental thing about this correspondence is the duke of Wellington. He looms over every page, influencing the language, style and content.

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<sup>271</sup> There are of course some exceptions, but Wellington was not a function of his office like Aberdeen or, to a lesser extent, Peel

## Part Three: The People and their Letters

There is not a subject of public interest upon which I do not receive hundreds of letters, numerous almost in proportion to the difficulty and importance attached to each. Corn, currency, poor laws, payment of the national debt, adjustment to the Roman Catholic question, are the favourite topics; and to read this correspondence it might be believed that there would be nothing so easy as to arrange all our difficulties. Political arrangements and the objects of minor importance are not beneath their notice; and I have come to the conclusion that the English are the most officious people that I have yet met with.<sup>1</sup>

Thus far this study has concentrated on the contents of the letters Wellington received from the general public. This has revealed the issues and concerns which prompted people to put pen to paper, and how far they were informed by (and influenced) the public debates in parliament and the press. While this has told us something about the authors of these letters - that they were politicised, and felt strongly enough about a certain subject to bother writing to a member of government - little has been said about these people. That is the concern of this chapter.

The only definition of these letter writers given so far has been that they were not members of the ruling elite and were not acquaintances of the duke. For the purposes of this study I have referred to this group as 'the people'. As a term of reference for aggregates of human beings 'the people' has a long and diverse history, and as a political concept used in political discourse and rhetoric its usage can be traced back to the seventeenth century. Any analysis of the concept shows that 'the people' can be considered as the community, an organic conception; the propertied; the respectable; the middle class; the working class; the

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<sup>1</sup> WCD, vol. v p. 184, Wellington, 29 October 1828

electorate or political nation; or the excluded.<sup>2</sup> The term is ambiguous and variable and it is important to pay attention to the context in which it was used and by whom. In many cases 'the people' are given a (negative) identity depending on who they are juxtaposed with: people versus the populace, the people and the House of Commons, the people and the manufacturers, or middle class, or aristocracy. 'The people' represented different categories depending on the user of the term and the particular political campaign being fought. As a pamphleteer noted in 1837:

What is meant by a whole people? Are the mob the people? They think themselves so; whereas the shopkeepers say they are the true people; the merchants and bankers claim to be better people than either mob or shopkeepers; and the country squires and farmers fancy they are the best people of all.<sup>3</sup>

An analysis of language follows later in this chapter when the concept of 'the people' will be discussed in greater length. With regard to Wellington's correspondents, it is possible to broadly define them as members of 'the people', simply in the sense that they were not members of the ruling elite. As a term of reference 'the people' does not include those in power. One of the definitions given in the OED is: 'The common people, the commonality; the mass of the community as distinguished from the nobility and ruling or official classes'. This distinction can also be found in the fifteenth chapter of Volney's *Ruins of Empires* which in the 1790s was widely distributed as a tract. When 'the people' interrogate the 'privileged class' and find that they contribute nothing positive to society, the latter are banished: 'privileged men, class distinct from the people, form a nation apart and govern yourselves'.<sup>4</sup> This is, I think, the fundamental distinction; the relationship between governed and governors,

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<sup>2</sup> H. T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property. Political Ideology in Eighteenth Century Britain* (1977); J. Epstein, *Radical Expression. Political Language, Ritual and Symbol in England, 1790-1850* (Oxford, 1994); G. Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty. England in the Early Industrial Age* (1984); J. Vernon, *Politics and the People. A Study in English Political Culture c. 1815-1867* (Cambridge, 1993)

<sup>3</sup> G. Farren, *Kings, Lords and Commons. Remarks* (1837)

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Epstein, *Radical expression*, p. 161

between the people and the ruling elite. The correspondents who wrote to Wellington were members of the general public; the ruled, not the rulers.

The duke's unsolicited correspondence reveals information about the people who wrote to him. It is possible to ascertain where the authors lived, what their occupations were, what motivated them to write and what language they used. All of this can be used to construct a reasonably full picture of these politically, socially and economically informed people, who wrote to members of the ruling elite. The chapter will conclude by examining the impact and fate of this correspondence.

## I

The duke of Wellington, despite his unique position in society, was not alone in receiving this type of correspondence. Not only did the general public write to other politicians on the same issues as they wrote to Wellington, the *same* people who wrote to the duke also wrote to (for example) Robert Peel, Liverpool and Palmerston. Some correspondents wrote on different issues to different politicians, while others published their ideas in the newspapers or in pamphlets.

What follows is an analysis of Wellington's correspondents who wrote to at least one other member of the ruling elite. This is important for a number of reasons. It shows that people did not just write to Wellington because of his military fame (although some did). It indicates that there was a culture of letter writing to prominent persons in society; that writing to a politician was recognised as a legitimate expression of opinion. Moreover, the following analysis breaks down the boundaries between private and public opinions. A significant number also published their ideas, either as pamphlets or in letters to newspapers. There is a direct association between this unsolicited correspondence and what historians usually take as expressions of public opinion. It has already been confirmed that people wrote to Wellington on the major 'public opinion' issues, and that they understood what they were talking about. Many of the ideas and plans suggested - whether it was securities for the church, an income tax or the desire for political reform - were on the political agenda and discussed at the highest level. These letters form part of that discussion.

It has been established in Part Two that Wellington was not alone in being burdened with requests for favours and patronage. For example, Marcus Crosbie wrote to the duke in December 1819 requesting a copy of a letter he had written in March 1813 on his plan to convey intelligence from France by printing it in French Newspapers. He had earlier written to Spencer Perceval and Lord Liverpool on the same issue and was referred to John Croker at the Admiralty. Crosbie wrote a further 17 times to Liverpool between 1812 and 1817. He also wrote 40 times to Peel between 1814 and 1825, in the latter year discussing Catholic Emancipation and O'Connell. In 1836 Crosbie was still asking for the return of his paper (on the above plan), this time from Palmerston, who replied that it was probably destroyed as he had no need to keep it. Palmerston's secretary thought Crosbie mad, who was now getting his son, Alfred, to write to Palmerston to induce Brougham to return his father's papers. In 1839 Crosbie was still seeking assistance, and wanted Palmerston to frank his letters.<sup>5</sup>

Silas Neville of Norwich was another persistent nuisance. In 1824 Wellington's secretary had to copy Neville's letter because the duke could not read it, annotating the wrapper 'Mr Neville has very often written to you before', invariably seeking remuneration for his schemes to improve Britain's standing in the world. In 1817, claiming descent from an ancient and noble Catholic family, Neville implored Liverpool not to ignore a man who had recommended measures for his country. He wrote a further eight times to Liverpool and six to Peel.<sup>6</sup>

Other writers who requested assistance from the government included Samuel Brooke of Finchley, late printer to the revenue boards, who complained to Wellington and Liverpool that a new system and the competition from Hansard, had put him out of work. Charles Gosling, also from London, wrote similar letters to Peel and Wellington asking for a situation, and Elizabeth Pyne (of Cork), whose son died at Talavera, wrote to Wellington in

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<sup>5</sup> WP 1/636/3, 24 December 1819; Liverpool papers BL Add. Mss. 38248, f178, 184 (1812); Peel papers BL Add. Mss. 40376, f169, 171, 365 (1825); Palmerston papers MPC 276, 281, 284, 299, 302, 336, 943, 1035

<sup>6</sup> WP 1/618/4, 16 February 1819; 802/15, 15 October 1824; Liverpool papers BL Add. Mss. 38269, f36, 6 November 1817

1829 seeking some provision for her daughters. She had previously written to Sidmouth and Liverpool respecting her claim.<sup>7</sup>

Wellington was also not alone in being sent literature to peruse, inventions to endorse and subscriptions to pay. The Palmerston papers contain a large series (MPC) which is filled with this type of correspondence. Captain John Murray of Sandhurst sent Wellington a book on the Portuguese revolution, and Liverpool his design for a military car. Harriet Cope wrote to Wellington four times about her poem - 'Waterloo'- and respecting payment for it. She also wrote to Peel requesting a subscription to the same poem. Wellington and the King had both subscribed £5. Gilbert Flesher (from Northamptonshire) sent his loyal songs on Wellington and Nelson to the duke and to Peel; Catherine Hyde Solari sent her poems to Wellington and Sidmouth; and the novelist Maria Edgeworth wrote to the duke, Peel and Palmerston.<sup>8</sup> Benjamin Brodie sent the same manuscript on dissection to Peel and Wellington, and George Guthrie, a surgeon seeking to dedicate his book on the eye to Wellington also wrote to Liverpool and Peel. Benjamin Haydon also communicated with Wellington, Peel and Palmerston. The inventor Goldsworthy Gurney set his ideas to Peel and the duke; Wilbraham Liardet, who wrote to Wellington with a plan to finish off the Thames Tunnel, had previously solicited a job from Liverpool; and Maxwell Dick informed the Home Office and Wellington about his plan for a suspension railway.<sup>9</sup> Clearly,

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<sup>7</sup> WP 1/973/5, 27 December 1828; Liverpool papers BL Add. Mss. 38296, f197, (1823); 1041/12, 31 August 1829; Peel papers BL Add. Mss. 40374, f371, 18 March 1825; 1034/13, 29 July 1829; Liverpool papers BL Add. Mss. 38290, f325 (1822)

<sup>8</sup> For Murray, WP 1/891/19, 30 June 1827; BL Add. Mss. 38287, f79 (1820); Cope, WP 1/781/11, 12 February 1822, 782/2, 17 January 1822, 827/16, 28, September 1825, BL Add. Mss. 40381, f144 (1825); Flesher, WP 1/1193/12, 29 August 1831, BL Add. Mss. 40372, f52 (January 1825); Solari, WP 1/654/6, 9 October 1820, HO 44/9/16, August 1821; Edgeworth, WP 1/1115/4, 21 May 1830, Palmerston papers GC/ED/9 (1832)

<sup>9</sup> For Brodie, WP 1/995/16, 9 February 1829, BL Add. Mss. 40398, f151, 6 February 1829; Guthrie, WP 1/769/9, 7 August 1823, Peel papers BL Add. Mss. 40523, f226, 228, 231 (1843), Liverpool papers Add. Mss. 38264, f46 (1816); Haydon, WP 1/972/23, 24 December 1828, Palmerston papers MPC 32. He wrote 34 times to Peel between 1827 and 1846; Gurney, WP 1/1041/7, 31 August 1829, BL Add. Mss. 40387 f294 (1826);

patronage was a fundamental part of nineteenth-century life. The recipients of these letters may have considered them a burden, but more often than not they did not ignore them. Wellington, Peel, Palmerston and Liverpool joined societies and subscribed to literature and charitable events because their position in society demanded it.

