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Richard Oastler, Toryism, Radicalism and the Limitations of Party, c.1807-1846\*

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Richard Oastler (1789-1861), the immensely popular and fiery orator who campaigned for factory reform and for the abolition of the new poor law in the 1830s and 1840s, has been relatively neglected by political historians. Few historians, however, have questioned his toryism. As this article suggests, labelling Oastler an ‘ultra-tory’ or a ‘Church and State Tory’ obscures more than it reveals. There were also radical strands in Oastler’s ideology. There has been a tendency amongst Oastler’s biographers to treat him as unique. By comparing Oastler with other tories – Sadler, Southey and the young Disraeli – as well as radicals like Cobbett, this article locates him much more securely amongst his contemporaries. His range of interests were much broader (and more radical) than the historiographical concentration on factory and poor law reform suggests. While there were periods when Oastler’s toryism (or radicalism) was more apparent, one of the most consistent aspects of his political career was a distaste for party politics. Far from being unique or a maverick, Oastler personified the pervasive anti-party sentiments held by the working classes, which for all the historiographical attention paid to popular radicalism and other non-party movements still tends to get lost in narratives of the ‘rise of party’.

**Keywords:** tory-radicalism; rise of party; William Cobbett; popular politics

## 1

Mr Oastler had no sooner presented himself to the Meeting, after the Huddersfield Address had been presented to Feargus O'Connor, Esq., than he was met by a cry, from a person on the right of the Hustings, who shouted, 'a Tory and a Radical!'<sup>1</sup>

Richard Oastler has long defied easy political categorisation. Deceptively, he appears to be the quintessential tory: the emphasis he placed on organic communities; social hierarchy – his maxim was 'The Altar, the Throne, and the Cottage'; his pessimistic Christian world-view, to say nothing of the temperamental characteristics – such as a conspiratorial view of history – that some commentators have identified as the essence of toryism.<sup>2</sup> Yet his was not merely a toryism beset by contradiction; there were radical strands in Oastler's creed. As the radical *Leeds Patriot* conceded, 'To Mr Oastler they [the workmen] owe much; and ultra-tory as he is in *name*; he possesses genuine radical feelings'.<sup>3</sup> The London radical Francis Place, who characteristically viewed Oastler with suspicion, recalled that 'Mr Oastler called himself a Tory, but was received by the wildest of the Democrats as a friend in common'.<sup>4</sup> For all Place's suspicion, his choice of language and insinuation was acute: while Oastler might call himself a tory, others did not see him in this light. Rather than smooth over these apparent contradictions or falsely reconcile them by labelling him a 'Tory Radical' or a 'Tory Democrat' (labels that neither Oastler nor his followers recognized) as Cecil Driver did, in what is still the only substantial biography of Oastler,<sup>5</sup> we should take them as our starting point. Oastler's repeated affirmations that he was a tory have a hollow ring at times and often served as a shield to license his radicalism. When

Oastler's biographers have been willing to concede any radicalism on his part it has only been in relation to his incitements to physical force as the ultimate means to resist tyrannical factory owners and those charged with implementing the new poor law. In short, Oastler was radical – revolutionary even – but only in method and rhetoric, and possibly not even then.<sup>6</sup>

The purpose here is not to revisit the strategy and tactics of Oastler's campaigns for factory reform and against the new poor law, ground that is now well-traversed.<sup>7</sup> Yet Oastler himself has received very little sustained attention from historians: the *Bibliography of British and Irish History* lists a mere three secondary items specifically on him.<sup>8</sup> The focus here is on Oastler's ideology, chiefly in the 1830s and early 1840s – the period in which he was most politically active – but some attempt is made to situate this period in the broader context of a political career that spanned the first half of the nineteenth century. Oastler's toryism has been exaggerated.<sup>9</sup> Obviously, placing Oastler depends in part on how one defines toryism; yet even a broader definition such as that suggested by R. L. Hill in his classic study *Toryism and the People* still fails to fully capture the totality of Oastler's ideology.<sup>10</sup> Situating Oastler is also a relational exercise. There has been a tendency amongst his biographers to treat him as unique. By comparing Oastler with other Tories – Michael Thomas Sadler, Robert Southey and the young Disraeli – the second section locates him much more securely amongst his contemporaries by highlighting the similarities as well as differences. As the third section suggests, much of Oastler's creed was in fact closer to Cobbettite radicalism than it was to the new Conservatism of Peel and Wellington, or even to the evangelical toryism associated with his mentor, Sadler, a relationship noted in numerous previous studies but one that has not been fully explored.

Restoring the radical elements to Oastler's ideology allows us to understand his widespread popularity with northern labourers without resorting to crude explanations such as a deferential affinity for toryism, or an immature political obsession with gentleman leaders.<sup>11</sup> This is a view which has stubbornly persisted; one recent survey concluding that while tories such as Oastler 'could join in common cause with radicals and Chartists against the new poor law, their basic political creed diverged sharply from their allies'.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, John Knott has observed – incorrectly – that Oastler was an 'opponent of political reform, not caring about Trade Unions' and knew 'little about the lives of working people'.<sup>13</sup> Oastler's range of interests were much broader (and more radical) than the historiographical concentration on factory and poor law reform suggests, as demonstrated by his prolific pamphlet writing in the 1830s; his *Fleet Papers*, the periodical he edited whilst in prison (1841-4), much of which has been skated over in the existing historiography; and by the range of individuals with whom he corresponded.<sup>14</sup> Although there were periods when his toryism was more apparent, one of the most consistent themes to emerge in Oastler's career is his revulsion against party politics. Thus, the article concludes by situating Oastler in the context of an enduring anti-party strand in popular politics, and in doing so challenges recent attempts to claim Oastler exclusively for an emerging popular Conservatism.<sup>15</sup> The example of Oastler provides further evidence of the limitations of 'party as an organising concept' for understanding nineteenth-century British politics.<sup>16</sup>

## 2

Oastler was a quixotic tory, ill-at-ease with the modern Conservatism of Sir Robert Peel. 'He has divided you and sunk you and made you ashamed of your name', was

Oastler's judgment on Peel after a decade of his leadership of the Conservative Party.<sup>17</sup> Oastler held 'the trickery of Peel' partly responsible for the failure to pass a ten hours bill (limiting the hours of employment in factories for women and children).<sup>18</sup> The friction between Oastler and the Conservative party was clearly two-way. The Duke of Wellington, with whom Oastler was at one point on friendly terms, described him as a 'strange Tory'.<sup>19</sup> Even in the West Riding, the so-called heartland of the 'Tory-Radical alliance', there were many tories that held aloof from, or were outright opposed to, Oastler.<sup>20</sup> After all, how many tories would have led a militant campaign against the tithe-claims of a clergyman (however outrageous those claims may have been), as Oastler did against the Vicar of Halifax in 1827? How many tory Churchmen would dispute the right of the bishops of the Church of England to sit in the House of Lords, or were so outspoken in their abuse of pluralities, non-resident clergy, and the riches of the bishops? When the Irish tithe war was raging in the mid-1830s, Oastler claimed that the Irish labourers were justified in refusing to pay either tithes or rent given that 'poverty has no relief' in Ireland.<sup>21</sup> Oastler made no secret of his opposition to the new Conservatism that was supplanting the old toryism. As he lamented, 'Sorry I am, that you will now find many Tories, willing to rub off their party prejudices' in the interests of 'advocat[ing] the right, the Christian and natural rights of Poverty and Labour'.<sup>22</sup> Very few tories indeed would have spoken of 'natural rights' at all.

It may be significant that Oastler's toryism had unusual origins. It was not in reaction to the revolutionary bloodshed and warfare of the 1790s and 1800s that turned Oastler (or his father). Unlike Robert Southey, a similar figure in some ways to Oastler, he never had the same dread fear of Jacobinism that gripped the mature Southey (another convert from radicalism).<sup>23</sup> The future 'Church and King Tory' was raised in a methodist and radical household. Though Oastler's father, Robert, hailed

from a North Riding of Yorkshire tory family, by the time Richard was born in 1789 he was moving in whig-liberal and methodist circles in Leeds where he was a merchant. Robert Oastler had even been part of the New Connexion secession. While Robert Oastler gravitated back to the wesleyans, Richard seems to have inherited some of his father's democratic chafing against religious (and political) hierarchies, as the protest against the Vicar of Halifax's tithe-claims testifies. It was the issue of black slavery and his humanitarian commitment to abolition that introduced Robert and Richard Oastler to tory politics. Yet Oastler's toryism, like his father's, was issue-specific and based on measures not men, though in an age when fixed party identities were still only in the process of solidifying there was nothing unusual in that. While the Oastlers worked tirelessly to re-elect William Wilberforce as MP for Yorkshire in the 1807 general election, Wilberforce was more of an independent albeit one with tory leanings. More telling is that the Oastlers did not support the tory candidate Henry Lascelles (seen by some as Wilberforce's running mate) partly because Lascelles was implicated in the slave trade but also because he had supported the mechanisation of the West Riding cloth trade against the interests of the small clothiers and croppers.<sup>24</sup> Instead, the Oastlers also supported the whig Lord Milton: indeed, Oastler's father even offered to repair relations between Milton's father Earl Fitzwilliam and some of his tenants at Malton who had supported the tory candidate at the previous election.<sup>25</sup> Only retrospective partisan gloss presented Oastler as a 'Tory from a child'.<sup>26</sup>

It is unclear when exactly Oastler began to consider himself a tory and a member of the Church of England as he was describing himself by the 1830s,<sup>27</sup> though previous biographers have suggested that it occurred sometime after he was appointed steward of the Fixby estate near Huddersfield in 1820. Little is actually known about Oastler's political evolution in the 1820s due to lack of evidence.

