

ROBERT WILMOT HORTON AND LIBERAL TORYISM

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Abstract

This thesis examines aspects of the political career of Robert Wilmot Horton (1784-1841), a junior minister in the Tory governments of the 1820s and an advocate of state-aided emigration to the British colonies. It considers how far Wilmot conforms to existing conceptualisations of 'liberal Toryism', which are summarized in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2 finds both ambition and principle in Wilmot's choice of party, while identifying fundamental aspects of his political make-up, in particular his devotion to political economy and his hostility to political radicalism. Chapters 3 to 5 explore his economic thinking. Chapter 3 charts Wilmot's gradual move away from a Malthusian approach to the problem of pauperism, and the resulting changes in his view of the role of emigration as a means of relief. Chapter 4 shows how his specific plan of colonization addressed broader considerations of imperial strategy and economic development. Chapter 5, exploring the wider context of economic debate, reveals Wilmot as an advocate of governmental activism in social policy, a critic of 'economical reform', and a moderate protectionist in the short term.

Chapter 6 suggests that Wilmot, and the ministry as a whole, were driven by pragmatic rather than ideological considerations in their approach to the amelioration of slavery. Chapter 7 concludes that Wilmot's advocacy of Catholic Emancipation, on grounds of expediency, conformed to the approach normally ascribed to liberal Tories in principle if not in detail. Chapter 8 finds, in Wilmot's pamphleteering and lecturing, a striking instance of an 'outward turn' in political behaviour; and, in his support for parliamentary reform in 1831, a continuing determination to resist political radicalism.

Overall, the thesis argues that Wilmot embraced political economy more in its 'secular' than its 'Christian' guise, but took interventionist positions on economic and social questions which set him apart from his colleagues. These conclusions complicate the task of retrieving a convincing ideology of liberal Toryism, if indeed there is one to be found.

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The research for and writing of this thesis have taken a very long time, and would not have been possible without the support and encouragement, not to mention the patience and forbearance, of my wife Hilary and daughter Emily. If dedications were appropriate to PhD theses, this one would be dedicated to them.

Stephen Lamont

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Abbreviations

Note: Full titles and bibliographic details of published works by Wilmot Horton are given in the Appendix.

Add. MS	British Library, Additional Manuscripts
Arundel	Arundel Castle Archives
ASR	<i>Anti-Slavery Reporter</i>
Baines	R.W. Horton, <i>Correspondence upon some Points connected with the Roman Catholic Question</i> (1829)
Bathurst Letters	Mitchell Library, New South Wales, Fond A73, Letters of Earl Bathurst to R.J. Wilmot Horton, 1824-1827
BCA	British Catholic Association
Blackwood’s	<i>Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine</i>
Burdett	R.W. Horton, <i>A Letter to Sir Francis Burdett</i> (1826)
C	Derbyshire Record Office, Fond D3155, Wilmot-Horton of Osmaston and Catton Papers, ‘C’ series letter

<i>Causes</i>	R.W. Horton, <i>Causes and Remedies of Pauperism ... considered</i> (1829)
<i>Chronicle</i>	<i>The Morning Chronicle</i>
CO	The National Archives, Kew, Colonial Office files
‘Corn Laws’	[R.W. Horton], ‘The Corn Laws’, <i>QR</i> vol 35 no 69 (Jan 1827), pp.269-83
D4576	Derbyshire Record Office, Fond D4576, Wilmot Horton Papers
Denison Papers	Denison of Ossington Papers, Nottingham University Manuscripts Department
<i>EHR</i>	<i>The English Historical Review</i>
<i>ER</i>	<i>The Edinburgh Review</i>
<i>Hansard</i>	<i>Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates</i> (followed by 2 nd or 3 rd series as appropriate, volume, column, and date)
Grey Papers	Grey Papers, Durham University Library
Hatherton Papers	Hatherton Family Papers, Staffordshire Record Office
<i>HJ</i>	<i>The Historical Journal</i>
<i>Inquiry</i>	R.W. Horton, <i>Inquiry into the Causes and Remedies of Pauperism</i> (1830)
<i>Lectures</i>	R.W. Horton, <i>Lectures on Statistics and Political Economy</i> (1832)
Murray Papers	John Murray Archive, National Library of Scotland
<i>Newcastle</i>	R.W. Horton, <i>Letter to the Electors of Newcastle-under-Line</i> (1826)
<i>Observations</i>	R.W. Horton, <i>Observations upon the Present Crisis in Public Affairs</i> (MS, Aug 1830; WH2858)
<i>PH</i>	<i>Parliamentary History</i>