A similar pattern emerges when one considers the correspondence discussed in Part One. There are 19 letters from James Edward Devereux surviving in the Wellington papers for the years 1819 to 1832 (and a further 22 for 1833-43). Devereux, claiming descent from 'Sir John Devereux in the reign of Edward I' had been active in the Catholic cause since 1792. He was one of the delegates who presented a petition from the Catholics of Ireland to George III in 1793, and was involved in the Wexford Catholic association prior to 1798. Devereux remained an active propagandist until what must have been old age. He wrote to Wellington on various aspects of Catholic Emancipation, especially on the Jesuits and monastic orders, and also discussed the Bastardy laws and foreign affairs. He proposed that one of the French Orleans family should succeed to the throne of Greece in order to keep the French busy, otherwise their ambitions would revive in another part of Europe.<sup>10</sup> As early as August 1829 Devereux suggested to the duke that Charles X should act against the liberals in order to safeguard his government. Less than a year later, there had been another revolution in France, which Devereux believed would have been avoided if his advice had been taken. Wellington replied to him that it was no part of his (the duke's) duty to advise the king of France on the internal affairs of his country.<sup>11</sup> Devereux continued to write recommending people as ambassadors, discussing the politics of Europe and soliciting money. He claimed his suggestions had aided the government and wanted £300. Wellington disagreed. Writing to the government did not render a service worthy of a monetary reward.<sup>12</sup> Devereux also wrote to Peel, to the *Morning Chronicle* (signed 'Hibernus'), to the

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Liardet, WP 1/1056/20, 15 November 1829, BL Add. Mss. 38295, f206, (1823). He wrote to Peel six times in 1822; Dick, WP 1/1136/4, 26 August 1830, HO 44/20/369, June 1830

<sup>10</sup> WP 1/1057/27, 23 November 1829. See chapter on Catholic Emancipation for Devereux.

<sup>11</sup> WP 1/1039/9, 18 August; 1041/2, 29 August 1829; 1140/22, 10 September 1830. Wellington received a first hand report of the July Revolution from W. I. Stevenson on 1 August 1830, WP 1/1132/9

<sup>12</sup> WP 1/1144/20, 6 October 1830; 1187/45, 26 June 1831



*Dublin Evening post* and published pamphlets, for instance *The duke of Wellington, Lord Killeen and Lord Plunkett* (1828).

Thomas Newenham, who claimed to be a former member of the Irish House of Commons, also published his ideas. He wrote six times to Wellington on Catholic Emancipation and other religious issues, and published a letter in the *Cheltenham Chronicle* on the means of putting down a rebellion in Ireland. He had previously written twice to Peel.<sup>13</sup> Another correspondent who published his ideas was John Cooke Rogers of Dublin. In 1828 he wrote to Wellington discussing Emancipation and sent a pamphlet on the abolition of the 40s. freeholders. Five years previously he had done exactly the same to Liverpool, and in 1825 he had written to Peel.<sup>14</sup> William Atkinson of Leeds too sent the duke a pamphlet on Emancipation, *Popery unmasked*, having four years earlier in 1825 written to Peel on the coronation oath.<sup>15</sup>

A number of correspondents wrote on both Emancipation and the economic distress. Donald Bain, an accountant and pamphleteer, wrote eight times to Peel between 1823 and 1846, and nine to Wellington. Primarily concerned with Catholic relief he also wrote on the national debt. John Philip Fesenmeyer first appears in the Wellington papers in June 1830 discussing the King's health. In July he was more concerned with the national debt, stocks and the cultivation of wastelands. He had been pondering this question for some time. In 1812, Fesenmeyer had written to Liverpool on the problems of war finance and Catholic Emancipation. He came up with a plan for the enclosure of wastelands, which was intended to detach the lower orders of Catholics from the unreasonable demands made by the middle class agitators. In 1825 he wrote to Peel on the same theme.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> For example see, WP1/941/2, 10 July 1828; 954/22, 23 September 1828; 970/1, November 1828; 1001/16, 4 March 1829; BL Add. Mss. 40364, f195; 40365, f221 (1824)

<sup>14</sup> WP1/973/2, 27 December 1828; 988/8, 6 January 1829; Liverpool papers BL Add. Mss. 38293, f220, (1823); Peel papers Add. Mss. 40376, f135, 12 April 1825

<sup>15</sup> WP1/989/18, 14 January 1829; BL Add Mss 40374, f269 (1825)

<sup>16</sup> For Bain see, WP1/995/25, 10 February 1829; 1018/5, 15 May 1829; BL Add. Mss. 40378, f22; 40382, f122-8 (1825); For Fesenmeyer, WP1/1120/8, 17 June 1830, 1123/25, 2 July 1830; Liverpool papers Add. Mss. 38378, f249 (1812); Peel papers Add. Mss. 40368, f256 (1824), 40378, f42 (1825)

William Parker of Cork wrote on a variety of themes to different people. In 1830 he sent Wellington a copy of an article which he had published in the *Munster Farmers Magazine* in April 1818. His letter, and the article, concerned the establishment of a system of agricultural workhouses to aid the Irish poor. Fifteen days later he wrote proposing the standardisation of Britain's poor rates. Two months after this, in May 1830, he wrote to the duke to urge him to establish an enquiry into the treatment of natives in South Africa. He had witnessed the atrocities first hand and also communicated with the Colonial Secretary, Sir George Murray. Parker had written to Liverpool 12 times in 1817 and 1823 on the designs of the Popish clergy. He believed the Jesuits were the cause of many of Ireland's problems. It comes as no surprise to also find him in the Peel papers.<sup>17</sup>

In 1819 Alexander Moody from London wrote to Liverpool highlighting abuses in the Customs and Excise and seeking payment for this information. Nine years later he was trying to convince Wellington that Emancipation was not the solution to Ireland's problems. In 1829 he again wrote to the duke informing him that Huskisson (and by implication the government's measures) was responsible for the distress.<sup>18</sup>

Joseph Sparrow, a wine merchant, wrote an open letter to Wellington which was published in the *Morning Journal* and sent a private correspondence stating that 'the only remedy for the present state of trade is a fair and equitable property tax and the repeal of the ... assessed taxes'. In 1825 he had written to Peel on the services of the Church of England. Samuel Miller also published his ideas on the tax system, although he chose to focus on the land tax, the assessment of which was out of date.<sup>19</sup>

In 1823 Alex Mundell, a parliamentary agent, wrote to Liverpool on the poor laws. A year later he wrote to Peel. In 1829 he sent Wellington a pamphlet on the value of exports and discussed the value of the currency. This was referred on to the Chancellor of the

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<sup>17</sup> WP1/1100/4, 5 March 1830; 1102/25, 20 March 1830; 1115/16, 25 May 1830; Liverpool papers Add. Mss. 38296, f387 (1823); Peel papers Add. Mss. 40368, f143 (1824)

<sup>18</sup> WP1/923/12, 24 March 1828; 1018/14, 17 May 1829; Liverpool papers Add. Mss. 38278, f130 (1819)

<sup>19</sup> WP1/1044/9, 9 September 1829; Peel papers Add. Mss. 40378, f269 (1825); for Miller, 1/1012/18, 25 April 1829

Exchequer. In the same month he also wrote to the Home Secretary, sending a copy of a letter to Wellington on the Corn Laws and Britain's manufacturing superiority.<sup>20</sup>

Rev George Miller, headmaster of the Royal school in Armagh, had been encouraged to write to Wellington for preferment by Peel. He wanted to justify the recommendation, and so sent his thoughts on Turkey and Russia. He also published an article in the *Quarterly Review* entitled 'The reconstruction of the federative policy of Europe'.<sup>21</sup>

John William Perry Farren of the Consular service bombarded the duke with his opinions on the eastern question. Farren sent Wellington a long memorandum on the Treaty of London, which he intended to publish anonymously; he forwarded copies of letters that had been sent to Charles Grant, former President of the Board of Trade; and he requested an interview (which was declined).<sup>22</sup> He also wrote describing the feelings of the Turkish people after their defeat by Russia. He feared the peace would not last because it had been forced on Turkey, and that a collision between the people and their governors was imminent. Farren was particularly critical of 'the hacknied [sic], brainless effusions of the public papers', which knew little of the political and commercial capabilities of the Ottoman empire and failed to give its readership an accurate picture. He hoped to correct this by publishing his memoranda and sought an endorsement from Wellington, which was not forthcoming.<sup>23</sup>

While some correspondents such as Parker felt comfortable writing on a variety of issues, others, like Farren, stuck to their vocation. Charles Forster, a banker from Walsall, wrote to Wellington in 1828 in order to point out some errors the duke had made in a speech respecting the number of bank failures in 1825. In 1844, the year of the Bank Charter Act,

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<sup>20</sup> WP1/1032/10, 20 July 1829; 6/2/6 (index volume); HO 44/20/511, July 1830; Liverpool papers Add. Mss. 38293, f202 (1823); Peel papers Add. Mss. 40368, f41 (1824). It was, of course, a fundamental part of Mundell's job to write to politicians.