According to Driver, Oastler's tory Churchmanship was a product of his reinvention as a squire-paternalist, the role he played in the absence of his employer, Thomas Thornhill. Oastler's religious views merit more extended treatment than can be offered here, but it is worth noting that these, too, defy easy categorisation.<sup>28</sup> The immediate roots of Oastler's toryism, and his Churchmanship, can, perhaps, be traced to his time at Leeds in the 1810s. It was here that Oastler met his mentor, another member of the Leeds merchant and methodist community, the tory evangelical Michael Thomas Sadler. R. L. Hill's cursory assessment that a comparison between the two men is 'needless, for they were demonstrably complete opposites' seems to overstate the case given the common ground between them (though his judgment that Oastler was ultimately 'more Dantonesque, and less exercised by conventionality' is astute).<sup>29</sup> From the time that the two men became friends in the early 1810s down to 1830, there was very little to distinguish between them. Neither had a head for business – both had failed in the Leeds merchant community; both had a tendency towards evangelical piety; both for a time had feet in methodist and Church camps, eventually opting for the Church of England. Both men had engaged extensively in philanthropic work in Leeds.<sup>30</sup> It is possible that it was through this work that both men became attracted to the Church of England, perhaps because of its superior resources, its equal emphasis on faith and works (at least outside of the evangelical mainstream), and its self-proclaimed role as the friend of the poor. Both emerged as vocal opponents of catholic emancipation; were hostile to Malthus's population theories; and were abolitionists who switched their attention to the problems of 'white slavery' at home.<sup>31</sup> None of this is to suggest that Oastler was simply copying Sadler – the two men were close friends and no doubt arrived at some of these positions together, though given that Sadler was nine years older, it is almost certain that he was the dominant of the two, at least until 1830. It



was not until the launch of the West Riding factory movement in 1830-1 that Oastler emerged as a fully-fledged political personality in his own right, helped perhaps by the fact that Sadler had been elected MP for Newark in 1829, his new parliamentary duties taking him away from Yorkshire, thus leaving Oastler free to develop his own interests. Factory reform seems to have been the first issue on which Oastler led and Sadler followed. Oastler issued his thundering letter against factory slavery in September 1830, but it was not until the end of 1831 that Sadler became involved.<sup>32</sup>

Whatever the real causes of their conversion to factory reform, by 1830-31 the two men began to diverge. For the remainder of his life (he died in 1835), Sadler remained much more squarely an ultra-tory evangelical than did Oastler. Compare, for example, their responses to Malthus and the problems of the Poor Law: Sadler was largely content to argue – in turgid prose – that Malthus’s population theory was bogus because it was contrary to the Biblical promise of ever-lasting bounteous creation.<sup>33</sup> For Oastler this was merely the starting point: not only could Biblical precedents be found to challenge the legality of the new poor law, but the Bible could also be used to justify civil disobedience. Oastler concluded his 1838 work, *The Right of the Poor to Liberty and Life*, with a seven page appendix of small print consisting of quotations from the Bible to make these very points.<sup>34</sup> Although Sadler died before resistance to the new poor law really began, it is almost certain that he would not have countenanced Oastler’s call to direct action, just as he and other tory evangelical allies had refused to do so when Oastler began inciting the masses to take direct action in the campaign for factory reform.<sup>35</sup> Here the contrast between Oastler and other similar popular tory figures he is often bracketed with is striking – Parson Bull of Byerley (Bradford), Samuel Roberts of Sheffield, and even, eventually, the Rev. Joseph Rayner Stephens – the ex-methodist minister of Ashton-under-Lyne who was, for a time at least, the Lancashire equivalent of Oastler. Having played their part

in fanning the flames of popular discontent in the mid-1830s, Roberts and Stephens came to see in Chartism a Frankenstein, prompting them to speak out against the movement in a way that Oastler never did.<sup>36</sup> Oastler, unlike his brief allies the ultras and evangelical Tories, was not going to be held back by fears of the mob.<sup>37</sup>

### 3

Following Oastler's appointment as steward of the Fixby estate in 1820 his Toryism remained conditional. This was underlined by his support for Queen Caroline in 1820, which put him in opposition to the then Tory government's prosecution of the Queen. Oastler also spoke out against the Six Acts in the wake of Peterloo.<sup>38</sup> His Toryism was real enough at various conjunctures, but the adage of 'no zealot like a convert' does not apply to Oastler (a convert, that is, if we proceed on the assumption that he had initially shared his father's liberal-radical leanings). One possible alternative is to view Oastler's political beliefs in cycles. Viewed from this perspective, his Toryism appears to have been at its strongest in 1829, 1834, 1841 and 1846, the years in which, respectively, Catholic emancipation and the new poor law were enacted, the Conservatives won a general election, and the corn laws were repealed.

The issue of Catholic emancipation undoubtedly reinforced his Toryism in the late 1820s. Yet it is ironic that the first issue which accentuated Oastler's Toryism pitted him against the appeasing instincts of mainstream opinion in the Tory Party, siding as he did with the ultra-Tory opponents of emancipation. Oastler's newfound ultra-Tory allies were unlikely bedfellows. True, in several interventions in the *Leeds Intelligencer* Oastler gave vent to 'No Popery' sentiments, though he was always careful to distinguish between what he regarded as the intolerant despotism

of Roman Catholicism and its bloody persecutions (the kernel of Southey's anti-catholicism), and the absolute right of Roman Catholics to religious toleration and freedom to worship, which owed just as much to seventeenth century whiggish critiques of catholicism as it did to the blood-curdling accounts of the tory right.<sup>39</sup> For someone who had just waged a militant campaign against tithes – and who was on the cusp of waging one of the most organised, bitter and violent campaigns of the nineteenth century – for factory reform – Oastler's response to catholic emancipation seems tepid. In his defence, the wider ultra response to catholic emancipation also lacked bite: as the fate of the Brunswick clubs showed, the ultras lacked the populist courage of their 'No Popery' convictions.<sup>40</sup> Yet it seems unlikely that Oastler held back because he feared the consequences of inciting the mob – something he would do with gusto in the 1830s. One can only conclude that it was not an issue that he felt that strongly about, or – perhaps – an issue on which he had conflicting views. For example, Oastler also objected to catholic emancipation on the same grounds voiced by many English radicals: the disfranchisement of the Irish forty-shilling freedholders and, more forcefully, that it would do little to redress the poverty of the Irish labourers (an objection Sadler also raised). If Ireland was barbaric as Southey claimed, then Oastler and Saddler took the view that England had made it so. There was little anti-Irishness in Oastler's cultural politics, which distinguished him from an emerging racial/ethnic popular toryism in the north.<sup>41</sup> Oastler's commitment to religious freedom was not merely empty rhetoric; just a year before he had welcomed the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, vestigial symbols which branded dissenters as second-class citizens.<sup>42</sup> Oastler's position here is unusual in that the few voices of opposition raised against repeal were extreme evangelical tories, including his friend Sadler.<sup>43</sup> His distance from the ultra-tories was further underlined in his response to parliamentary reform. While he was

certainly an opponent of the various whig bills, this was on the (radical) grounds that they threatened to disenfranchise those labourers who already possessed the franchise. Above all, he resented the way in which parliamentary reform distracted attention from factory reform, which, he feared, would have even less chance of success in a reformed parliament dominated by capitalist interests.<sup>44</sup> There was little evidence of the histrionic tory view that parliamentary reform meant revolution and republicanism.<sup>45</sup> Neither does he appear to have subscribed to the spiteful ultra-tory view that a more popular franchise that registered the anti-catholic prejudices of the masses would have saved the protestant constitution, a view which led a small number of ultras to offer little opposition to the whig reform bill.<sup>46</sup>

Oastler's conversion to the cause of factory reform in 1830 not only muddied his own partisanship it also complicated electoral and popular politics as the contests at Leeds in 1832 and at Huddersfield later in the decade show. On the day the third Reform Bill received royal assent, Oastler wrote to a friend: 'What am I now? A Tory? No. A Whig? No, no, no. A Radical? I don't know. Time proves all things.'<sup>47</sup> After all, Oastler was emphatic that factory reform was not a partisan issue. Contrary to what some of his whig-liberal enemies asserted – that factory reform was a tory gambit to lure the masses away from supporting parliamentary reform – Oastler worked tirelessly to build a cross-party campaign, even to the point of stating that any Conservative candidate who refused to support factory reform would not have his support.<sup>48</sup> Theodore Koditschek has argued that it was the hostile response of liberal dissenting manufacturers to factory reform that 'turned Oastler decisively to the right'.<sup>49</sup> Yet subsequent developments suggest that if Oastler did turn, it was not decisively. When Oastler visited Halifax in early March 1832 to deliver a public speech on factory reform, he returned to his earlier conflict with the Vicar of Halifax, who, to Oastler's dismay, had refused to support the cause. Oastler not only berated

the vicar for hiding behind his toryism when he had made his exorbitant tithe-claims in 1827 – availing himself of a tory lawyer to thwart the protesting parishioners, Oastler observed – he also went on to attack the abuse of pluralities and absenteeism in the Church of England.<sup>50</sup>

When the Whig government began to pass controversial legislation, Oastler rediscovered some of his tory predilections, but only some. Once it became clear to him that tory aristocrats like the Duke of Wellington were unwilling to play the paternalistic role that he willed them to, he came to the view shared by popular radicals that the established and elite-led party system was simply not working.<sup>51</sup> Notwithstanding the opprobrium that Oastler and the radicals heaped on the whigs for their part in the passing of the new poor law, in reality it was never a partisan issue as Oastler well knew: ‘It was supported by the Tory, Wellington, - the Whig, Brougham, - and the Radical, Hume. - Let us have no more, then, about it being a Whig measure’.<sup>52</sup> By April 1835 Oastler was writing to his ally Lord Ashley complaining about whigs and tories.<sup>53</sup>

Oastler’s support for factory reform – and hostility to the new poor law – were only two instances of his multiplying radical associations. His growing radicalism was not just a product of his frustration over factory reform and subsequently resistance to the new poor law; it was also prompted by several attempts to stand for parliament. Oastler toyed with the idea of standing for the West Riding in 1832, even issuing an address but withdrew in the end because of his bleak electoral prospects. He stood twice for Huddersfield in 1837, at a by-election occasioned by the death of the sitting member, and then again at the general election, only losing by a margin of 22 votes in the latter contest. These occasions compelled Oastler to state his positions on a broad range of issues, including support for further parliamentary reform and protective legislation for labour. Contesting the borough of Huddersfield

did little to push Oastler and the local tories together. In reality Oastler was an independent candidate determined to effect an alliance between tories and radicals. Oastler was not the first, or even second, choice of the local Conservatives. Though swinging their full support behind Oastler – once it became clear that public opinion would tolerate no other candidate, the *Halifax Guardian* admitted ‘It is true that many Tories, - ourselves amongst the number, - frequently differ with Mr. Oastler...but we have never ceased to honour and revere’ him.<sup>54</sup> As the campaign against the new poor law reached its crescendo in 1837-38, Oastler burnt many tory bridges with his incendiary rhetoric and call to arms – and this at a time when Oastler was repeatedly calling himself an ‘ultra-Tory’,<sup>55</sup> as a protective cover, no doubt, to license the call to arms.