P.P.	Parliamentary Sessional Papers
PRO	The National Archives, Kew, 'PRO' series files
<i>Protestant Safety</i>	R.W. Horton, <i>Protestant Safety ...</i> (1829)
<i>Protestant Securities</i>	R.W. Horton, <i>Protestant Securities Suggested</i> (1828)
QR	<i>The Quarterly Review</i>
<i>Reform</i>	R.W. Horton, <i>Reform in 1839 and Reform in 1831</i> (1839)
<i>Rochester</i>	R.W. Horton, <i>Letter to the Lord Bishop of Rochester ...</i> (1828)
RO	Record Office
<i>Speech, 1828</i>	<i>Speech of the Right Hon. R. Wilmot Horton ... on the 6th of March 1828</i> (1828)
'Taxation'	[R.W. Horton], 'Taxation and Expenditure', <i>QR</i> vol 35 no 69 (Jan 1827), pp.283-307
Taylor Papers	Taylor Family Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford
TRHS	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
<i>West India Question</i>	R.W. Horton, <i>The West India Question practically considered</i> (1826)
WH	Derbyshire Record Office, Fond D3155, Wilmot-Horton of Osmaston and Catton Papers, 'WH' series file
<i>York Letter, I</i>	R.W. Horton, <i>First Letter ... on Negro Slavery</i> (1830)
<i>York Letter, II</i>	R.W. Horton, <i>Second Letter ... on Negro Slavery</i> (1830)

Biographical Note

Robert John Wilmot was born in 1784, the only child of Sir Robert Wilmot, second baronet, of Osmaston near Derby, by his first wife Juliana, the second daughter of Admiral John Byron. The poet Byron was Wilmot's first cousin.¹ Wilmot was only three years old when his mother died; his father later remarried and had seven further children by his second wife.²

Wilmot was educated at Eton and at Christ Church, Oxford, matriculating in 1803, graduating B.A. in 1806, and taking his M.A. in 1815. In 1806 he married Anne Beatrix Horton, the elder daughter of Eusebius Horton of Catton Hall, Derbyshire. Their marriage settlement provided them with an estate at Davenport, Cheshire,³ where they lived until moving to London in 1812. They had eight children between 1808 and 1825, four boys and four girls, of whom two of the girls died in infancy or childhood.⁴

Wilmot was Member of Parliament for Newcastle-under-Lyme from 1818 to 1830, having previously contested the borough unsuccessfully in 1815. From late 1821 to early 1828 he served as Undersecretary of State in the Colonial Department, and from 1831 to 1837 as Governor of Ceylon. Between 1825 and 1831 he wrote extensively on emigration, slavery, Catholic emancipation, and other subjects. On returning to England in 1838 he resumed his pamphleteering on these subjects but was unable to attract much interest. In ill health, he spent much of his time abroad. He died in 1841.

Wilmot took the additional surname Horton in 1823, as a condition of his succession to the Catton estates under his father-in-law's will. Thereafter he signed himself R.W. Horton, but was generally referred to as Wilmot Horton. In this thesis for the sake of simplicity he is referred to throughout as Wilmot

¹ Unless otherwise stated, basic biographical data is taken from the article on Wilmot Horton in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

² *The Gentleman's Magazine* (Oct 1834), pp.431-2.

³ WH2549, Correspondence between Sir R. Wilmot and E. Horton, 1806-7.

⁴ Revd. R. Ussher, *A Historical Sketch of the Parish of Croxall* (1881), p.174.

or Wilmot Horton. Quotations from primary sources, and citations in footnotes, follow the contemporary usage.



**Robert Wilmot Horton, c. 1820
by Richard James Lane (1800-1872)**

Introduction and Methodology

It is notoriously hard to attach meaning to political labels such as ‘liberal’ and ‘conservative’. Such labels change their shape and meaning over time; even when applied to a particular grouping at a specific time, they must accommodate a wide range of opinion. If the problem seems particularly acute in the case of conservatism, it is probably in the nature of things that it should be so. Conservatives tend to distrust system, and so rarely develop a systematic political ideology of their own. Secondly, there is an inevitable tension between conservative beliefs and values, on the one hand, and the means by which conservatives in government seek to accommodate inevitable change, on the other. When two such amorphous labels are combined, as in the ‘liberal Toryism’ of the 1820s, the problem of description is compounded, and it is no surprise that this ‘liberal Toryism’ has proved resistant to the best efforts of historians to understand it.¹ This thesis aims to contribute towards a more detailed knowledge of the liberal Toryism of this period, through an exploration of certain aspects of the political career of a junior minister of the time, Robert Wilmot Horton. It also aims to contribute to the history of party development by considering Wilmot’s relationship to political party.