<sup>21</sup> WP 1/941/13, 14 July 1828; Peel papers Add. Mss. 40395, f195 (1828), 40502, f165 (1842)

<sup>22</sup> WP 1/1044/14, n.d. (1829); 1051/6, 14 October; 1050/17, 12 October 1829. 1051/6 is the paper Farren sent instead of meeting Wellington in person.

<sup>23</sup> WP 1087/10, 23 January; 1094/25, 13 February; 1115/9, 23 May 1830

he also wrote to Peel. Daniel Beaumont Payne of London was also a banker. In 1819 he wrote to Liverpool discussing the resumption of cash payments. He wrote again twice in 1823. In 1829 the flow of booklets on the currency, cash payments and the Bank of England became a flood. Payne's real grumble was with the directors of the Bank who had failed to call on his advice at an earlier date.<sup>24</sup>

In 1821 John Parish of Bath sent Wellington information about the fall of Lima (Peru). His excuse for writing was the 'satisfaction I derive in having it in my power to communicate so important an event before the notification of it in any official shape'.<sup>25</sup> Intelligence took a long time to arrive from South America (in 1828 *The Times* reported that the Felix had travelled from Buenos-Ayres to Liverpool in 53 days - 'a passage unprecedentedly quick'),<sup>26</sup> and Parish hoped that the more information the government possessed the better. Parish's intelligence came from his two grandsons, John and William Parish Robertson, who were engaged in commerce in Lima and Buenos-Ayres, 'and being in the habit of occasionally communicating their political information to the Foreign Office, as well as to Lord Liverpool', he sent the duke copies of their letters. Wellington wrote back to Parish thanking him for the trouble he had taken. The duke was informed about attempted coups, the movements of the Spanish army, the feelings of the people and the elections for a new governor of Buenos-Ayres. William Parish thanked his grandfather 'for the honourable publicity you have given to the state of public affairs here, and the flattering manner in which your ministers have received my communications to you on that subject is truly gratifying'. The two grandsons later published their correspondence.<sup>27</sup>

Other correspondents also published their writings. John Hall's letter supporting Catholic Relief was published on 24 January 1829 in the *Northampton Mercury*, and he sent

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<sup>24</sup> WP1/940/20, 5 July 1828; Peel papers Add. Mss. 40543, f244; 40546, f222 (1844); For Payne see, 1/1025/38, 17 June 1829; 1047/6, 29 September 1829; 1087/7, 23 January 1830; Liverpool papers Add. Mss. 38275, f339-352 (1819)

<sup>25</sup> WP 1/685/20, 20 November 1821

<sup>26</sup> *The Times*, 2 February 1828. On 13 August 1823 Parish received a letter dated 7 May, WP 1/769/20

<sup>27</sup> WP 1/769/20, 13 August 1823; 771/13, 19 September 1823; 788/17, 24 March 1824; J P & W P Robertson, *Letters from Paraguay* (3 Vols., 1839)

Wellington a copy in February.<sup>28</sup> John Clayton from Nottingham, ‘having been engaged in the trade of this place the whole of my life’, was compelled to publish his ideas because of the deploring state of distress. His letter, which discussed the currency, taxation and the Corn Laws, was published in the *Mercury* under the pseudonym ‘Justitia’.<sup>29</sup> The desire for anonymity was not uncommon. Devereux has already been referred to, and W Cantrell sent letters to the *Courier* and *John Bull*, signing himself ‘A Lover of Truth’.<sup>30</sup>

Some writers sent Wellington copies of letters that they had written to other politicians. One correspondent from Lynn (Norfolk) wrote to Wellington on the Corn Laws in April 1828, enclosing a copy of a letter written to Huskisson a year previously on the same subject.<sup>31</sup> Robert Atkinson from Newry had first sent his plan to increase the revenue to Herries in November 1827. In October 1830 he informed Wellington.<sup>32</sup> John Sidney, a solicitor, had intended to send his treatise on savings banks to William Pitt, but diffidence prevented him. He did send it to George Rose, who afterwards brought in a bill in the House of Commons on the same subject. Sidney believed he had had some influence and sent the same pamphlet to Wellington. In January 1826 he had also written to Canning.<sup>33</sup>

John Debenham, a commander in the Royal Navy, did not send ideas or suggestions, but information. In 1819 he wrote to Liverpool respecting his claim for services during the war. In 1820 he had become an informer and sent the Home Office a seditious placard with details of where it was purchased. In March 1831 he sent Wellington information on Hume, Bentham and Burdett whom he believed to be Jacobins and traitors. The duke referred him to the Home Secretary. Debenham wrote again in November (also sending letters to the Home Office and the duke of Bedford) transmitting a copy of a National Political Union

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<sup>28</sup> WP1/994/10, 2 February 1829

<sup>29</sup> WP1/1015/28, 4 May 1829

<sup>30</sup> WP1/1114/5, 17 May 1830

<sup>31</sup> WP1/927/12, 15 April 1828

<sup>32</sup> WP1/1145/7, 12 October 1830

<sup>33</sup> WP1/1134/29, 6 August 1830

placard and *The Republican* newspaper which contained an article on the Lords and the people.<sup>34</sup>

People wrote to Wellington and Liverpool on public matters because they were Prime Ministers, believed to be in charge of affairs. People also wrote to Peel or Sidmouth if the letter dealt with a subject under the Home Office's remit, for example Ireland (Peel as the prominent anti-Catholic in the Commons, at least before February 1829, received a huge amount of correspondence on Emancipation in 1825). Huskisson and Herries attracted correspondence about economic matters, Lord Aberdeen and, later, Palmerston Foreign affairs. These were all logical choices for politically informed people.

## II

The people discussed above had no problem with signing their names on the letters sent to Wellington. They wanted the duke to know who they were. However, a large minority of the duke's unsolicited correspondence was anonymous or pseudonymous, which, while it makes an investigation of the individual writers difficult, allows some conclusions to be drawn by a collective analysis. There are nearly 200 anonymous letters surviving in Wellington's papers for the period under discussion, the vast majority (over 150) have survived for just one year, 1830. These were filed separately in a bundle marked 'letters of advice, warning and threats of assassination, chiefly anonymous', and many of these letters have been used throughout this study.<sup>35</sup>

The threatening letters that Wellington received in 1830 have already been discussed, but it is clear that anonymity by itself is not a reliable guide to a threatening, or even a critical, intention. In the Wellington correspondence there are many anonymous letters dealing with a whole range of issues, some of which could be quite detailed and

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<sup>34</sup> WP1/1179/18, 25 March 1831; 1201/20, 9 November 1831; HO 44/2/192, August 1820; Liverpool papers Add. Mss. 38278, f9 (1819)

<sup>35</sup> WP 1/1159, 1830. Peter Jupp, in a rare reference to Wellington's unsolicited correspondence, briefly comments on these letters, but does not mention that they were anonymous, *Politics on eve of Reform*, p. 428 n. 111

complex discussions of government policy. In a wider context, anonymity was by no means a taboo. Writers to newspapers and those that published pamphlets were often anonymous or pseudonymous. Anonymity was 'the rule for all nineteenth century periodicals'.<sup>36</sup> It was a safeguard of independent reviewing, allowing professional men to publish opinions without fear of 'disparagement or reprisal'.<sup>37</sup> It was held to be conducive to the public interest. Thomas Barnes, editor of *The Times*, acknowledged and praised the tradition of anonymous public writing:

The public is a gainer because it obtains a full and free discussion without any mixture of that egotism and self-intrusion which are almost inseparable from the composition of any individual writer in his own personal character.<sup>38</sup>

Returning to Wellington's correspondents, many writers simply did not feel the need to give their names. They did not wish to appear egotistical. Their names, they felt, would add little to their arguments because they were unknown to the duke. For instance, a letter on government securities was concluded with 'my name would add no weight to this & therefore I shall suppress it'. Another, 'Amicus' from Lima made no apology for writing because the duke would never know his name.<sup>39</sup> This particular correspondent wrote long and detailed accounts of the political situation in South America, where he had lived since 1823. 'Amicus' had witnessed the bloodshed and corruption first hand. He wanted the British government to protect British creditors otherwise the revolutionaries would rob them of their possessions. 'Amicus' described the extent of Bolivar's influence in Buenos-Ayres and Guatemala, and his unpopularity in Chile and Mexico. He also supported a plan to colonise the south of Chile with Irish paupers. On 28 March 1831, 'Amicus' wrote because

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<sup>36</sup> P. T. Murphy, 'Impersonation and Authorship in Romantic Britain', *Journal of English Literary History*, 59 (1992)

<sup>37</sup> R. H. Tener, 'Breaking the Code of Anonymity: The Case of the Spectator 1861-1897', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 16 (1986)

<sup>38</sup> [Anon.], *The History of The Times*. Vol. 1 1785-1841 (1935) p. xiii

<sup>39</sup> WP 1/1159/100, 5 November 1830; 1043/18, 5 September 1829

he had just heard of Wellington's retirement from public office. Despite this he would continue to keep the duke informed.<sup>40</sup>

Wellington clearly felt that gentleman should sign their names when writing letters. In reply to Dr Patrick Curtis who had accused him of writing an anonymous letter, the duke remarked,

To write, or cause to be written, an anonymous letter, is understood by gentlemen to be the dirtiest trick of which a person in that class can be guilty. And while one writer was aware 'that anonymous advice is generally not treated with much confidence or attention',<sup>41</sup> there were good reasons for writers to omit their names when sending letters to persons in authority.