By the mid-1830s Oastler had publicly supported or at least sympathised with a range of issues that was not only highly unusual for a tory but also signalled his affinity with key radical issues of the day. During the Reform Bill agitations, he had defended the political unions from charges of sedition and he was soon defending the principle of trades unionism, speaking out against the treatment of the Tolpuddle Martyrs in 1834 and again in 1837 when the case of the Glasgow cotton spinners was before the public: he even donated £1 towards the defence fund of the latter. He also supported the radical campaign against the ‘taxes on knowledge’ and wished to see not merely a free press established - ‘taxes on paper and newspapers...I think less desirable than a tax on the air we breathe’ - but free speech: he was in favour of abolishing the laws of libel.<sup>56</sup> And from the summer of 1838 down to his imprisonment for debt in 1840 he was effectively co-opted as a physical force Chartist, though not all Chartists were willing to embrace a ‘tory’.<sup>57</sup>

While some of these radical associations have been noted in previous studies, there are also less well known aspects of Oastler’s radicalism, notably his pacifism

which he publicly aired at the time of the ‘Dutch War’, occasioned by the Belgian Revolution of 1830 when Britain intervened on the side of Holland. Oastler went to the lengths of addressing the Huddersfield Peace Society during which, he recalled, ‘I declared my conscientious and determined hatred of all war’, a principle which he traced to his education by the Moravians at Fulneck. Oastler also desired a major overhaul of taxation, shifting the entire burden on to property ‘whether in Lands or Money...Labour should be free from taxation’. As one would expect of such a vociferous opponent of the new poor law, Oastler also opposed the Anatomy Act (1832) and assisted emigration, both on account of the way they tried to dispose of the poor. The Anatomy Act was unjust and tyrannical because of the way it made a gift of the pauper to the dissecting knife for no other reason than his poverty. He similarly opposed assisted emigration for the way it singled out the poor. Oastler rejected the Malthusian assumption that there was a ‘surplus population’; the only reason for the existence of growing numbers of unemployed adult males, he remonstrated, was due to the employment of women and children in their place.<sup>58</sup>

In the early 1840s Oastler appears to have gravitated back towards toryism, though when he began the *Fleet Papers* in January 1841 he announced that ‘I shall have little to do with party names in this work’. A few weeks later, however, he confessed that ‘if we must have party names, I am a Tory’. Oastler went on to define toryism in his own way: ‘A Tory is one, who, believing that the institutions of this country are calculated, as they were intended, to secure the prosperity and happiness of every class of society. [...] He is tenacious of the rights of all, but most of the poor and needy’. While the first sentence was akin to an ultra-tory political mind-set, the second represents the radical strands in Oastler’s ideology. In his view there was no longer an exemplary political, social and economic order to defend. Nonetheless, Oastler’s continued hostility to the new poor law and the introduction of police forces

– which he interpreted as a tyrannical (and French) means of imposing the new poor law – accentuated a tory aversion to centralization which peaked in the run up to the 1841 general election. Oastler came out in support of a number of Conservative candidates in the 1841 general election, yet even then he exhorted ‘honest Tories, Whigs, and Chartists...to merge their party differences’. He did, however, take great delight in the defeat of the two sitting whig MPs for the West Riding by two tories, devoting a whole issue of the *Fleet Papers* to gloating.<sup>59</sup>

No sooner had the Conservatives won the election he was complaining ‘I do not like the casting of this new Conservative administration. I fear there is something rotten, out of joint, and rickety about it’.<sup>60</sup> Oastler unleashed his polemical fire on the issue that has occupied historians of the Conservative party: was the electoral victory of 1841 the result of Peel’s new brand of Conservatism or was Peel swept into power by a recrudescence of old-style toryism?<sup>61</sup> Unsurprisingly, Oastler took the latter view, and he was soon berating Peel for his treacherous betrayal of the tory electors. During this period he became even more disillusioned by the Conservative party. With Peel and the Conservatives in power from 1841, they were no longer just complicit in supporting Whig legislation, they were now fully culpable. ‘Shall the Dictator and the leaders of the Conservative party escape from impunity?’, Oastler asked in July 1842, ‘Shall those who now sit in high places, and hold the reins of Government, because the people hoped they would oppose the New Poor Law, shall these be tolerated...? An Independent and noble-minded people must answer, No!’<sup>62</sup> Like others within and without the Conservative party, Oastler measured Peel against the tradition of Pittite toryism and found him wanting, invoking on one occasion Pitt’s speech on the ‘omnipotence of parliament to protect’ the people’s interests.<sup>63</sup> While Peel had long been the object of Oastler’s rebuke, the new villain was the home secretary, Sir James Graham, whom Oastler substituted in November 1842 for



Thomas Thornhill as the recipient of the open letters that comprised the *Fleet Papers*. Graham was, in Oastler's view, a whig in disguise and came to view him as his personal jailor, not entirely delusional given the new powers that the Queen's Prison Act of 1842 vested in the Home Office over debtors like Oastler.<sup>64</sup> By February 1843, Oastler complained to a friend 'the Conservatives are my bitterest foes', though he owned that 'my Tory soul cannot bend'.<sup>65</sup> By July of the same year, Oastler – with some hyperbole – viewed the government's decision to surrender its education scheme (to provide schooling for textile workers) in the face of Dissenting hostility as tantamount to negligence of the Church of England, who had stood to benefit the most from the initial scheme. So outraged was Oastler that he questioned the value of the Church-state connection: 'It seems to me that the time is drawing near when the Church must bid the state farewell, or become the mere tool of a political junta.'<sup>66</sup> Small wonder that the tory party faithful rebuked Oastler for his attacks on Peel's government. The refusal of Peel's government to repeal the new poor law and support Lord Ashley's Ten Hours Bill were acts of the deepest treachery in Oastler's view.<sup>67</sup>

The prospect of corn law repeal served to accentuate Oastler's protectionism. He defended the corn laws on the grounds that they guaranteed, at least in theory, a minimum wage for agricultural labourers, the result of which was to stem the flow of rural labourers to the towns, thus putting less pressure on the wages of urban workers. Protectionism for Oastler meant much more than the corn laws; he envisaged it as part of a wider project to promote British production to feed and clothe Britons with British corn and British manufacture. As early as 1832, Oastler had declared:

Whenever I hear a British artisan shout ‘cheap foreign corn’, I always fancy I see his wife pulling his coat, and hear her crying out ‘low wages’, ‘long labour’, ‘bad profits’. [...] And when I hear a large millowner coaxing his workpeople with a promise of ‘cheap foreign corn’, I fancy I see him shrugging his shoulders and saying, ‘more work for less money, that’s all’. Very well, then, my principle of legislation is this – to encourage home growth, home labour, home trade, and home consumption.<sup>68</sup>

Oastler republished the above in the *Fleet Papers* in May 1841 at the very moment when corn law repeal had become a live issue with the approaching general election. Yet Oastler was being disingenuous in implying that he had always been a staunch protectionist. For all his emphasis on home production and consumption, in 1832 Oastler had declared in favour of the principle of free trade and was opposed to all trade monopolies, singling out the East India Company as a particular evil. Once it became clear in 1837-38 that the government was not going to repeal the new poor law, Oastler began to urge the working class to demand corn law repeal in retaliation, knowing that this would hit the landed proprietors, and as way of reducing the cost of living, thus keeping the workhouse at bay. Nevertheless, Oastler’s denunciation of the Anti-Corn Law League was vitriolic. Like many Chartists he viewed the League in conspiratorial terms – a middle-class plot to lower wages.<sup>69</sup>

For the remainder of the 1840s Oastler clung even more tenaciously to his toryism, but only because it was becoming clearer that ‘the old Tory school’, as he termed it, had little place in the new Conservatism of Peel.<sup>70</sup> On the surface, there is much in Oastler’s broadsides against Peel and the Conservative party that appears little different from the wider tory critique of Peelite Conservatism that was growing on the backbenchers.<sup>71</sup> Oastler’s perspective, though, was never that of the usually

mute tory squire. Indeed, Oastler berated this same group – ‘the old Tory noblemen’ – for being dazzled by Peel.<sup>72</sup> There is very little in the *Fleet Papers* on the need for the tories to pull together. For all his clinging to ‘the old Tory school’ Oastler knew that the game was up; there was no chance of bringing the party leadership to heel. All that remained was spirited independence and a cultivation of popular support. And here a comparison with Disraeli is apposite.<sup>73</sup>

The parallels and similarities between the two men appear to be many. Disraeli had tried to straddle toryism and radicalism in the mid-1830s, albeit for different motives and with different emphases; was famously of a romantic temperament and railed against ‘system’ and those like Peel who were too susceptible to its dictates; like Oastler he willed the nation’s nobility to reassert themselves; and he hated whiggery, political economy and centralization.<sup>74</sup> Oastler would certainly have subscribed wholeheartedly to Disraeli’s judgment in *Sybil*: ‘But we forget, Sir Robert Peel is not the leader of the Tory party.’<sup>75</sup> There are, however, notable differences. In straddling toryism and radicalism, Oastler never desired the creation of a new political party as Disraeli urged in 1833.<sup>76</sup> Oastler, as we shall see, was much more insular – he certainly did not possess a ‘continental mind’; he was anti-Semitic; genuinely religious; was nowhere near as pragmatic as Disraeli (over issues like taxation and tariffs); and did not view the working class as immoral or brutish (as portrayed by Disraeli in *Sybil*).<sup>77</sup> Although Oastler willed the aristocracy to lead, he was much less sanguine than Disraeli about their willingness or ability to do so; and unlike Disraeli, but like Feargus O’Connor, Oastler was soon impressed by the ability of the working class to lead themselves. In this crucial respect, Oastler was not a king in search of a kingdom – he was content to work with the ‘managing committees’ of the workers.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, his initial reservations about entering into formal alliance with the working class in pursuit of factory reform – what became the

Fixby Hall Compact – stemmed from his belief that the workers should pursue their own campaign in parallel with his own. Above all, Oastler would not have agreed that the main function of the tory party ‘was to uphold the aristocratic settlement of the country in the impending struggle with the democratic principle’;<sup>79</sup> rather, its main job was to defeat political economy and improve the lot of the poor. This was no more the priority of Disraeli than it was of the tory backbencher – even of the protectionist kind.