Wilmot’s historical reputation does not currently stand high. It will not be contended here that he has been fundamentally misunderstood, or that he is a figure of great but hitherto unrealized importance. The argument is rather that he is a more interesting figure than has been appreciated, and that an exploration of his concerns, his campaigns, and the political tribulations he suffered, sheds new light on aspects of the social and political thought of his day which have been of interest to historians in recent decades.

¹ Below, pp.16-31.

This introductory chapter serves the following purposes: first, to explore the existing understanding of Wilmot Horton and to explain why he is a suitable subject for further investigation; second, to survey the historiography of liberal Toryism, and, where relevant, of early nineteenth-century Toryism more generally; third, to describe the sources on which this study is based; fourth, to outline the content of subsequent chapters.

I

Wilmot Horton is rarely mentioned in general political histories of his period. Insofar as he has any general reputation at all, it is as a well-meaning but impractical zealot, with an obsessive passion for emigration as the solution to the nation's economic and social ills. Peter Jupp, for instance, placed him among the 'inevitable enthusiasts for particular causes.'² For C.R. Fay, Wilmot 'had emigration on the brain', while in temperament he was 'restless, eager for office, fond of a project, political or financial, an enthusiast with a central purpose';³ for Eric Richards his political behaviour was 'often quixotic or inept', he was 'possessed of a passion "for re-making the world"' and 'he pursued too many impractical visions.'⁴ Nor was this lack of practicality confined to the subject of emigration: for Elie Halévy his suggested 'security' to facilitate Catholic emancipation was 'too complicated to be considered by a practical statesman.'⁵ Given such judgments, it is not surprising that Wilmot has also suffered a share of purely gratuitous disparagement. We are assured, for instance, that when Wilmot met Thomas Chalmers in 1827, 'it is likely that the two *fanaticks* talked past each other';⁶ and that, as an 'assiduous

² Peter Jupp, *The Governing of Britain, 1688-1848* (Abingdon, 2006), p.222. See also P. Jupp, *British Politics on the Eve of Reform* (Basingstoke, 1998), p.175.

³ C.R. Fay, *Huskisson and His Age* (1951), p.85.

⁴ Eric Richards, 'Horton, Sir Robert John Wilmot-, third baronet (1784-1841)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; online edn., accessed 7 Feb 2014.

⁵ E. Halévy, *The Liberal Awakening, 1815-1830* (1923; 2nd English edn., 1949), p.275.

⁶ Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement* (Oxford, 1986), p.60. The correspondence between Chalmers and Wilmot Horton, preserved in the latter's papers, reveals a degree of intellectual engagement, though little agreement.

correspondent', Wilmot was in 'regular but not necessarily reciprocal contact with most of the leading political figures of the day.'⁷

Similar judgments are to be found in more specialized studies. D.M. Young thought Wilmot 'an anachronism in the administrative machine of his day', because of his faith in government planning informed by statistical knowledge. 'Because of this impractical pursuit of visions he has been roundly and justly condemned as a policy maker.'⁸ D.J. Murray gave an unflattering assessment of his character in comparison with his immediate predecessor at the Colonial Office: 'Where [Henry] Goulburn was a self-effacing, hard working, model Undersecretary, Horton was sensitive, impetuous, strong-willed and unmethodical.'⁹

Undeniably, support can be found for these assessments in the historical record, and they also reflect a decided strain in contemporary opinion of Wilmot. Wilmot's 'Protestant securities' *were* impractical,¹⁰ and his relentless advocacy of assisted emigration certainly alienated many of his contemporaries.¹¹ By 1828, according to *Blackwood's* – admittedly a hostile source – 'this matter is now treated by the House as an "amiable weakness" of the Right Hon. Gentleman.'¹² By 1830, for some, amused toleration had hardened into exasperation. As Wilmot's close friend James Macdonald complained, 'you are plunged up to your chin in that eternal slough of Emigration ... Positively it is beyond enduring!'¹³ While most people gave Wilmot credit for good intentions, that was rarely enough to save him from censure. George Croly, for instance, wrote of him that 'a well-meaning man, when he gets a wrong idea in his head, is the most consummate of public

⁷ P.J. Salmon, 'Robert John Wilmot', in D.R. Fisher (ed.), *The House of Commons, 1820-1832* (7 vols., Cambridge, 2009), vii, p.831. Wilmot's correspondence with leading politicians and economists was almost always 'reciprocated', generally with every appearance of mutual respect.