As Edward Thompson has rightly commented 'even the gentleman, certainly the professional man, might wish to gain the ear of authority without offending an influential neighbour', for a new proposal or idea might involve a criticism of the existing system or personnel.<sup>42</sup> For example, 'C.L.P' wrote to Wellington in 1828 with a plan for educating the Irish poor: 'At present I am the only repository of my own secret [his plan] & being ignorant of the light in which this proposal may be viewed by your grace & averse to notoriety, I take the liberty of using fictitious characters'. Another stated that 'if this address were not anonymous, it would be liable to the charge of presumption'.<sup>43</sup> But one writer feared more than offence to sensibilities and protocol:

The inability of exposing myself to the vengeance of an attorney, whereby I might incur the hazard of losing an easy & agreeable employment, has led me to subscribe the initials only of my name.

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<sup>40</sup> WP 1/1043/18, 5 September 1829; 1061/13, 10 December 1829; 1084/2, 6 January 1830; 1113/22, n.d.(1830); 1179/28, 28 March 1831

<sup>41</sup> WP 1/808/15, 21 December 1824; 987/25, 3 January 1829

<sup>42</sup> Thompson, *Anonymity*, p. 272

<sup>43</sup> WP 1/933/1, 26 May 1828; 760/16, 29 April 1823



Here, 'J.W.P' was offering information on a political meeting and probably rightfully feared being used as a witness. Anyone suspected of being a spy or informer was often treated very harshly by their communities.<sup>44</sup>

The majority of anonymous writers did give some form of identification. 98 out of the 153 anonymous letters contained in the bundle for 1830 were either signed with a pseudonym (which was often a description of what the writer did) or initials. Either of these devices enabled the person to identify themselves if they wanted to write again. For example, 'Amicus' from Lima wrote many times on foreign affairs, and 'A friend of William Pitt's' wrote twice. This allowed for a degree of familiarity, especially if town or region was also given, without the writer divulging their name. Indeed, on one occasion Wellington replied to an anonymous correspondent wanting to know his name because the information provided on the hostility to reform in Edinburgh was so useful.<sup>45</sup> The occupations of Wellington's correspondents is considered below, and while most of the anonymous writers did simply describe what they did - 'retired clerk of the custom house', 'a Bristol merchant', 'a Gloucester freeholder and manufacturer' - caution needs to be used. As Wellington realised above, 'a subaltern of the 9th Regt. of the line', might be nothing of the sort, just as 'a friend of William Pitt's', 'a moderate Tory' and 'a man of property' could equally be fictions in order to add weight to a suggestion or warning. But in most cases, the views and knowledge expressed in the correspondence does support the occupational pseudonym given. The most common pseudonym used by different people was 'Swing', which has already been discussed, and these threatening letters aside, there is little to distinguish (by content) the letters that were signed, pseudonymous or left blank. It is likely that the unnamed correspondent simply wanted to make a point and then disappear back into obscurity.

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<sup>44</sup> WP 1/1159/50, 18 March 1830; See WP 2/33/103, 18 May 1835, George Corbett had written to Wellington during his Premiership, but since then 'some most mischievous persons in this borough have recently become acquainted with the fact .... I have been selected as an object of the vilest calumny. I am pointed out as the spy of the late government, the walls of the neighbourhood have been written on in large characters "Reformers' beware of the Duke's informer Corbett"'.

<sup>45</sup> WP 1/1199/5, 17 October 1831

### III

Besides a name or pseudonym, most writers also gave an address for the very practical reason that they wanted to obtain a reply from the duke of Wellington. Some provided details of their employment in order to appear respectable, to show that they knew the subject under discussion or, for patronage, that they could do a job. The following analysis is based on the correspondence in which the writers informed the duke about their occupation. It is intended to show the kind of people who wrote to Wellington. This is not an exhaustive analysis, but the 150 people who provided this information can be taken as a representative sample of the total.

Contained in this sample are 29 churchmen, of various ranks and creeds, many of whom wrote on Emancipation, sent pamphlets or requested patronage. There are 17 soldiers or sailors, plus a further 14 who had previously been in the army. These people obviously connected with Wellington and corresponded on a variety of issues, sending books and seeking assistance. The professionals are well represented, with 13 merchants, ten solicitors, five doctors and four bankers, writing on the economic distress, Catholic issues and parliamentary reform. People involved with societies and charities, whether as secretaries, treasurers or committee members, also feature prominently, with 21 writing about their organisation or anniversary dinner. There are ten people involved in writing and journalism, including editors of periodicals and newspapers. Others include four letters from farmers, three from government clerks, three from lobbyists and one from a parliamentary agent and two from land agents and surveyors. A stone mason, linen draper, brewer, distiller and cobbler also corresponded, as did an overseer of the poor, a public accountant, a sculptor, a playwright, an engineer, a professor of fortification and artillery at the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, 'one of what the world calls the middle class', a workhouse inmate and 'one of the working class'. One writer, 'a.r.c', hoped Wellington would excuse his bad

handwriting as he was 'no scholar, my chief fort being to work hard for an honest livelihood'.<sup>46</sup>

The wide variety of occupations, covering a large range of incomes, testifies to the commonality, the general nature, of writing to a member of the ruling elite. These people would have had little in common, save a desire to get involved. They were obviously articulate and educated, aware of political developments and who felt confident enough to join in the debates. They also needed to possess some leisure hours (more if a regular correspondent) and the resources to buy writing materials and pay postage, because sending a letter could be a costly exercise.

The duke of Wellington received letters from all over the United Kingdom and Ireland. Where possible in the text, I have endeavoured to provide a name and location for the correspondent in order to show how widespread this culture of letter writing was. From Budleigh Salterton in Devon to Aye in Scotland, from Cork, Limerick and Dublin to Norwich, Manchester, Liverpool and Edinburgh, people in villages, towns and cities wrote letters to the duke. The geographical spread of Wellington's correspondence was extremely wide. Many ordinary people from across the country wrote to the Prime Minister. Surviving in the archive are over 120 letters posted from Ireland, nearly half of which were sent in 1829. To send a letter this distance was very expensive - over two shillings in the 1820s - which obviously prevented many from sending unsolicited letters, notwithstanding the abuse of the privilege of franking. Similarly a letter from Edinburgh to London would have cost at least 1s. 2d.<sup>47</sup> Many letters, of course, were sent free of charge to Wellington (and are marked so on the wrapper), because of the franking privilege, but a reply would more often than not have to be paid for by the recipient.<sup>48</sup> This meant that either the writer could easily afford correspondence, or that these people took their letter writing very seriously and thought the expense worthwhile.

The cost of postage, and the sheer size of the place, helps to account for why most of Wellington's unsolicited correspondence was posted in London. It only cost a couple of

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<sup>46</sup> WP 1/1066/12, n.d. (1829)

<sup>47</sup> H. Robinson, *The British Post Office. A History* (New Jersey, 1948) pp. 157, 182

<sup>48</sup> Ellis, *Post Office*, pp. 39-43

pence to send a letter in the Capital and there was always the option of hand delivery. Wellington spent a lot of time in London, especially when parliament was sitting, and would have been seen regularly travelling between Apsley House and the Lords. Whether this induced more people in the Capital to write to the duke than in, say, Bristol is impossible to answer. However not all the letters posted in London came from London residents. For whatever reason people travelled to the Capital, some seem to have taken the opportunity of writing to the duke, giving hotel addresses for replies and informing Wellington of the length of their stay.<sup>49</sup> Again, this would indicate that the typical person who wrote to Wellington was one who enjoyed a reasonable standard of living.

What, then, prompted these people, from every corner of Britain and Ireland, to spend not inconsiderable amounts of time and money in writing letters to the duke of Wellington which could so easily have been ignored?

#### IV

The motivation of certain groups of writers has already been assessed. Many people wrote to the duke in the hope of gaining something from their correspondence, whether it was a job, a dedication, an endorsement or money. The authors of threatening letters sought to intimidate Wellington and force him into a course of action, which in November 1830 meant granting a reform of parliament or resigning. But the majority of letters discussed in this study were suggestions and letters of advice on the major public opinion issues during Wellington's Premiership, and it is not readily apparent what these authors would have gained by writing to the Prime Minister. They obviously felt strongly about the subject matter - whether it was Catholic relief, the distress or reform - and had conviction enough to put their thoughts on paper. From the following analysis it is clear that most of these people felt that it was their duty to make suggestions to government in times of crisis. They were trying to help their fellow countrymen, and in the process gain an acknowledgement from perhaps the most famous living Englishman.

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<sup>49</sup> For example see, WP 1/988/12, 6 January 1829; 1017/2, 11 May 1829; 1018/5, 15 May 1829

Many people were induced to write to Wellington because of the newspapers. This is not to say that press influence dictated what people thought on the issues because often the correspondents challenged the newspaper reports, but it did get people thinking about the debates. A considerable number of Wellington's correspondents were inspired to write to him 'having seen in the public papers' an article which captured their interest, whether it was critical of the duke, or on the government's foreign policy or on tea smuggling.<sup>50</sup> It was not just articles that encouraged people to correspond. Parliamentary debates were influential. Jonathan Abbott wrote to challenge Wellington's comments on the currency, which he had culled from *The Times* of 27 May 1829.<sup>51</sup> Other correspondence could also spur people on. John D'Alton sent Wellington his thoughts on Ireland because he had 'seen a letter from a Mr Cooke published in the *Dublin Evening Post*'.<sup>52</sup>

Numerous writers sent Wellington copies of newspapers and periodicals or drew his attention to a particular article or letter. For example, one recommended an article on the poor laws in the *Quarterly Review*, while another sent a copy of the *Morning Herald* which contained a report on the decaying state of Waterloo bridge.<sup>53</sup> On 11 August 1829 Mr Fiche sent a copy of the *Colchester Gazette*, which contained a letter purporting to be written by John Crosbie, Chaplain of the duke of Cumberland, that libelled Wellington. The duke asked his secretary if this was the same letter he had seen in the *Morning Journal* of 30 July, which it was, and replied to Fiche to that effect. This is of particular interest because it was that letter (by Crosbie) which prompted Wellington to successfully sue the *Morning*