Unsurprisingly, he sided with the protectionist rump following the split over the repeal of the corn laws. Once again, Oastler was soon disappointed. As early as July 1846 he complained to his friend the radical Thomas Allsop that ‘The Protectionists are sadly shaken – they are evidently in want of defined principles – and very soon, they will cease to be a party if they cannot take up a definite position’.<sup>80</sup> He berated the protectionists for their lack of firmness and determination. Oastler’s view that protection should be all encompassing, extending to labour as well as property, found little more favour with the protectionist leaders than it had did with Peelites.<sup>81</sup> The prospect of a revived old-style toryism held out by Young England might have excited his partisanship in the mid-1840s, but this, with its medievalism and paternalism, proved to be even more of a fleeting and minority concern than tory-radicalism ever had. ‘Young England’, Oastler charged, was too abstract and content to do little more than ‘make fine speeches and quote the classics’.<sup>82</sup> It is also possible that Oastler found the catholic sympathies of Young England distasteful.<sup>83</sup> By December 1850, he confessed to Allsop that ‘I am acting in concert with no one’ and that the ‘vauntings of “the Tories” have no weight with me’.<sup>84</sup> By summer of the following year, he boasted to Allsop that ‘I have offended the farmer because I will have beef for the labourers. I have offended the Protectionists because I will not write up what they call “their leaders”’.<sup>85</sup> By this stage, Oastler had

been disillusioned with, or railed against, virtually the whole spectrum of the political Right from the ultra-tories in the late 1820s and moderate figures (Wellington) in the early 1830s though to liberal conservatives of Peel's stamp in the 1840s.<sup>86</sup>

## 4

How, then, to make sense of the years when Oastler's toryism was in retreat? There were radical currents in Oastler's ideology. He often publicly supported the radicals and defended them from their traducers. The radicals, he mused in 1832:

...seem to demand more than they have a right to, but they are not so unreasonable as they are thought to be. They don't want to dethrone the King, to behead the Nobles, destroy the Church, and cut up the property of the rich. Not they, though thousands think they do. They want their rights; they want either to vote for their representatives, or not to be taxed by the representatives of the ten-pounders.<sup>87</sup>

Oastler's interpretation of the rights of the freeborn Englishman was little different from what any radical would have said: '*liberty* – freedom from confinement, as well as food and clothing – is the birthright of every Englishman, however poor.'<sup>88</sup> He shared the popular radical critique of the new political economy and demanded the restitution of an older moral economy. 'The law-makers of the present age, whether Whig or Tory, have imbibed the Utilitarian notion, that men are mere things, without rights or feelings', he complained.<sup>89</sup> Oastler objected to the 'system of competition' which he defined as 'leaving labour free and unrestricted, which enabled the man who is rich, to reduce the small capitalists to poverty and the artisans to abject

wretchedness'. His remedy – 'a recognition, by law, of the Rights of Labour'.<sup>90</sup> He came close to subscribing to the labour theory of value; that productive labour should be valued above all else. Oastler found Biblical sanction for this: as he repeatedly declared '*the husbandman that laboureth MUST be FIRST partakers of the fruits*'.<sup>91</sup> Sentiments such as these could easily have come from the mouth of any radical. No Chartist, for example, would have disagreed with Oastler's fundamental claim:

...that every honest industrious workman has a right, before the Government can demand his allegiance, to receive from his employer, in return for his industry, comfortable food, shelter and clothing, for himself and for his family [...] and if he cannot obtain employment, or is not able, from debility, to work at all...he has a right to demand food, clothing and shelter from the State, without parting with his liberty or any of his social rights. [...] show me any other principle, upon which you can with justice, maintain the rights of private property or demand the allegiance of the subject...remembering always, that the laws of society are intended for the good of all. [...] if you do not recognise this fundamental principle of society – you will, like many others, misapprehend all I say.<sup>92</sup>

Oastler's definition of toryism included the restoration 'of those good, old-fashioned bills which protected labour and restricted machinery to the hands of those who worked at it'.<sup>93</sup> He often told of how his own father had turned his back on the cloth trade rather than accept the relentless mechanisation that was displacing handicraft (this, allied to Oastler's call for the factory workers to take the law in to their hands, led to him being called a Luddite in Huddersfield).<sup>94</sup> Was all this just the longing of an old-fashioned tory paternalist? The relish with which Oastler assumed

the role of squire at Fixby seems evidence enough. Two caveats should be entered here. First, some of this relish was applied retrospectively by Oastler and for the same protective purposes as his repeated professions of ultra-toryism: how could a man with the deepest attachment to old England be branded a revolutionary?<sup>95</sup> Secondly, Oastler's veneration for all that was traditional stemmed just as much from a 'country party' mentality which overlapped considerably with the kind of radicalism personified by Cobbett and other restorationist radicals.<sup>96</sup> His speeches are littered with invective against fund-holders, stock-jobbers, bankers (occasionally indulging in the kind of anti-Semitism that Cobbett was prone), and paper money. At times, Oastler shared Cobbett's Arcadian vision, contrasting the artificiality and hollowness of the 'factory system' with the authenticity of agriculture, craftwork, estate and village.<sup>97</sup> When Thomas Paine Carlile issued a portrait of Oastler with his short-lived radical periodical it was accompanied with an extract from a letter written by Oastler: 'I am not so much a political man as one who wishes to raise the labourers of England to a state of comfort, happiness, and security. I wish to see the population enjoying rural scenery, breathing pure air'.<sup>98</sup> This could easily have come from Cobbett's pen. Though Oastler was not a farmer, he could trace his lineage to the same stock as Cobbett: the yeoman farmer, a group that was dying out thanks to enclosure, which both men opposed (Oastler was also opposed to the Game Laws). Like Cobbett and the Chartist land planners, Oastler wanted to see some urban workers resettled on the land, which would not only take the pressure off the urban labour market (without recourse to emigration) but also help feed a growing population in a way that was less reliant on foreign imports.<sup>99</sup> When interviewed by the Home Office in February 1839 and asked what plans he had recommended to improve the lot of the labourer, the first specific policy he cited was reclamation of wasteland (a favourite policy of Sadler's).<sup>100</sup>

It would be difficult to exhaust the parallels between Oastler and Cobbett, a parallel not lost on contemporaries.<sup>101</sup> Like Cobbett, Oastler was a patriot and a ‘little Englishman’. Developing an under-consumptionist argument, they questioned the value of overseas trade when domestic supply and demand could just as easily be substituted.<sup>102</sup> Oastler’s Englishness and his veneration for the historic rights of the freeborn Englishman appears to be of a piece with the restorationist current in popular radicalism – the so-called ‘constitutional idiom’.<sup>103</sup> ‘I am, in heart and soul, an Englishman – devotedly attached to the time-honoured institutions, nay, even prejudices, of my native country’, Oastler lectured his former employer Thornhill.<sup>104</sup> He virtually subscribed to the ‘Norman Yoke’ theory that the land had originally belonged to the people: enclosure, he argued, was merely the latest chapter in a long line of dispossession. Like Joseph Rayner Stephens, Oastler drew far more revolutionary conclusions than many radicals did, including Cobbett – conclusions that issued more from their radical Christianity than it did from secular precedents such as Magna Carta (‘Polar Star’ though it was, Oastler was of the view that it had been rendered ‘merely a piece of waste paper’).<sup>105</sup> Oastler even came perilously close to expressing a Paineite contempt for ancient rights: ‘Talk about Rights, you none of you have any Rights but what the people let you have. A Title-Deed is no right if the People say it shan’t be.’<sup>106</sup> For Oastler, the first principles of the British constitution was Christianity, which, he argued, was the basis of the ancient common law of England. Cruelty, oppression and tyranny were thus not only unchristian, but unconstitutional.<sup>107</sup> Oastler reasoned that providing employment and the necessities of life to those who had fallen on hard times was an obligation incumbent on those fortunately situated. While Oastler’s adage ‘The Altar, the Throne, and the Cottage’ is well known, less well known is the second sentence, which accompanied every issue of the *Fleet Papers*: ‘Property has its duties, as well as its rights.’ And if property



refused to carry out those duties, ‘the constitution of this country is destroyed’, then the poor were in their right to dispossess property. As Oastler threatened the Duke of Wellington: ‘My Lord Duke, if you pass that law [the new poor law], Apsley House is yours now, but it may be mine hereafter.’<sup>108</sup> Even when allowance is made for Oastler’s invective and intimidating rhetoric, these are not the sentiments of a tory, much less an ultra-tory.