⁸ D.M. Young, *The Colonial Office in the Early Nineteenth Century* (1961), pp.51-2.

⁹ D.J. Murray, *The West Indies and the Development of Colonial Government* (Oxford, 1965), p.119.

¹⁰ Chapter 7 will show that there is much more than this to say about Wilmot's contribution to the debate on the Catholic Question.

¹¹ The practicability of Wilmot's emigration plans is considered below, pp.183-9.

¹² 'Notices, Travelling and Political, by a Whig-Hater', *Blackwood's*, 142 (Aug 1828), p.193.

¹³ WH2838, Macdonald to Wilmot, 5 Sep 1830.

nuisances.’¹⁴ Such perceptions no doubt underlay the harsh judgment of Lord Melbourne, who refused to consider Wilmot for the Governorship of Canada in 1838, commenting: ‘he has always appeared to me a particularly silly fellow.’¹⁵ Wilmot also attracted more than his share of gentle disparagement from colleagues. Joseph Planta, for instance, in urging Huskisson not to risk his health by rushing back to England after the death of Canning, wrote that ‘Wilmot Horton will ruin or lose a few colonies in the interval, but no other harm will happen.’¹⁶

Yet there was another side to contemporary perceptions of Wilmot. At the personal level, Wilmot appears to have been – at least normally – an agreeable and amusing companion, and a generous and loyal friend. James Stephen (the younger) called him ‘the pleasantest of companions’;¹⁷ the young Richard Wellesley ‘passed one of the most agreeable evenings of my life at Wilmot’s ... Wilmot was as eloquent; and as pleasing as possible’;¹⁸ and Charles Greville told the clerks at the Colonial Office, on Wilmot’s appointment as Undersecretary in 1821, that ‘a merrier man within the limits of becoming mirth, they never passed an hour’s talk withal.’¹⁹ Wilmot’s kindness and generosity, both with time and money, were greatly appreciated by his friends.²⁰

Wilmot’s tireless promotion of assisted emigration brought him as many bouquets as brickbats.²¹ Colleagues in parliament, and commentators in newspapers and periodicals, acknowledged his zeal, diligence, and usefulness, even when they disagreed with him, and by 1831, shortly before his departure for Ceylon, there were strong signs that his ideas were gaining ground among

¹⁴ ‘Mr Wilmot Horton and Emigration’, *Blackwood’s*, 135 (Feb 1828), p.191.

¹⁵ Lloyd C. Sanders (ed.), *Lord Melbourne’s Papers* (2nd edn., 1890), p.376. Wilmot and Melbourne were poles apart in political temperament.

¹⁶ Add. MS 38750, ff. 30-33, Planta to Huskisson, 15 Aug 1827.

¹⁷ But added, ‘the most restless of politicians’: Young, *Colonial Office*, p.59.

¹⁸ Bodleian Library, Papers of F.S.N. Douglas, MS.Eng.lett.c.568, ff.24-7, Wellesley to Douglas, 26/7 Jul 1813.

¹⁹ But added, he would ‘probably be a horrid man of business’: WH2897, Greville to Wilmot, 4 Dec 1821. The reference is to *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, 2.1.66-8.

²⁰ WH2810, Heber to Wilmot, 4 May 1817; Hatherton Papers, D260/M/F/5/27/5, Fazakerley to Littleton, 20 Sep 1828.

²¹ Wilmot’s standing amongst leading political economists is considered below, pp.116-9.

the political classes. The new Whig government introduced a Bill to facilitate emigration, Lord Howick observing that ‘the government only claimed the merit of having adopted the ideas of the right hon. gentleman (Mr. Wilmot Horton) who had so long and perseveringly urged on the country the consideration of the subject.’²² The *Quarterly Review* and *Edinburgh Review* were united in their support for the Bill. The *Quarterly* thought that the country owed ‘no common obligation’ to Wilmot for his ‘enlightened efforts’ to promote ‘sound doctrines on the causes and remedies of pauperism’;²³ while for the *Edinburgh*, J.R. McCulloch wrote that it was ‘impossible ... to estimate too highly’ Wilmot’s services, and that events had shown ‘the solidity of his leading principles, and the correctness of his general views’. McCulloch hoped that Wilmot ‘would have the gratification of seeing his opinions adopted and acted upon by parliament.’²⁴