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<sup>50</sup> For a selection of these correspondents see, WP 1/1027/16, 27 June 1829; 1066/17, 23 June 1829; 1019/23, 23 May 1829; 1027/20, 27 June 1829; 1033/23, 24 July 1829; 1041/8, 31 August 1829; 1066/7, 8 n.d. (1829); 1095/6, 16 February 1830; 1102/24, 20 March 1830; 1103/6, 23 March 1830; 1120/8, 17 June 1830; 1144/3, 1 October 1830; 1145/19, 15 October 1830; 1156/12, 16 December 1830

<sup>51</sup> WP 1/1026/19, 21 June 1829

<sup>52</sup> WP 1/1133/21, 8 August 1830

<sup>53</sup> WP 1/1045/12, 17 September 1829; 1037/10, 4 August 1829. For other examples of people transmitting newspapers see, 1044/9, 9 September 1829; 1147/16, 28 October 1830; 1150/25, 11 November 1830; 1151/26, n.d. (1830); 1189/19, 16 July 1831. Peel was also happy to receive newspapers, Read, Peel and Victorians, p. 315

*Journal*, a decision that brought considerable criticism.<sup>54</sup> A month later, having read that Wellington was going to prosecute, H E Brady from Ireland, felt it his duty to provide some information about Crosbie, who had got drunk while visiting his house one night. Brady hoped this intelligence would be of some use.<sup>55</sup>

Newspaper reports, then, could jog memories. On 9 November 1830 W Hanghall wrote to Wellington because of the 'rumoured existence of a conspiracy adverted to in the public papers'. This prompted him to recall 'an extraordinary [overheard] conversation about a fortnight ago'.<sup>56</sup> Press stories could also arouse anger. 'Medicus' was induced to write on the strength of anti-reform feeling in Scotland 'by the shameful conduct of the public press', and another correspondent sent Wellington a copy of the 'vile' *Newark Times*.<sup>57</sup> The role of the newspapers during the reform agitation, and the antipathy of Wellington's correspondents to this, has already been discussed.

Newspapers were important organs in disseminating information about the political process, and a number of people wrote to Wellington because a certain issue (for example, Catholic relief) 'appears likely to be again brought before parliament'.<sup>58</sup> Correspondents felt that writing to the Prime Minister was the most direct means of submitting a plan to government, and on subjects 'of great interest to the public' they hoped their suggestions might be useful in discussions.<sup>59</sup> The desire on the part of 'humble' individuals to be 'useful' during 'extraordinary times' was common, and they clearly felt some satisfaction in trying to be of assistance to their country.<sup>60</sup>

Indeed this correspondence reveals the deep-seated loyalism (as discussed recently by Linda Colley) of many people. Testaments of loyalty are extremely common in this

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<sup>54</sup> WP 1/1038/7, 11 August 1829. See Jupp, *Politics on eve of Reform*, p. 62; Sack, *Tory Press*, *passim*

<sup>55</sup> WP 1/1046/28, 26 September 1829

<sup>56</sup> WP 1/1150/7, 9 November 1830

<sup>57</sup> WP 1/1199/5, 17 October 1831; 1198/34, 13 October 1831

<sup>58</sup> WP 1/620/3, 2 March 1819; 1085/18, 16 January 1830

<sup>59</sup> WP 1/1032/24, 20 July 1829; 1039/2, 17 August 1829; 1004/24, 23 March 1829

<sup>60</sup> WP 1/973/2, 27 December 1828; 1032/19, 19 July 1829; 1094/8, 10 February 1830; 1102/12, 18 March 1830; 685/20, 20 November 1821; 1012/18, 25 April 1829

correspondence, the word 'duty' being particularly prevalent: 'I feel it a duty I owe to my country' (to write on Catholic Emancipation); 'It is a duty which every individual owes to his country to tender his best advice and assistance to its government' (on distress). The writers felt an 'obligation' to 'serve' 'my' country or state in times of need. These people were loyal subjects, who loved their 'king and country' and who wanted to live in a peaceful and prosperous kingdom. They felt that by writing to the Prime Minister they were helping to achieve that aim.<sup>61</sup>

While notions of duty, service and obligation were common, only a couple of writers felt that it was their privilege or right to send thoughts and suggestions to government.<sup>62</sup> Few correspondents were as forthright as one anonymous pamphleteer writing in 1830, although they may have agreed with his statement that:

The exalted situation which your Grace fills in the ministry renders unnecessary any apology for addressing you. His Majesty's councillors are, in fact, but the servants of the nation; since it is from the nation that they receive their wages, and it is for the benefit of the nation that they are presumed to work.<sup>63</sup>

Most went out of their way to 'excuse the liberty I have taken' in writing to Wellington. For some the duke was the reason for writing, especially if he had answered a former letter or had requested more information. Charles Aylmer wrote from London on Emancipation due to the 'undiminished attachment to your grace's person', while another correspondent was encouraged to write 'by the knowledge that your grace is equally accessible to the most

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<sup>61</sup> These terms of reference were extremely common, see WP 1/923/12, 24 March 1828; 999/13, 28 February 1829; 940/17, 14 July 1828; 987/6, 1 January 1829; 989/23, 15 January 1829; 1002/11, 8 March 1829; 1006/15, 31 March 1829; 1011/23, 20 April 1829; 1015/26, 4 April 1829; 1016/24, 8 May 1829; 1031/7, 9 July 1829; 1046/14, 24 September 1829; 1102/18, 20 March 1830; 1139/27, 6 September 1830; 1145/3, 11 October 1830; 1147/9, 26 October 1830; 1149/23, 6 November 1830; 1150/12, 13, 10 November 1830; 1152/19, 20 November 1830; 1178/19, 13 March 1831; 1198/34, 13 October 1831; 1201/20, 9 November 1831

<sup>62</sup> WP 1/1179/26, 28 March 1831; 1040/16, 27 August 1829

<sup>63</sup> 'An Englishman', *Letter to the duke of Wellington, on the Expediency of making Parliamentary Reform a Cabinet Measure* (1830)

humble individual as to the most distinguished'. J Gunby (also from London) was induced to write because he knew 'in common with my countrymen, that your grace is a zealous patron of the arts'.<sup>64</sup> More will be said about Wellington's perceived character later, but people clearly felt that it was permissible, if not a right, to pen a letter to a member of the ruling elite. As an anonymous correspondent pointed out 'your grace's station inflicts upon you the trouble of receiving communications from many who are unknown to you'.<sup>65</sup>

The many who were unknown to Wellington were motivated to write to him for a variety of reasons. Vanity and ego; reward and advantage; self-interest or a desire to serve and be dutiful all influenced people's decisions. As the thematic organisation of this study indicates, collectively these people were concerned about similar issues, although their opinions could differ widely. It is also possible to detect common terms of reference used in the correspondence, and an analysis of this language is attempted next.

## V

The language of correspondents has been analysed throughout this study. In Part Two it was seen that 'humility' was a common term of reference when writers wished to appear deferential to get a beneficial response. Various languages were discussed in Part One. Many writers who blamed their distressed state on political mismanagement used a language of discontent. The menacing language used in threatening letters was employed to frighten the recipient. And it has also been shown how 'duty' and 'service' were popular justifications for people sending letters of advice to the government. The purpose of this section is to analyse the languages of social and political description as used by Wellington's correspondents.

Much work has been done on the public language of political and social groupings. In 1967 Asa Briggs discussed the language of class, and recently the 'linguistic turn' has become a fashionable starting point for the analysis of society. For Stedman Jones, writing

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<sup>64</sup> WP 1/961/8, 17 October 1828; 1020/24, 28 May 1829; 1187/47, 27 June 1831

<sup>65</sup> WP 1/1159/78, 30 October 1830



over a decade ago, 'Class should be analysed in its linguistic context' and the language he chose for this analysis was the formal, printed, political ideas of radicalism.<sup>66</sup> The post-modernist, post-structuralist challenge to the methodological foundations of social history has necessitated some re-thinking on the part of historians. In the pages of *Social History* and *Past and Present*, scholars have called into question not only the usefulness of class as a category of historical explanation but also the future of social history itself. In place of class, it is argued that 'the people' had more relevance to the way ideas and opinions were constructed about others in the community and society in general. This approach, which is evident in the work of Patrick Joyce and James Vernon, has as yet failed to sweep away the 'older' mentalities. Class may not have 'fallen' to the extent Joyce suggests, indeed there may still be time for the parachute to open. Historians such as James Epstein and Neville Kirk maintain the relevance of class, arguing that the concept need not be reduced to a economic-deterministic category.<sup>67</sup> It is also argued that in attacking class 'post-modernist' scholars have defined the concept in an excessively restrictive economic way, and that in fact the 'determinists' do not adopt a mechanistic, undifferentiated view of class as has been the charge.<sup>68</sup>

The linguistic turn makes one aware of the dangers of imposing pre-given categories, for example class, upon events and behaviour in the past. Taken to its conclusion 'class is

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<sup>66</sup> G. S. Jones, *Languages of Class. Studies in English working class history 1832-1982* (Cambridge, 1983); Briggs, *Language of Class*

<sup>67</sup> For this some what spirited debate see D. Mayfield and S. Thorne, 'Social history and its discontents: Gareth Stedman Jones and the politics of language', *Social History*, XVII (May 1992); J. Lawrence and M. Taylor, 'The poverty of protest: Gareth Stedman Jones and the politics of language - a reply', *Social History*, XVIII (January 1993); P. Joyce, 'The imaginary discontents of social history: a note of response to Mayfield and Thorne, and Lawrence and Taylor', *Social History*, XVIII (January 1993); D. Mayfield and S. Thorne, 'Reply to 'The poverty of protest' and 'The imaginary discontents'', *Social History*, XVIII (May 1993); J. Vernon, 'Who's afraid of the 'linguistic turn'? The politics of social history and its discontents', *Social History*, XVIII (January 1994); N. Kirk, 'History, language, ideas and post-modernism: a materialist view', *Social History*, XVIII (May 1994). R. J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (1997); P. Joyce, *Democratic Subjects. The Self and the Social in Nineteenth Century England* (Cambridge, 1994)

<sup>68</sup> Kirk, *A Materialist view*, *passim*

increasingly seen less as objective reality than as a social construct'.<sup>69</sup> That is, class was less significant to people's lives than has previously been suggested. It is argued that the collective selves were more often than not represented by the term 'the people', and this is shown when the significance of language and discourse is appreciated.