Like his friend John Fielden, who often explicitly positioned himself as a disciple of Cobbett, it does not, to paraphrase Weaver on Fielden, do justice to the broad nature of Oastler’s politics to describe him simply as Cobbettite.<sup>109</sup> For all Oastler’s relishing of the Arcadian, he was much more at ease with the culture of the factory and workshop than was Cobbett. Over the years Oastler learnt a great deal about the conditions of the handloom weavers and mill workers. As one would expect of a tory and radical forged in the crucible of factory reform, Oastler was much more exercised by the evils of unrestrained capitalism than was Cobbett. In the latter’s view it was the unholy trinity of the fundholder, the boroughmonger and the ‘Scotch *feelosophers*’ who were the co-evils plaguing society. While Oastler also denounced this trinity, it was increasingly subordinate to ‘the most contemptible, low bred, tyrannical wretches, who ever lived; the “*Liberal*” Capitalist and Factory *Lords*’.<sup>110</sup> Such was Oastler’s hatred of capitalists that, in one of the early letters to Thornhill concerning his indebtedness, Oastler explained to his employer why it would be folly to ask his wider family for help in paying off his debt: ‘The position I have taken against “capitalists” shuts me out from my family connections, who are great capitalists and have viewed my exertions with considerable dislike’.<sup>111</sup> So exercised was Oastler by the ruinous effects of capitalism, that after some initial caution he even expressed interest in the co-operative ideas of Robert Owen, with whom he was on friendly terms (Oastler and his wife were even praying for Owen by October

1836!).<sup>112</sup> Oastler may not have been serious, but he did not dismiss Owen's ideas out of hand as Cobbett did with his quip about 'parallelograms of paupers', and he was certainly not unsympathetic, as Cole suggested.<sup>113</sup> In contrast to Owen, however, Oastler always tempered his objectives to what he deemed practicable. As he lectured Owen on his support for an eight hour day: 'You must alter your name or you will never get on, "12 hours wages for 8 hours work" is Unjust – you might as well say "12s. for 8s.', though Oastler conceded that 'the poor creatures have only had 8 hours wages for 12 hours work'.<sup>114</sup>

There was little space in Oastler's politics for an alliance of the 'productive classes' longed for by Cobbett; on the contrary the alliance he wished for was aristocracy and people against the capitalists – however expansively he defined the former and restrictively the latter, and here he was clearly in the mould of the gentleman leader. Yet, as we have seen with his periodic disillusionment with the tory party, Oastler was soon disabusing himself that the aristocracy would unite with the people to defeat the capitalists. 'Who can really pity the farmers and landlords? Not I', Oastler mused privately to Thomas Allsop.<sup>115</sup> Oastler came to view his treatment by his former employer, Thornhill, who dismissed Oastler as his steward in 1838 – ostensibly because Oastler was not devoting enough time to estate affairs, but really on account of his political views – as symptomatic of the aristocracy's desertion of the people.<sup>116</sup> The breach, which had been growing for some time, was essentially the result of a clash of ideologies: Thornhill insisted that Oastler run his estates merely as a profitable enterprise; while Oastler the paternalist refused to run the estate solely for 'pounds, shillings and pence' as he disparagingly termed it in a letter justifying his tenure as steward.<sup>117</sup> While it was Thornhill's absence that allowed Oastler to play the role of squire, Oastler seldom lost an opportunity to rebuke Thornhill for his absenteeism.<sup>118</sup> The problem was that Oastler's salary was

nowhere near enough to finance his paternalism, with the result that he ran up debts. In the end, Thornhill sued Oastler for the outstanding debt and after two years of legal wrangling, Oastler, unable to pay, was imprisoned in the Fleet Prison. By the early 1840s, Oastler's disillusionment had turned to rebuke: not only had the aristocracy failed to heed his warnings, he also judged them to be culpable: 'By the New Poor Law, the landlords have, under the pretence of charity, robbed the poor' and a few weeks later, 'I did not suppose that the Landlords would become the silly dupes and ready tools of the Factory Monster'.<sup>119</sup>

Oastler is even more difficult to classify as a populist than Cobbett. A fundamental component of populism is the preservation of a traditional way of life, a reactionary emphasis on the need to restore a lost golden age. While there are aspects of Oastler's political persona that could be described as populist, it should be emphasized that he was not seeking to turn the clock back: his objective was not to abolish factories, but to regulate them: 'The factory system is necessary, but it is not necessarily an evil'.<sup>120</sup> Thus, for all Oastler's rhapsodies on the 'good old days', he was far from being reactionary and his vision was hardly feudal; rather, it was a synthesis of old and new. Oastler's version of the English past is only partially that of Cobbett's. Like Cobbett, Oastler also viewed the Reformation as a cover for the plunder of church wealth and its distribution amongst royal favourites; but unlike Cobbett, Oastler emphasized that the Church of England of his day was also a victim of this plunder as it now lacked the resources to relieve the poor, though this did not stop him from rebuking the Church for 'suffer[ing] the rich to oppress the poor'. While Oastler applauded the catholic church's care for the poor before the Reformation, as we have seen, this did not translate into support for catholic emancipation in the 1820s as it did for Cobbett.<sup>121</sup> One of the most enduring facets of Oastler's ideology was his anti-catholicism, though he did later pay tribute to the support he had

received from catholic priests in furtherance of the factory movement.<sup>122</sup> More generally, Christianity was much more central to Oastler's politics than it was to Cobbett's.

A crucial difference between Oastler and Cobbett was in their respective stance towards slavery, abolition and compensation. While Oastler became famous for the parallels he drew between colonial slavery and the plight of 'white slavery' in British factories, as clumsy as that comparison was, he never adopted the racist, negrophobia of Cobbett.<sup>123</sup> In Oastler's hands, this parallel was a tactical move designed to draw attention to the hypocrisy of those local manufacturers who supported abolition and yet saw no problem in exploiting women and children in their own factories. As Oastler made clear in many letters and speeches, he did not conceive abolition and factory reform as mutually exclusive; rather factory reform would complete the promise held out by emancipation. As Oastler wrote in one of his letters to the *Northern Star*, he was for 'down with slavery all over the world...set every slave, male and female, young or old, black, brown, or white, at perfect liberty'.<sup>124</sup> Oastler continued to voice his opposition to slavery as we have just seen, speaking out on issues such as compensation. In contrast to Cobbett, who objected on principle to any kind of compensation on the grounds that this was an intolerable imposition on the already over-taxed pockets of the working class,<sup>125</sup> Oastler demanded that compensation be paid not to the slave owners but to the freed slaves. His was a highly unusual stance which further underlines the distance between Oastler and the Tory Party, the vast majority of whom were fully committed to paying compensation to the slave owners. By May 1838 Oastler was calling for an alliance of all those who detested slavery to unite in one society to pursue three objectives: the total repeal of the new poor law; factory reform; and an immediate and total end to slavery in the colonies. As Oastler exhorted the abolitionists on

behalf of the factory reformers and opponents of the new poor law, 'our cause being one and the same – they must now help us'.<sup>126</sup>

Although Oastler did not share Cobbett's commitment to radical parliamentary reform, he was never as vehemently opposed to suffrage extension as some accounts have suggested.<sup>127</sup> True enough, on numerous occasions Oastler expressed reservations about universal suffrage, yet these have to be set alongside his equally numerous equivocal statements on this issue. As early as 1830 Oastler had signalled his support for a popular franchise. His plan then was for each constituency to return two MPs; one elected by the people; one by the propertied classes. Oastler was also opposed to the Sturges Bourne Acts for the way they deprived the labourer of representation on the parish vestry.<sup>128</sup> Unlike Cobbett, Oastler refused to support the reform bills of 1831-2 as instalments. Indeed, he subscribed to the popular radical conspiracy theory held by Henry Hunt that the liberal middle classes had used and duped the people to secure their own enfranchisement. On the other hand, his opposition was nowhere near as vehement as his old mentor's – Sadler, who as a result was burnt in effigy by some of his Newark constituents (an indignity that never befell Oastler).<sup>129</sup> Oastler also interpreted the Reform Bill episode as a victory for popular pressure: it showed what a disciplined, well financed extra-parliamentary campaign could achieve.

Once the 'reformed parliament' demonstrated its true colours, Oastler's position on the franchise was further radicalized. At a meeting of 'ultra-radicals' and Tories at Huddersfield in October 1836 Oastler seconded a resolution of thanks to Feargus O'Connor for the latter's 'unceasing advocacy of the rights of all men, above the age of twenty-one years, to vote for representatives'.<sup>130</sup> And by 1837 he declared that 'he had no hesitation in saying, as I have said a hundred times, that I would infinitely prefer universal suffrage, to the present £10 and £50 suffrage'.<sup>131</sup> He too

objected to Lord John Russell's declaration that the Reform Act was a final settlement of the franchise question, and he promised to support any 'suffrage which would secure to the labourers, as well as to every other class, their *full* share of representation'.<sup>132</sup> As the campaign against the new poor law reached its climax Oastler was at least threatening that universal suffrage might be necessary to get the new poor law repealed and factory reform enacted.<sup>133</sup> In its exhortation that all radicals and working men support Oastler in the Huddersfield by-election, the *London Dispatch* concluded its address by asserting (falsely) that Oastler 'is the advocate of Universal Suffrage'.<sup>134</sup> A more accurate assessment of Oastler's position was made by Bronterre O'Brien who recognized that 'if Mr Oastler be not the real advocate, neither is he the enemy of Universal Suffrage'.<sup>135</sup> O'Brien went on to point out that Oastler had never thwarted or undermined the radical campaign for universal suffrage. Speaking at a radical dinner in Dewsbury in April 1838, Oastler confessed that although he did not currently share the opinions of his friend Feargus O'Connor 'if he thought that Universal Suffrage was the thing to do the people good; he would vote for it at any time'.<sup>136</sup> Oastler was also in favour of equal electoral districts and the ballot (if the people really wanted it), though on another occasion he claimed he was opposed to it – itself an indication of his ambiguity regarding the People's Charter. On the issue of lengths of parliament Oastler's position was highly unusual, though like the radicals he clearly envisaged MPs as delegates. He cared not whether parliaments were one, three, five or seven years long, but would empower each constituency to recall and dispense with its MP at any time if they were dissatisfied with his services.<sup>137</sup>

The temptation with a figure like Oastler is to label him a political maverick: ‘eccentric’ was the word chosen by Dorothy Thompson.<sup>138</sup> Certainly, some of his contemporaries clearly saw him in these terms, and not just his enemies either. Squire Farrar, a Bradford Chartist, for example, referred to Oastler as a ‘hybrid breed, and no man could class him’.<sup>139</sup> Neither, as we have seen, was Oastler heavily influenced by anyone, much less a pale imitation. Yet such a temptation runs the risk of making Oastler appear a much less representative figure than he was. Like the popular radicals with whom he was allied, Oastler personified the pervasive anti-party sentiments held by the working classes in the 1830s and 1840s. As ‘Radical Reformer’ complained in the correspondence column of the *Leeds Patriot*, ‘The distinctions of Whig and Tory have become a perfect bugbear’ and those ‘who are not led blindfold’ by the whig-liberal *Leeds Mercury* ‘do not ask, before they give a man their support, whether he is a Whig or a Tory...they ask what has he done, or what has he attempted to do for the country, for the distressed and suffering labourers of this free land’.<sup>140</sup> There is no doubt that Oastler’s involvement in factory reform, and subsequently the anti-poor law movement, did much to foster his anti-party sentiments: ‘I do think the time is now when we ought to forget all party names’, he had told an audience of short-timers at Leeds in July 1832.<sup>141</sup> Oastler’s candidacies at Huddersfield in 1837 can also be seen in these terms, dominated as the town was by the Whig Ramsden family. While the (undue) influence of the Ramsden family may have been much exaggerated by their political opponents,<sup>142</sup> this did not stop Oastler or his radical supporters from propagating the view that Huddersfield was little more than a nomination borough: ‘Oastler and Independence’ had been the rallying cry of his supporters. Although defeated, Oastler felt ‘assured that PARTY has received its death-blow – and I hope soon to see the day, when good men of all Parties, shall be bound under one Banner’.<sup>143</sup> When Sadler had contested Huddersfield in 1834 he too

had emphasized electoral independence over his toryism.<sup>144</sup> Oastler was so disgusted with the faction-fighting at the 1834 by-election that it left him even more despairing of party politics.<sup>145</sup>