Language is an important criterion to use when analysing historical events, but it does not stand-alone. Context, consciousness and economic and political structures are important and need not be reduced to a deterministic base. Language is a creative and a political act. Politics influences the shape and emphasis of language. 'Class' language when used by politicians, for example, is often less to do with social description and all to do with political rhetoric.<sup>70</sup> The construction of language takes place in various political, economic, social, cultural and fiscal contexts. People rarely just describe their world, but rather they try to shape it or impose order and rationality in hindsight. Utterances have important consequences for speakers and hearers and studies of language should not be divorced from these consequences. Moreover, language is often fluid and ambiguous leading to conflicts over a common discourse (who were 'the people'?). This conflict results in words and symbols having distinctive meanings for different social groups: 'people often appropriate the legitimating force of universalist appeals - to the people, the nation, or the bible - inflecting said usage with class meaning'.<sup>71</sup>

The following analysis will test these conclusions drawn from public language, by looking at the private language of individuals in the letters they wrote to Wellington. For this, the concepts of 'the people', 'class' and 'public opinion' will be investigated.

The dichotomy between 'The People' and 'Government' has already been mentioned at the beginning of this section, and some of Wellington's correspondents chose to use this adversarial, two-sector model when describing their world. For example, 'the people' were on the point of rebellion in Ireland; Catholic Emancipation was unpopular

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<sup>69</sup> Kirk, *A Materialist view*, p. 225

<sup>70</sup> G. Crossick, 'From gentlemen to residuum: languages of social description in Victorian Britain', P. J. Corfield (ed.), *Language, History and Class* (Oxford, 1991) p. 156

<sup>71</sup> J. Epstein, 'The populist turn', *Journal of British Studies*, 1993, p. 181; *Radical Expression*.

with ‘the people’; and the Beer Bill was ruinous to the morals of the ‘common people’.<sup>72</sup> The term was most commonly used in the contest over political rights and relationships, and features prominently in the discussions of the various Reform Bills during 1831 and 1832. ‘The People’ were those who sent representatives to parliament;<sup>73</sup> they were those thinking about reform, who were unhappy with Wellington’s declaration;<sup>74</sup> or they were cooling on reform.<sup>75</sup> This was the tactic of the anti-reformers during 1831-2; to stress the evils of the system ‘if the House of Commons actually represented the people’ and to argue that the people were not really in favour of reform. ‘The people’ were not the vox populi, but Wellington’s friends.<sup>76</sup> Two long, anonymous letters to Wellington illustrate this point, with ‘the people’ referred to many times on almost every page. There was already ‘an incessant intervention of the people in the proceedings of the legislature’, the only reason ‘for reform is that the people demand it and that it is necessary to satisfy the wishes of the people’. It was ‘time for the House of Lords to take a stand against the people’.<sup>77</sup> Wellington entirely concurred with these views and in his memorandum and in speeches to the lords, he drew on the conflict between ‘the people’ and the legislature, as represented by the Upper House, and sought to discredit the argument that government should bend to the will of the people, and ‘adopt this measure because it is the pleasure of the people’.<sup>78</sup>

‘The people’ then could be the electorate, pro- or anti-reformers or the rebellious Irish nation, but as stated above, it was always juxtaposed with the government or ruling elite. However, ‘the people as a whole’ could be divided into various subsets. It was not the only term of reference used by correspondents with many, especially when writing about distress, tending to use languages of ‘class’ and ‘classes’ to describe society. And by doing so, they identified the shared interests of certain groups as distinct from others. It is evident

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<sup>72</sup> WP 1/943/5, 24 July 1828; 1002/19, 3 November 1829; 1159/69, n.d. (1830)

<sup>73</sup> WP 1/1004/13, 39, 21 & 25 March 1829; 1159/118, 9 November 1830

<sup>74</sup> WP 1/1159/125, 134, 9 & 10 November 1830

<sup>75</sup> WP 1/1199/9, 19 October 1831

<sup>76</sup> WP 1/1147/18, 29 October 1830; 1159/145, 14 November 1830

<sup>77</sup> WP 1/1198/4, 1 October 1831; 1209/10, 20 August 1831

<sup>78</sup> WP 1/1207/12, 14, 15/1 for Wellington’s memoranda on reform; *Hansard*, 4 October 1831 col. 1198

that people were identified by their contemporaries either with an hierarchical or occupational appellation.

A number of writers did not specify whom they were discussing. 'Good fellowship' existed 'amongst all classes'; Catholic relief would 'remove disabilities from every class' and unite 'all classes of his majesty's subjects' in peace; 'all classes' were distressed.<sup>79</sup> The recognition that society was made up of 'classes' allowed people to then place each class in a position relative to another, and the most common way of doing this was via the familiar three-class model.

When Thomas Newenham wanted to discuss the problems of Ireland on the eve of Emancipation, he drew up a table comparing the incomes and number of families of the 'highest class', 'middle class' and 'lowest class' in Ireland and Britain. With 'reference to the source of public opinion', Newenham concluded that British opinion was represented by the middle class, but in Ireland, and this accounted for many of the problems on the island, the lowest class, susceptible to untoward influence, was the source of opinion (in favour of relief). He proposed the creation of an independent middle class and the education of the lowest class as solutions to the problem of governing Ireland.<sup>80</sup>

For other correspondents too, society was made up of the 'lower classes', the 'men in middle class of life' and the 'higher classes of the nation'. At the edges, the distinctions between the classes were blurred, but these hierarchical appellations were often complimented by occupational definitions which further served to distinguish contrasting groups. Thus the 'lower classes' were also the 'industrious classes', the 'labouring classes' (or 'class'), 'operatives' or the 'working classes' (all of which conveyed positive attributes against the rather negative 'lower' classes); the middle class were sometimes referred to as

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<sup>79</sup> See WP 1/760/10, 10 April 1823; 995/25, 10 February 1829; 998/1, 21 February 1829; 1001/22, 5 March 1829; 1003/7, 14 March 1829; 1017/6, 11 May 1829; 1066/12, n.d. (1829); 1088/14, 28 January 1830; 1106/27, 6 April 1830

<sup>80</sup> WP 1/970/1, n.d. (1828)

the 'intelligent and respectable classes' or defined by occupation - merchant, solicitor or fundholder.<sup>81</sup>

Some writers went into further detail about the people they were discussing. Henry Lucas from Liverpool wrote with suggestions which would aid 'the most valuable class of His Majesty's subjects' during the distress in 1829. For this he divided 'the working class' (whom he also described as the 'lower classes') into the manufacturing operatives and the agricultural labourers. These two groups may have had distinct problems which suggested different remedies, but Lucas identified them as a whole as people who toiled for a living.<sup>82</sup> Henry Appleton of London was concerned about the effects of machinery, and his plan applied 'to the preservation of that class of the community which constitutes the very sinews of a nation'. In this 'class' Appleton placed the labourer, artisan and trader.<sup>83</sup> Another writer described the tenantry as a class.<sup>84</sup> Josephus Beddome from Manchester, also writing about the distress, preferred to simply state that 'population my Lord includes a great variety of classes, engaged in very different pursuits, these may be arranged thus: 1st landed proprietors, 2nd operatives, 3rd all other classes'.<sup>85</sup>

Because groups of people were 'engaged in very different pursuits' this permitted some writers to establish a conflict of interests between them, which has been discussed above. For one anonymous writer, 'the complaints of the middle classes are great, yet those of the poor whom none of us can do without are ... greater.' H Lambert from County Wexford was more specific: 'all classes in the state, except fundholders' were suffering; the people were 'sacrificed to a privileged class'. J T Currie from Ayr deplored the 'present

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<sup>81</sup> For these hierarchical and occupational definitions see WP 923/12, 24 March 1828; 1001/12, 21, 3 & 5 March 1829; 1010/18, 16 April 1829; 1030/11, 3 July 1829; 1044/3, 8 September 1829; 1078/4, 24 December 1829; 1093/19, 9 February 1830; 1102/25, 20 March 1830; 1106/12, 3 April 1830; 1141/11, 16 September 1830; 1159/23, 42, 72, 74, 84, 94, 155 (2 February, n.d., 11 October, 25 October, 30 November, 4 November, 30 November 1830); 1190/8, 24 July 1831

<sup>82</sup> WP 1/1020/21, 28 May 1829

<sup>83</sup> WP 1/1023/2, 1 June 1829

<sup>84</sup> WP 1/1002/24, 12 March 1829

<sup>85</sup> WP 1/1034/32, 31 July 1829

state of the people': 'every class has suffered more or less by the long protracted system of the corn laws, except the land holders and the clergy'.<sup>86</sup>

As the last quote indicates, languages of 'class' and 'people' were not mutually exclusive. Indeed, most of Wellington's correspondents used a fluid language which employed 'older' terms of reference such as 'ranks' and 'orders' alongside concepts such as 'the people' and 'class'. Wellington, in a memorandum on discontent in the Horse Guards, wrote, 'it must be observed that they [the Guards] are taken from the ranks & of the class of the people and liable to be influenced by the views & sentiments of the people'.<sup>87</sup> Some writers preferred to refer to the 'lower orders of society' or the 'middle ranks in life'.<sup>88</sup> Adam Davies, trying to convince Wellington to appoint a negotiator at Constantinople, stated that 'if he is not to be found amongst the higher, go to the middling, nay, to the lowest ranks'.<sup>89</sup> The 'people in every rank of life' should join country banks.<sup>90</sup> Wellington's 'elevated rank and station' meant that he did not know 'the real sentiments of the people'.<sup>91</sup> Others spoke of conflicting interests groups. A Atkinson from Dublin discussed the 'higher ranks of the landed interest' and the 'mercantile interest', while an anonymous writer on Ireland used the following terms of reference: the 'landed interest', 'commercial interest', 'middling classes' and 'other classes of society'. Another anonymous correspondent writing about the malt and beer duties recognised that the 'agricultural, as well as the trading interests' were suffering, and sought relief for 'the middle and lower classes' in order to change 'the habits and comforts of the people'.<sup>92</sup>

When discussing society it appears that it was the convention to use all of the terms of social description available, which would indicate that 'class' or populist identities were not yet fully established. Wellington's correspondents often divided 'the people' into

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<sup>86</sup> WP 1/1159/35, n.d. (1830); 1013/3, 28 April 1829; 1039/5, 18 August 1829

<sup>87</sup> WP 1/648/1, June 1830

<sup>88</sup> WP 1/1015/16, 2 May 1829; 1016/24, 8 May 1829

<sup>89</sup> WP 1/1044/24, 12 September 1829

<sup>90</sup> WP 1/1051/1, 14 October 1829

<sup>91</sup> WP 1/1044/9, 9 September 1829

<sup>92</sup> WP 1/972/11, 22 December 1828; 1159/3, 12 n.d. (1830)

classes, orders, interests and ranks. For example John Jones wrote to Wellington from London in order to impart his knowledge about the revolutionary spirit of the people:

I am much among the lower orders of society and I can assure you that there is very much severe distress among the working classes generally.... I was of an opinion that the higher classes of society were not aware of the privation the lower orders were actually suffering.... I can further declare that revolution is not wanting among the distressed working class.<sup>93</sup>

For Thomas Crump from Banbury, the poor rates were the 'real grievance of the lower order' and his plan to correct this would impose no further expense 'either to the state or the people'. 'A.B.' felt that his suggestion would alleviate the suffering of the 'labouring artisan & the poor' as well as 'the middling classes of society & families of all ranks and descriptions'.<sup>94</sup> An anonymous correspondent believed that 'the second class of the middle order of society' was distressed, while a writer on reform asserted that Wellington gave 'the people just cause to assert their rights' because 'the higher orders do not bear their proportion of the public burdens' which resulted in the 'working classes' being disaffected.<sup>95</sup> Bingham Escott, an anti-reformer, wrote in 1831 that 'the people' would not be satisfied with the measure to give the vote to 'men in the middling rank of life'. In the unreformed system 'every class in society' was represented.<sup>96</sup>

A number of writers made an attempt to define who they were talking about in order to give their utterances more credence. J F Gordon of Edinburgh knew that the people - 'by which I mean the respectable class containing all the tenants who pay their landlords a rent of £1,200 to £30 a year' - were opposed to reform.<sup>97</sup> Others made appeals to 'opinion'. It has already been seen how Thomas Newenham equated public opinion with the British middle

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<sup>93</sup> WP 1/1205/4, 19 December 1831

<sup>94</sup> WP 1/1044/2, 8 September 1829; 1066/15, 13 May 1829

<sup>95</sup> WP 1/1159/38, 142 (23 February, 13 November 1830)

<sup>96</sup> WP 1/1178/33, 18 March 1831; for further examples of the usage of mixed languages see, 940/10, 3 July 1828; 987/6, 1 January 1829; 1010/17, 16 April 1829; 1015/28, 4 May 1829; 1040/15, 29 August 1829; 1144/3, 1 October 1830; 1149/22, 6 November 1830; 1159/20, n.d. (1830); 1199/21, 31 October 1831

<sup>97</sup> WP 1/1205/10, 24 December 1831

class, which echoed what Whig politicians were also saying. Lord Grey appealed 'to the middle classes who form the real and efficient mass of public opinion and without whom the power of the gentry is nothing'. While Sir James Graham stated in 1826:

I know no bound but public opinion. The seat of public opinion is in the middle ranks of life - in that numerous class, removed from the wants of labour and cravings of ambition, enjoying the advantages of leisure, and possessing intelligence sufficient for the formation of sound judgement, neither warped by interest not obscured by passion.<sup>98</sup>

'Asmodeus' believed that Wellington suffered in 'public opinion' as a result of the congress of Verona, and to correct this the duke should spread accurate information among 'the people' by publishing an accurate version of events. Samuel Miller also meant publishing when he informed Wellington of his intention to submit his ideas on the land tax to 'public opinion'. Henry Burgess meant the newspaper press when he stated that 'public opinion' had supported the 1819 currency act.<sup>99</sup> Thomas Rowland from Bristol believed that reform was unpopular because he knew 'the feelings of the people generally.... I make a point of investigating & of conversing with every class (except the highest and lowest) upon all subjects'. George Craik from London feared that 'the state of public opinion will make it impossible to carry on the government on the principle of resistance to all reform'. Finally, an anonymous correspondent commenting on the distress, travelled amongst the 'different classes of society ... and know also the public opinions, when I say public opinion, I understand the feelings of the very different classes in general' but 'not those of a mob'.<sup>100</sup>

By appealing to 'opinion' or by basing observations on the behaviour of the people, correspondents hoped to add weight to their arguments. As the preceding analysis has shown, the language of social description, in private correspondence, was remarkably fluid, and this compliments the many studies done on public, political language in this period. 'The people' might dominate discussions over reform, but 'class' was common when discussing the

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<sup>98</sup> Both quoted in Briggs, *Language of class*, p. 56. See Davis, *House of Lords*, for a useful discussion of public opinion.

<sup>99</sup> WP 1/760/16, 29 April 1823; 1020/20, 28 May 1829; 1110/9, 28 April 1830. All written from London

<sup>100</sup> WP 1/1198/7, 1 October 1831; 1198/32, 11 October 1831; 1159/144, 14 November 1831



distress. While the 'linguistic turn' has proved a useful historical tool, it is clear from the above that 'the people' as a concept did not have more relevance than, say, class, to the way opinions were constructed about society. Rather, a mixed language, consisting of hierarchical, adversarial and 'class' elements, was used by people when writing to the Prime Minister, who, clearly understood them and was not averse to using the same languages himself.

## VI

The duke of Wellington treated this correspondence seriously. That is to say he read the letters, replied to them and then they were filed. This permitted Wellington to refer to previous correspondence if necessary. On John Farren's letter discussing trade with Turkey, the duke left a note for his secretary: 'let me see my last letter to this gentleman'.<sup>101</sup> This indicates that Wellington could and did keep track of the people who wrote to him. Wellington rarely dismissed or destroyed these letters, although on occasion he did return them. One of the duke's indexes notes the fate of Daniel Payne's booklets on the currency, 'another of his blue covered mss returned in a blank cover'.<sup>102</sup> Most correspondents did get a brief reply from Wellington and if it was warranted a longer response was forthcoming. Moreover a number of these letters, on diverse and varied subjects, were discussed and acted upon by Wellington and his colleagues.

Wellington often asked for information from relevant authorities to collaborate suggestions or opinions expressed in his correspondence. George Harley's contention that there were excessive numbers of field officers in the engineers led to the duke seeking advice from Lieut. Col. Chapman.<sup>103</sup> Mrs J G Tennell wrote to Wellington because she was concerned that a new fever hospital was placed dangerously near to the main guard in Limerick. The truth was that the main guard was next to her house which in turn was adjacent to the fever hospital. This letter set in motion a chain of enquiry that involved Lord

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<sup>101</sup> WP 1/1099/6, 1 March 1830

<sup>102</sup> WP6/2/6, Index Volume 1829-30

<sup>103</sup> WP 1/613/10, 6 January 1819

Fitzroy Somerset, the Commander-in-Chief in Ireland, and the medical officer in Limerick who confirmed the hospital (which was in fact for casualties without contagious diseases) was safe. Thirteen days after Tennell wrote her letter, Wellington was able to allay her fears.<sup>104</sup>

The duke also sought advice on legal questions. Goldsworthy Gurney requested a charter to form a company to enable him to finance experiments into steam carriages. Again Wellington wrote a note to his secretary, this time asking if a law existed regulating the establishment of chartered companies. George Maule, the solicitor to the treasury, informed Wellington that no bill should pass the House of Lords until a certain amount of capital was raised.<sup>105</sup> Robert Adair from London wrote to the Prime Minister on behalf of some nuns who had property seized during the French revolution. The property and the funds were English and therefore the nuns should have been compensated under the 1814 convention. Their claim had previously been denied. Wellington sought information on the claim. It had proved difficult to acquire the documentation but eventually he found the case in the Privy Council office. After studying the particulars, Wellington concluded that the original decision was correct.<sup>106</sup>

During 1829 and 1830 Wellington referred to his colleagues nearly 850 letters, and an alphabetical index was kept which allows the historian to trace them. For example, a letter from Robert Atkinson was forwarded to Goulburn on 5 January 1829, as was one from Alex Mundell in July. One of James Devereux's many letters was sent to the Treasury in February 1829. Other letters were sent to Joseph Planta, the Joint Secretary to the Treasury (often to do with the press); Lord Beresford, Master General of the Ordnance; Sir George Murray, Secretary of State for the Colonies; Lord Aberdeen at the Foreign Office; the First Lord of the Admiralty and the Treasury Solicitor.<sup>107</sup> Peter Jeffrey, offering a suggestion on how a plague in a Gibraltar garrison could be prevented, was advised by Wellington to write to the medical board or the college of physicians, while Richard Richardson, who wrote

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<sup>104</sup> WP 1/1192/7, 5 August 1831

<sup>105</sup> WP 1/1041/7, 31 August 1829

<sup>106</sup> WP 1/1145/8, 12 October 1830

<sup>107</sup> WP6/2/6

about the proposed extension of the two penny post in London, was referred to the Post Master General.<sup>108</sup> The fate of these letters when they reached the appropriate office is another matter, but Wellington at least made sure they were sent to the right people.