The electoral contests at Leeds in 1832 and Huddersfield later in the decade may have been unusual in the depth of their complexity due to tory-radical ‘alliances’ muddying the otherwise growing trend towards partisan voting which a number of scholars have detected in the 1830s.<sup>146</sup> It is worth noting, however, that partisan loyalties, especially at the popular level, were far from clear-cut in the aftermath of the 1832 Reform Act, a situation that would endure down to the 1860s. James Vernon has shown that political parties in Westminster after 1832 were widely rejected in the nation in favour of local, idiosyncratic leaders, symbols and loyalties. Building on Frank O’Gorman’s work on the unreformed electorate, Vernon has also shown that the language of electoral independence – the stance adopted by candidates who built their campaigns around opposition to local oligarchy – persisted beyond 1832. Judging by the banners displayed by Oastler’s supporters, there was little evidence of any popular affirmation of distinctly tory principles – beyond Oastler’s own mantra of ‘The Altar, the Throne and the Cottage’. If colours are significant, as Vernon suggests, Oastler was not awash in a sea of blue (which, in any case, was not always the colour of toryism); his supporters sported a combination of white, blue, green and black banners. Seen from this perspective, tory-radicalism was one incarnation of partisan loyalties in flux.<sup>147</sup>

To understand the appeal of Oastler, therefore, there is no need to separate the movements for factory reform and the abolition of the new poor law into tory and radical strands, intertwined purely for reasons of expediency,<sup>148</sup> as Oastler personified and partly reconciled these strands. There is no denying that one of the strongest and most enduring aspects of Oastler’s politics was his hatred of whig-



liberals, especially the Baineses who were the frequent targets of his invective on the platform and in the pamphlet wars he waged. In Oastler's case this was never toryism masquerading as independence. His ideology and rhetoric hardly amounted to a 'typical Tory interpretation of the English constitution'.<sup>149</sup> Oastler devoted very little of his considerable energies to building up a tory interest in Huddersfield. He fell out with the Operative Conservative associations, following his attack on the Leeds Tory MP John Beckett for his equivocation over factory reform.<sup>150</sup> In 1836 Oastler had declared that his purpose was 'to serve the "Party" of the People, and the good men of all "Parties"'.<sup>151</sup> Ten years later Oastler declared that he no longer recognised tories and whigs only Christians and Malthusians. Reaching loftier levels of patriotism, Oastler declared in January 1842 that: 'I have a higher motive than the salvation of party – I would save my country.'<sup>152</sup> When he was released from prison in February 1844, Oastler insisted that the celebrations be a non-partisan affair.<sup>153</sup> The great failing of both parties was their 'total[] ignorance of the wants, the condition, and the prejudices of the working classes'.<sup>154</sup> In closing his *Fleet Papers*, Oastler recapitulated his political and social philosophy, concluding that 'They belong to no political party'.<sup>155</sup>

With the partial exception of John Fielden (who was already a radical) few other figures that set out on this journey with Oastler – Sadler, Bull, Rayner Stephens and W. B. Ferrand – were as willing to accept the logical radical conclusions of their positions as Oastler was. Yet Oastler was from being one of kind. His friend and ally Rayner Stephens shared Oastler's antipathy to party, and though he, too, had tory strands in his ideology, he was likewise ill-at-ease with the Conservative party and had no connections with it.<sup>156</sup> When Stephens stood as a candidate for Ashton-under-Lyne at the 1837 general election he reminded the working men that 'they knew he was neither a tory nor a whig'.<sup>157</sup> As with Rayner

Stephens and other romantic politicians in the 1830s and 1840s, Oastler longed for a chivalric Christian nobility that would take the lead in restoring society to its original purity.<sup>158</sup> But it was not to be. Perhaps the main reason why historians have found it difficult to place figures such as Oastler and Cobbett is because of the subsequent ossification of the political system into a left-right dichotomy, and the flawed attempts to apply this schema retrospectively.<sup>159</sup> And here the Conservative party's cultivation of a 'Tory Democratic' tradition to woo the enfranchised working man was just as straightjacketing and myth-making as the liberal-radical and socialist traditions.<sup>160</sup> Oastler was hardly a precursor of later Victorian popular Conservatism, at least beyond a vague sense that conservatives had a more impressive tradition in relation to social reform: while hostile to the centralising designs of whiggery there was little hostility towards the state per se (hence the demand for protective legislation) and for all his knowledge of working-class conditions and intimacy with working-class radicals, beer and Britannia formed no part of Oastler's populist politics. Even when it came to 'altar and throne' there was no adoring cult of monarchy or militant Protestantism of the kind that was beginning to be registered in Operative Conservative societies.<sup>161</sup> In short, Oastler's was always more of a figure of the eighteenth than of the nineteenth century, hence his repeated claims to be a 'tory of the old school'.

Backwards looking Oastler may have been in his social philosophy, but he was neither a reactionary, nor a populist to the degree of Cobbett. To return to the quotation with which this article opened, Oastler was both a tory *and* a radical, depending on the context. Like Cobbett, the enduring thread running through his ideology was patriotism: 'Shall *Tory* – Whig – Radical, for ever blast the hopes of Britain? Forbid it every spark of patriotism.'<sup>162</sup> Oastler and those like him were not quirks, or vestiges of an earlier age before party politics, but were products of a

popular revulsion against the dictates of party. If we are to view Oastler's politics as a chapter in an enduring narrative at all, then there is a case for situating it in the tradition of electoral independence, which looked backwards to the 'country party' as well as forwards to the later Victorian popular revolt against dictatorial liberal elites.<sup>163</sup> Oastler's Conservative friends were forced to accept that he did not belong exclusively to them.<sup>164</sup> This was just as true during his own lifetime as it was for his posthumous career. Hence the encomiums of Arthur Gardiner, founding member of the Huddersfield Socialist Party, who singled out Oastler for commemorative praise in his book *The Industrial Revolution and Child Labour* (1948):

There is one monument in Huddersfield that I never pass without a warm glow of affection and respect. It is the small memorial, erected outside the Children's Playground in Greenhead Park (what a delightfully appropriate place) to the memory of Richard Oastler, 'The Factory King'. Oastler sacrificed his health and his fortune in fighting the battle of the child-slaves. May his memory remain green in the hearts and minds of those who love their fellow-man.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Oastler, *Damnation! Eternal Damnation to the Fiend-Begotten, 'Coarser Food' New Poor Law* (1837), 3.

<sup>2</sup> James J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative: Reaction and Orthodoxy in Britain, c.1760-1832* (Cambridge, 1993), 2, 31-5. The fullest statement of Oastler's toryism appears in *Fleet Papers*, 30 Jan. 1841.

<sup>3</sup> *Leeds Patriot*, 23 Apr. 1831.

<sup>4</sup> BL, Add MS 27820, Francis Place Papers relating to Working Men's Associations, f.150.

<sup>5</sup> Cecil Driver, *Tory Radical: The Life of Richard Oastler* (New York, 1946), 3-4.

<sup>6</sup> Stewart A. Weaver, 'Oastler, Richard (1789-1861)', *ODNB* (Oxford, online edn, 2011); John A. Hargreaves, "'Treading on the Edge of Revolution?" Richard Oastler (1789-1861)', in *Slavery in Yorkshire: Richard Oastler and the Campaign against Child Labour in the Industrial Revolution*, ed. John Hargreaves and E. A. Hilary Haigh (Huddersfield, 2012), 202.

<sup>7</sup> J. T. Ward, *The Factory Movement, 1830-1855* (1962); Nicholas C. Edsall, *The Anti-Poor Law Movement, 1834-44* (Manchester, 1971); Hargreaves and Haigh, *Slavery in Yorkshire*.

<sup>8</sup> Driver, *Tory Radical*; Hargreaves and Haigh, *Slavery in Yorkshire*; Colin Creighton, 'Richard Oastler, Factory Legislation and the Working-Class Family', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, v (1992), 292-320.

<sup>9</sup> For this view see G. D. H. Cole's *Chartist Portraits* (1941), 81; Robert Gray, *The Factory Question and Industrial England, 1830-1860* (Cambridge, 1996), 52, 57.

<sup>10</sup> R. L. Hill, *Toryism and the People 1832-1846* (1929), 7, 29.

<sup>11</sup> For the debate on 'Tory-Radicalism', see Felix Driver, 'Tory Radicalism? Ideology, Strategy and Locality in Popular Politics during the Eighteen-Thirties', *Northern History*, xxvii (1991), 120-38.

<sup>12</sup> Anthony Brundage, *The English Poor Laws, 1700-1930* (Basingstoke, 2002), 82.

<sup>13</sup> John Knott, *Popular Opposition to the 1834 Poor Law* (1986), 95.

<sup>14</sup> While there are no 'Oastler Papers' in terms of manuscripts, some fifty letters that he wrote have been located. As the letters are spread across a disparate set of archives only a small proportion

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appear to have been consulted in previous studies. The principal collections are the Oastler-Thornhill Correspondence (British Library); Oastler's letters to the radical MP Thomas Allsop (LSE), to John Fielden (John Rylands Library), and to the Huddersfield radical Lawrence Pitkethly.

<sup>15</sup> Jörg Neuheiser, *Crown, Church and Constitution: Popular Conservatism in England, 1815-1867* (Oxford, 2016), 212.

<sup>16</sup> David Craig and James Thompson, 'Introduction', in *Languages of Politics in Nineteenth Century Britain*, ed. David Craig and James Thompson (Basingstoke, 2013), 8-9.

<sup>17</sup> *Northern Star*, 11 Aug. 1838.

<sup>18</sup> John Rylands Library, Manchester, John Fielden Papers, FDN/4, Oastler to Fielden, 11 June 1836.

<sup>19</sup> *Blackburn Standard*, 21 Sept. 1836.

<sup>20</sup> J. R. Sanders, 'Working-Class Movements in the West Riding Textile District 1829 to 1839', University of Manchester PhD, 1984, pp. 359-60.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Oastler, *Vicarial Tithes, Halifax: A Statement of Facts and Incidents* (Halifax, 1827); Richard Oastler, *A Letter...Bradford Observer* (Bradford, 1834), 16-17; Richard Oastler, *Eight Letters to the Duke of Wellington* (1838), 12.

<sup>22</sup> Oastler, *Damnation*, 4.

<sup>23</sup> W. A. Speck, *Robert Southey: Entire Man of Letters* (London, 2006), 106.

<sup>24</sup> D. Colin Dews, 'Richard Oastler: The Methodist Background, 1789-1820', in Hargreaves and Haigh, *Slavery in Yorkshire*, 83, 88; *A Report of the Proceedings and Speeches of a Public Meeting held in the Primitive Methodist Chapel, Oldham, 14 March 1835* (Oldham, 1835), 7; Ellen Gibson Wilson, *The Great Yorkshire Election of 1807*, ed. Edward Royle and James Walvin (Lancaster, 2015), 55, 195;

<sup>25</sup> Sheffield City Archives, Wentworth Woodhouse Muniments, WWM G29/1-2, Robert Oastler to Lord Milton, 15 and 18 July 1807.

<sup>26</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 9 Mar. 1844; *Huddersfield Chronicle*, 24 Aug. 1861.

<sup>27</sup> *Bradford Observer*, 3 Nov. 1836.

<sup>28</sup> Boyd Hilton and Robert Gray have rightly emphasized the difficulties in labelling Oastler an evangelical, but Hilton is surely mistaken in his view that 'there is not much evidence of religiosity at all' in Oastler's public persona. Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford, 1988), 97; Gray, *Factory Question*, 57; cf.

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Eileen Groth Lyon, *Politicians in the Pulpit: Christian Radicalism in Britain from the Fall of the Bastille to the Disintegration of Chartism* (Aldershot, 1999), 143.

<sup>29</sup> Hill, *Toryism and the People*, 23.

<sup>30</sup> Kim Lawes, *Paternalism and Politics: The Revival of Paternalism in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Houndmills, 2000), 41.

<sup>31</sup> Driver, *Tory Radical*, ch. 2.

<sup>32</sup> Stewart A. Weaver, 'Sadler, Michael Thomas (1780–1835)', *ODNB* (Oxford, online edn, 2011).

<sup>33</sup> Michael Thomas Sadler, *The Law of Population* (2 vols, 1830).

<sup>34</sup> Richard Oastler, *The Right of the Poor to Liberty and Life* (1838), 47-53.

<sup>35</sup> Geoffrey B. A. M. Finlayson, *The Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, 1801-1885* (Vancouver, 2004 [1981]), 121.

<sup>36</sup> Samuel Roberts, *Chartism! Its Cause and Cure* (Sheffield, 1839); J. C. Gill, *The Ten Hours Parson: Christian Social Action in the Eighteen-Thirties* (1959), 176; Michael S. Edwards, *Purge this Realm: A Life of Joseph Rayner Stephens* (1994), 89.

<sup>37</sup> Sack, *Jacobite to Conservative*, 111.

<sup>38</sup> Anon. [Joseph Rayner Stephens], *Sketch of the Life and Opinions of Richard Oastler* (Leeds, 1838), 5-6.

<sup>39</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer*, 8 Jan. 1829; Speck, *Southey*, 120; Sack, *Jacobite to Conservative*, 241, 245.

<sup>40</sup> G. I. T. Machin, 'The No-Popery Movement in Britain 1828-9', *Historical Journal*, vi (1963), 193-211.

<sup>41</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 18 July 1837; James Vernon, *Politics and the people: a study in English political culture, c.1815-1867* (Cambridge, 1993), 301.

<sup>42</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer*, 27 Nov. 1828.

<sup>43</sup> Boyd Hilton, 'The Ripening of Robert Peel', in *Public and Private Doctrine: Essays in British History presented to Maurice Cowling*, ed. Michael Bentley (Cambridge, 1993), 79.

<sup>44</sup> Driver, *Tory Radical*, p. 180.

<sup>45</sup> Edwin Jaggard, 'Lord Falmouth and the Parallel Political Worlds of Ultra-Toryism, 1826-32', *Parliamentary History*, xxxiii (2014), 313.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Stewart, *The Foundation of the Conservative Party, 1830-1867* (1978), 51.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Driver, *Tory Radical*, 181.

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<sup>48</sup> *Leeds Intelligencer*, 15 Dec. 1831.

<sup>49</sup> Theodore Koditschek, *Class Formation and Urban Industrial Society: Bradford, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, 1990), 416.

<sup>50</sup> *Leeds Patriot*, 10 Mar. 1832.

<sup>51</sup> *Mr. Oastler's Three Letters to Mr. Hetherington* (1836), 9.

<sup>52</sup> Oastler, *Damnation*, 13.

<sup>53</sup> Oastler to Lord Ashley, 17 Apr. 1835, quoted in Edwin Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury* (3 vols, Shannon, 1971 [1888]), I, p. 215.

<sup>54</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 27 Apr. 1837.

<sup>55</sup> At one meeting, held at Prestwich, where Oastler was imploring workers to arm in self-defence, he referred to himself as a tory no less than four times. *Chartist*, 2 Feb. 1839.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Oastler, *Facts and Plain Words on Every-Day Subjects* (Leeds, 1833), 43, 44; Richard Oastler, *A Few Words to the Friends and Enemies of Trades' Unions* (Huddersfield, 1834); *London Dispatch*, 15 Oct. 1837; *Northern Liberator*, 18 Nov. 1837.

<sup>57</sup> *London Dispatch*, 20 Aug. 1837 (letter from 'H. W. '); *Northern Star*, 28 Apr. 1838 (letter from 'Mary Grassby'); *Leeds Times*, 12 Aug. 1837 (and the subsequent exchanges during September).

<sup>58</sup> Oastler, *Facts and Plain Words*, 11, 14, 16, 35, 40; *Fleet Papers*, 1 May 1841.

<sup>59</sup> *Fleet Papers*, 9 and 30 Jan. 1841, 15 May 1841, 24 July 1841, 18 Sept. 1841.

<sup>60</sup> *Fleet Papers*, 18 Sept. 1841.

<sup>61</sup> *Fleet Papers*, 12 Feb. 1842.

<sup>62</sup> *Fleet Papers*, 16 July 1842.

<sup>63</sup> *Fleet Papers*, 10 Sept. 1842; Michael Ledger-Lomas, 'The Character of Pitt the Younger and Party Politics, 1830-1860', *HJ*, xxvii (2004), 641-61.

<sup>64</sup> *Fleet Papers*, 28 May 1842; 26 Nov. 1842; Margot Finn, *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740-1914* (Cambridge, 2003), 176.

<sup>65</sup> West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds, Richard Oastler Letters, WYL 22, Oastler to Ramsay, 1 Feb. 1843.

<sup>66</sup> *Fleet Papers*, 8 July 1843.

<sup>67</sup> *Fleet Papers*, 2 Sept. 1843, 13 July 1844.

<sup>68</sup> *Fleet Papers*, 22 May 1841.

<sup>69</sup> Oastler, *Facts and Plain Words*, 41; *Champion*, 3 Feb. 1839; *Fleet Papers*, 3 Dec. 1842.

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- <sup>70</sup> *Fleet Papers*, 26 Feb. 1842, 13 July 1844.
- <sup>71</sup> J. T. Ward, *Sir James Graham* (1967), 187, 208.
- <sup>72</sup> *Fleet Papers*, 10 Sept. 1842.
- <sup>73</sup> The two men certainly knew of one another, but they seem to have been little more than casually acquainted, though Oastler was a guest at one of Disraeli's parties. M. G. Wiebe et al., *Benjamin Disraeli Letters: 1838-1841* (Toronto, 1987), 258-9 n5.
- <sup>74</sup> Paul Smith, 'Disraeli's Politics', *TRHS*, xxxvii (1987), 65-95.
- <sup>75</sup> Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil* (1983 [1870]), 278.
- <sup>76</sup> Benjamin Disraeli, *Lord Beaconsfield on the Constitution* (1884), 10.
- <sup>77</sup> Jonathan Parry, 'Disraeli, Benjamin, earl of Beaconsfield (1804-1881)', *ODNB* (Oxford, online edn, 2011).
- <sup>78</sup> TNA, HO 40/40, Examination of Richard Oastler, 7 Feb. 1839, f.376.
- <sup>79</sup> Parry, 'Disraeli', *ODNB*.
- <sup>80</sup> LSE, Thomas Allsop Papers, COLL 0525/3/2, Oastler to Allsop, 15 July 1846.
- <sup>81</sup> *Morning Post*, 8 Aug. 1846.
- <sup>82</sup> Hill, *Toryism and the People*, 223.
- <sup>83</sup> W. A. Speck, 'Robert Southey, Benjamin Disraeli and Young England', *History*, xcv (2010), 195.
- <sup>84</sup> LSE, COLL 0525/3/11, Oastler to Allsop, 15 Dec. 1850.
- <sup>85</sup> LSE, COLL 0525/3/12, Oastler to Allsop, 12 Aug. 1851.
- <sup>86</sup> For this classification of Conservative positions, see Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People? England, 1783-1846* (Oxford, 2006), 519.
- <sup>87</sup> Oastler, *Facts and Plain Words*, 19.
- <sup>88</sup> Oastler, *The Right of the Poor*, 5-6.
- <sup>89</sup> *Fleet Papers*, 14 Jan. 1843.
- <sup>90</sup> TNA, HO 44/33/32, Oastler to Home Secretary, 18 September 1839, f. 6.
- <sup>91</sup> *Northern Star*, 10 Mar. 1838.
- <sup>92</sup> TNA, HO 44/33/32, Oastler to Home Secretary, 18 September 1839, ff. 4-5.
- <sup>93</sup> *Oastler's Letters to Hetherington*, 10.
- <sup>94</sup> *Halifax and Huddersfield Express*, 6 May 1837.
- <sup>95</sup> *Fleet Papers*, 2 Jan. 1841.