Wellington and his colleagues in the government shared their correspondence if it was deemed appropriate.<sup>109</sup> Interestingly, Rev. Gleig notes that Wellington sent him a copy of Escott's letter on reform.<sup>110</sup> It appears then that this correspondence was not treated as private or personal. Although intriguingly a letter from Thomas Nash, dated 1 May 1829, stating that the remuneration of curates in Ireland should be increased, was copied and 'sent to Mr Goulburn without date or signature'.<sup>111</sup>

It has already been shown how anonymous letters, and those sending information, were treated very seriously. Wellington kept the threatening letters he received in November 1830, annotating some 'Keep for the handwriting',<sup>112</sup> and a number were investigated by the Home Office.<sup>113</sup> One correspondent believed a play at Sadlers Wells called 'The woodcutter' was 'jacobinical'. Wellington sent the letter to Sir Richard Birnie, the police magistrate, who went to see the play, and enquired after the playwright, concluding that both were harmless.<sup>114</sup> Mr Levien had been made acquainted with a secret armed expedition. Wellington wrote back saying that he should call on Edward Drummond, his secretary. A memo from Drummond states that Levien seemed respectable, but did not know the names of those involved, or the destination, save only that it was placed in the hands of a smuggler called Johnston. This prompted Wellington to send the details to Aberdeen, with a recommendation that he inform the Spanish ambassador.<sup>115</sup> Another writer congratulated Wellington on the prosecution of the *Morning Journal*, but believed the sleeping partners

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<sup>108</sup> WP 1/1015/13, 2 May 1829; 1041/8, 31 August 1831

<sup>109</sup> WCD, vol. v, Wellington to Peel, 5 November 1828, returning a pamphlet on the Catholic Association

<sup>110</sup> Gleig, *Reminiscences*, p. 104

<sup>111</sup> WP1/1015/2, 1 May 1829

<sup>112</sup> For example, WP1/1159/9, n.d. (1830)

<sup>113</sup> WP1/1159/101, 113, November 1830

<sup>114</sup> WP1/1120/6, 9 June 1830

<sup>115</sup> WP1/1133/15, 7 August 1830

had escaped the fine. The duke wrote to Joseph Planta who concluded that the statement was false.<sup>116</sup> Similar anonymous accusations, against a foreign consul and a surveyor general of the customs, were also investigated by the relevant authorities.<sup>117</sup>

There is also some evidence that the cabinet discussed such letters. In 1819 Liverpool forwarded an anonymous letter on Catholic Emancipation to the duke.<sup>118</sup> A year later, an anonymous letter questioning the loyalty of the army, prompted the Prime Minister to again write to Wellington:

I know the handwriting of the enclosed. I have communicated only to Lord Sidmouth, and he will direct a cabinet to be summoned for half past nine o'clock tonight to consider what is best to be done.<sup>119</sup>

Other types of letter were also acted upon. A letter from James Smith claiming that signatures for an anti-Catholic petition had been improperly collected was forwarded to the local peer (Lord Bexley) who replied that he would check the signatures before presenting it.<sup>120</sup> We have also seen how Wellington responded to correspondence discussing various aspects of the economy. John Wylie's letter on the commercial convention of 1815 between the USA and Britain was investigated by Thomas Peregrine Courtney, Vice President of the Board of Trade.<sup>121</sup> Courtney too investigated John Palmer's letter on behalf of the glove trade in Worcester. The duke replied to Palmer that the government could do nothing for them.<sup>122</sup>

The above has shown the mechanisms associated with this correspondence. Wellington forwarded letters to the relevant people, or asked for advice from suitably informed persons. The plans and suggestions of some writers were viewed to be sufficiently

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<sup>116</sup> WP1/1083/11, 25 December 1829

<sup>117</sup> WP1/1066/6, 1066/25, n.d. (1829)

<sup>118</sup> WP1/623/1, April 1819

<sup>119</sup> WP1/647/15, 27 June 1820

<sup>120</sup> WP1/1003/12, 15 March 1829

<sup>121</sup> WP1/938/13, 27 June 1828

<sup>122</sup> WP1/940/8, 2 July 1828

persuasive to have them looked into. But to what extent were these letters an influence on the duke?

To a degree this question has already been answered in the discussion in Part One. A Prime Minister could not fail to be influenced by the contents of his mailbag, even if it was only to reveal to him the strength of feeling on a given subject. The unsolicited letters show the opinions of a section of the public who bothered to write to the duke. These writers possessed political knowledge, thought and discussed relevant issues and made their opinions known. On Catholic relief Wellington was in agreement with the people who were concerned about the economic problems of Ireland and with those who suggested securities for the Protestant constitution. But he did not require convincing of the necessity of doing something about the problem of governing Ireland, that decision had already been made. Likewise the duke would not have been put off by the hostile reception to his measure. This correspondence did not induce Wellington to change his mind. But policy makers do not live in a vacuum, and Wellington through his correspondence would have been well aware of the feelings of his countrymen towards his administration.

This was also the case with the letters discussing economic distress. The post-war Tory governments, and by implication Wellington, were held responsible for the distress and the people tried to convince the duke to do something. He agreed with some people that machinery was part of the problem, his administration cut taxes and governmental expenditure, and Wellington could see the usefulness of the work creation schemes. However, he remained unmoved on the currency question, for to admit a general failing of Tory policy would have been political folly. Wellington did not believe that the distress was general, and there is some evidence that he may have drawn on his correspondence for this conclusion. In a speech to the Lords on 25 February 1830 Wellington used the example of the healthy state of savings banks to show that distress was not general. Twelve days previously, Rev. Henry Wagner informed the Prime Minister that the deposits of the Brighton savings bank had exceeded withdrawals: 'this fact, at a time, when the distress is so much spoken of, may be worthy of your Grace's notice'.<sup>123</sup> This may have been mere

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<sup>123</sup> WP 1/1094/21, 13 February 1830; *Hansard*, Vol. 22, col. 979, 25 February 1830

coincidence, or Wagner's letter may have supported what Wellington knew from other sources. What is interesting, is that the duke used that part of the letter which confirmed his opinions. He (if indeed he was referring to the letter) made no reference to the section that pointed to distress, such as the widespread use of soup aid. However it would have been strange had a politician not used those parts of his correspondence which he agreed with to back up a position in parliament.

Wellington and Peel also used the anonymous threatening letters of November 1830 in parliament as evidence of the existence of a conspiracy and as justification for the cancellation of the King's visit to the city. This is not to say that these letters intimidated Wellington, but they could, and did, have a dramatic influence on events.

However it is in 1831 where the correspondence appears to have had the greatest influence upon Wellington. As with distress, the opinion expressed in these letters is not the one that is found in the majority of the press. These letters are testimony to the strength of anti-reform feeling among certain sections of society. From the beginning Wellington had been sceptical about the strength of popular feeling for reform. His actions were designed to stall the Bill until another issue came along and captured the public imagination. When the Lords rejected the Bill in October, Wellington believed that the ensuing delay could be used to change public opinion. The reports in Wellington's correspondence would have strengthened his conviction, and he used the intelligence they provided to try to discredit the political unions. Many anti-reform writers were anxious to stress the declining popularity of the reform issue. In August and September, B S Escott informed Wellington that 'the excitement is gone & people of all parties are tired of the question'.<sup>124</sup> Other correspondents preferred to stress that people of intellect, property and respectability were all against reform - 'in short all who have anything to lose'.<sup>125</sup> These sentiments were echoed in the right wing press. In leading articles and letters from correspondents, the *Standard* highlighted the reaction against the Reform Bill as shown by the poor turnout at political meetings.<sup>126</sup> Indeed, the role of the press in sustaining this agitation, and how it reported the issue, was

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<sup>124</sup> WP 1/1192/11, 7 August 1831; 1195/8, 9 September 1831

<sup>125</sup> WP 1/1198/7, 1 October 1831; 1205/10, 24 December 1831

<sup>126</sup> *Standard*, 22, 23, 26 September 1831

the subject of much debate in Wellington's correspondence. And this too reflected Wellington's concerns on the pernicious influence of newspapers.

It can be argued then that this correspondence represented a form of public opinion, and that it could reinforce Wellington's opinions on certain issues. These opinions, suggestions and plans were treated seriously by the Prime Minister. These letters were discussed in cabinet, distributed to the relevant offices, reported on by knowledgeable officials and used by Wellington in Parliament and in discussions with other politicians to justify a course of action. Not all of the letters were useful in this way and Wellington did not agree with much that was written. This correspondence may have reinforced Wellington's convictions in certain cases (sedition, anti-reform feeling, the machinery question, reduction of taxes and securities for the Church of England), but it had less influence when it contradicted what he duke believed (as with the currency, the introduction of an income tax, or the need for reform). This does little to distract from the importance of these letters. They informed the Prime Minister of the feelings of the people his administration governed. They show that ordinary individuals were politicised, that they thought about and discussed political issues. Often it was a report in a newspaper, an editorial or a speech that prompted people to think about the issues, but the media and politicians could not dictate to people what to think. It is perhaps ironic that a Prime Minister who is charged with ignoring the press, and by implication opinion, was in fact extremely well informed of the sentiments of his countrymen.

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