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- <sup>96</sup> Ian Dyck, *William Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture* (Cambridge, 1992), 10.
- <sup>97</sup> Oastler to Ashley, 17 Apr. 1835, quoted in Hodder, *Life of Shaftesbury*, 215; *Northern Star*, 20 Oct. 1838; Oastler, *A Few Words*, 3; Oastler, *Eight Letters*, 164-5.
- <sup>98</sup> *The Fly*, 13 Apr. 1839.
- <sup>99</sup> Oastler, *The Right of the Poor*, 22; Oastler, *Facts and Plain Words*, 57; John W. Osborne, *William Cobbett: His Thought and His Times* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1966), 156; *Fleet Papers*, 8 Jan. 1842.
- <sup>100</sup> TNA, HO 40/40, Examination of Oastler, 7 Feb. 1839, f.378.
- <sup>101</sup> *Fleet Papers*, 17 Apr. 1841; John Timbs, *Wellingtoniana* (1853), 123.
- <sup>102</sup> *Halifax Guardian*, 18 July 1837.
- <sup>103</sup> John Belchem, 'Republicanism, Popular Constitutionalism and the Radical Platform in Early Nineteenth Century England', *Social History*, vi (1981), 1-32; James Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual and Symbol, 1790-1850* (New York, 1994), ch. 1.
- <sup>104</sup> *Fleet Papers*, 2 Jan. 1841.
- <sup>105</sup> *Fleet Papers*, 19 Aug. 1843.
- <sup>106</sup> *Halifax and Huddersfield Express*, 6 May 1837.
- <sup>107</sup> Samuel Kydd, *The History of the Factory Movement from 1802 to the Enactment of the Ten Hours Bill in 1847* (2 vols, 1857), i, 90-1.
- <sup>108</sup> Oastler, *The Right of the Poor*, 9, 20, 23.
- <sup>109</sup> Stewart Angas Weaver, *John Fielden and the Politics of Popular Radicalism* (Oxford, 1987), 6.
- <sup>110</sup> Oastler, *Eight Letters*, 58-9.
- <sup>111</sup> BL, Oastler-Thornhill MS, Add MS 41748, Oastler to Thornhill, 13 Feb. 1835, f.10.
- <sup>112</sup> Co-operative Archive, Manchester, Robert Owen Papers, ROCC/664, William Stocks and Richard Oastler to Robert Owen, 11 Nov. 1833, ROCC/832, Oastler to Owen 19 Oct. 1836; *New Moral World*, 29 Oct. 1836, 27 May 1837.
- <sup>113</sup> E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), 782; Cole, *Chartist Portraits*, 96.
- <sup>114</sup> Co-operative Archive, ROCC/668, Oastler to Owen, 22 Nov. 1833.
- <sup>115</sup> LSE, COLL 525/3/11, Oastler to Allsop, 15 Dec. 1850.
- <sup>116</sup> *Stephens' Monthly Magazine*, Jan. 1840; *Fleet Papers*, 30 March 1841, 26 June 1841.
- <sup>117</sup> BL, Add MS 41748, Oastler to Thornhill, 26 Jan. 1835, f.6.

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- <sup>118</sup> BL, Add MS 41748, Oastler to Thornhill, 20 May 1835, f.12.
- <sup>119</sup> *Fleet Papers*, 16 Jan. 1841, 6 March 1841.
- <sup>120</sup> Driver, *Tory Radical*, 61.
- <sup>121</sup> Oastler, *The Right of the Poor*, 14, 30.
- <sup>122</sup> *Fleet Papers*, 19 June 1841.
- <sup>123</sup> Ryan Hanley, 'Slavery and the Birth of Working-Class Racism in England, 1814-1833', *TRHS*, xxvi (2016), 103-24.
- <sup>124</sup> *Northern Star*, 5 May 1838.
- <sup>125</sup> Nicholas Draper, *The Price of Emancipation: Slave Ownership, Compensation and British Society at the End of Slavery* (Cambridge, 2010), 66.
- <sup>126</sup> *Northern Star*, 5 May 1838. On the links between abolition and British radical reform see Betty Fladeland, "'Our Cause being One and the Same": Abolitionists and Chartism', in *Slavery and British Society 1776-1846*, ed. James Walvin (1982), 69-99.
- <sup>127</sup> Cole, *Chartist Portraits*, 81; Driver, *Tory Radical*, 398; Hargreaves, "'Treading on the Edge of Revolution?'" , 219; Neuheiser, *Crown*, 197, 217.
- <sup>128</sup> Oastler, *Facts and Plain Words*, 36.
- <sup>129</sup> Simon Harratt, 'Sadler, Michael Thomas (1780-1834), in *HPC 1820-1832*, ed. D. R. Fisher (Cambridge, 2009), [<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1820-1832/member/sadler-michael-1780-1835>].
- <sup>130</sup> *Halifax and Huddersfield Express*, 12 Oct. 1836.
- <sup>131</sup> Oastler, *Damnation*, 13; *London Dispatch*, 14 May 1837.
- <sup>132</sup> Oastler, *Facts and Plain Words*, 20; John Belchem, '*Orator*' Hunt: *Henry Hunt and English Working Class Radicalism* (2012 [1985]), ch. 8; *Halifax Guardian*, 18 July 1837.
- <sup>133</sup> *London Mercury*, 14 May 1837; Oastler, *Facts and Plain Words*, 49; *Leeds Times*, 15 July 1837.
- <sup>134</sup> *London Dispatch*, 7 May 1837.
- <sup>135</sup> *Northern Star*, 1 Sept. 1838; Sanders, 'Working-Class Movements', 361.
- <sup>136</sup> *Northern Star*, 21 Apr. 1838.
- <sup>137</sup> *Fleet Papers*, 3 Dec. 1842; Oastler, *Facts and Plain Words*, 50, 54.
- <sup>138</sup> Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution* (New York, 1984), 15.

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<sup>139</sup> *London Dispatch*, 16 Dec. 1838.

<sup>140</sup> *Leeds Patriot*, 26 Nov. 1831.

<sup>141</sup> *Poor Man's Advocate*, 28 July 1832.

<sup>142</sup> Vivienne W. Hemingway, 'Urban Politics and Popular Protest Movements: Huddersfield in the Age of Reform c.1832-52', University of Huddersfield PhD, 1994, p. 314.

<sup>143</sup> *Halifax and Huddersfield Express*, 6 May 1837; TNA, HO 52/35/54, Oastler, 'To the Electors and Non-Electors of Huddersfield', 20 July 1837, f. 125.

<sup>144</sup> *Leeds Times*, 11 Jan. 1834.

<sup>145</sup> Driver, *Tory Radical*, 106-117, 255-9.

<sup>146</sup> Frank O'Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties: The Unreformed Electorate of Hanoverian England, 1734-1832* (Oxford, 1989); John A. Phillips, 'The Great Reform Act of 1832 and the Political Modernization of England', *American Historical Review*, c (1995), 411-36.

<sup>147</sup> Vernon, *Politics and the people*, ch. 4; Matthew Roberts, 'God Save the Paddock Flag: Anti-Poor Law and Chartist Banners, 1837-1844', in *The Charter Our Right: Huddersfield in the Chartist Era*, ed. John A. Hargreaves (forthcoming, 2018).

<sup>148</sup> For this interpretation, see R. Q. Gray, 'The Languages of Factory Reform in Britain, c.1830-1860', in *The Historical Meanings of Work*, ed. Patrick Joyce (Cambridge, 1987), 145-7.

<sup>149</sup> Neuheiser, *Crown*, 211.

<sup>150</sup> *Morning Post*, 23 Apr. 1838; Neuheiser, *Crown*, 227.

<sup>151</sup> Richard Oastler, *The Rejected Letter...to the Owners & Occupiers of Mills in...Halifax* (Leeds, 1836), 10.

<sup>152</sup> *Fleet Papers*, 30 Jan. 1841, 15 Jan. 1842.

<sup>153</sup> West Yorkshire Archives, Kirklees, Lawrence Pitkethly Papers, KC1040/5, Oastler to Pitkethly, 2 and 3 Feb. 1844. For the choreography of Oastler's liberation, see Janette Martin, "'Oastler is Welcome": Richard Oastler's Return to Huddersfield, 1844', in Hargreaves and Haigh, *Slavery in Yorkshire*.

<sup>154</sup> *Fleet Papers*, 21 July 1841.

<sup>155</sup> *Fleet Papers*, 7 Sept. 1844.

<sup>156</sup> Robert A. Sykes, 'Popular Politics and Trade Unionism in South-East Lancashire, 1829-42', University of Manchester PhD, 1982, pp. 455-68.

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<sup>157</sup> *Manchester Times*, 1 July 1837.

<sup>158</sup> Edwards, *Purge this Realm*, 36, 58, 97.

<sup>159</sup> Craig Calhoun, *The Roots of Radicalism: Tradition, the Public Sphere, and Early Nineteenth-Century Social Movements* (Chicago, 2012), 315.

<sup>160</sup> E.g. Henry Bentinck, *Tory Democracy* (1918).

<sup>161</sup> Jon Lawrence, 'Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914', *EHR*, cviii (1993), 629-52; Neuheiser, *Crown*.

<sup>162</sup> Oastler, *Eight Letters*, 68.

<sup>163</sup> Matthew Roberts, 'Currents of Electoral Independence: James Lowther and Popular Politics in York, c.1865-1880', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 78 (2006), 217-40; Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge, 1998), ch. 7.

<sup>164</sup> Quoted in *Fleet Papers*, 13 Jan. 1844.

<sup>165</sup> Quoted in Hargreaves, "'Victims of Slavery'", in *Yorkshire Slavery*, 33. For similar 'left-wing' commemorative praise, see H. de B. Gibbins, *English Social Reformers* (1892), 131-7; Ben Turner, *About Myself, 1863-1930* (London, 1930), 89.