Wilmot was denied this gratification. Neither he nor anyone else – and many others subsequently tried – was able to persuade a nineteenth-century government to take up assisted emigration on any scale, and this in part explains why the generous opinion of some of his contemporaries has not entered much into his modern reputation. Another explanation lies in the deliberate trashing of Wilmot’s reputation by his most important immediate successor as a theorist of colonization, Edward Gibbon Wakefield. Wakefield initially tried to convert Wilmot to his own theory of colonization, but, finding that this could not be done, he and his fellow ‘colonial reformers’ began systematically to denigrate him instead.²⁵ Charles Buller coined what has become the best-known, if not the most apt, description of Wilmot’s plan of emigration – that it consisted simply of ‘shovelling out paupers’.²⁶ With powers of promotion and persuasion far in excess of Wilmot’s own, Wakefield and his associates were largely successful: Wilmot was eclipsed for generations.²⁷

²² *Hansard*, 3rd ser., vol 2, c.880, 22 Feb 1831.

²³ [John Fullarton], ‘Parliamentary Reform’, *QR* 88 (Feb 1831), p.592.

²⁴ ‘Causes and Cure of Disturbances and Pauperism’, *ER* 105 (Mar 1831), p.53.

²⁵ See, for instance, *The Spectator*, 15 Jan & 26 Feb 1831; [E.G. Wakefield], *Outline of a System of Colonization* (1829), pp.iv-vii.

²⁶ *Hansard*, 3rd ser., vol 68, c.522, 6 Apr 1843.

²⁷ Relations between Wilmot and the ‘Colonial Reformers’ are considered in Chapter 4.

E.G. Jones's thesis of 1936, still the only full-length study of Wilmot Horton, represented a pioneering attempt to restore his reputation.²⁸ Jones's work was based primarily on Wilmot's copious published writings and speeches, and on his extensive archive of correspondence. This was still in private hands at the time, and Jones's time with the archive was inevitably limited. He prioritized Wilmot's correspondence with politicians and hardly drew on the equally extensive correspondence with political economists. He produced a lucid, thorough, and well-contextualized account of what Wilmot wrote, said, and did, which can still be read with profit by anyone seeking an introduction to Wilmot's career, but which does not go deeply into underlying social and economic questions. Consistent with the time at which he wrote, Jones was primarily concerned with Wilmot's 'imperial' legacy. Wilmot, he judged, 'looked beyond responsible government to the period when the colonies should be free and self-governing and anticipated an alliance between them and the mother-country, based on mutual interest and goodwill.' Having been 'relegated for nearly a century to ignominious obscurity', it was time 'to accord him a worthy place in its roll of Empire-builders.'²⁹

Historians working in the specialist fields of emigration and colonization have also done much to recover Wilmot's contribution. Wilmot's activities were recorded in some detail in two pioneering works, of which that by H.I. Cowan is the more sympathetic.³⁰ The dismantling of Britain's empire in the decades after the Second World War prompted a flurry of interest in the other end of the story, and Wilmot's contribution, theoretical and practical, was considered by several writers in the 1960s and early 1970s. Synoptic overviews of the relationship between 'classical' economic thought and colonization were provided by Donald Winch and R.N. Ghosh, both with chapters on Wilmot;³¹

²⁸ E.G. Jones, 'Sir R.J. Wilmot Horton, Bart., Politician and Pamphleteer' (M.A. thesis, Bristol, 1936).

²⁹ Jones, 'Wilmot Horton', pp.363, 365.

³⁰ W.F. Adams, *Ireland and Irish Emigration to the New World, from 1815 to the Famine* (New Haven, 1932); H.I. Cowan, *British Emigration to British North America* (1928; revised edn. Toronto, 1961).

³¹ Donald Winch, *Classical Political Economy and Colonies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965); R.N. Ghosh, *Classical Macroeconomics and the Case for Colonies* (Calcutta, 1967).

some contrarian views were expressed by Edward Kittrell.³² Bernard Semmel placed Wilmot's and Wakefield's ideas in the context of the ongoing debate, stimulated by Gallagher and Robinson, on the relationship between imperialism and free trade.³³ Edward Brynn explored Wilmot's wider social and political thought;³⁴ the relations between Wilmot and Wakefield were reassessed;³⁵ and extracts from Wilmot's correspondence with Malthus were published.³⁶ Oliver MacDonagh considered Wilmot's involvement in the development of the Passenger Acts, a subject later revisited by Peter Dunkley.³⁷ There is no comparable body of work taking Wilmot into consideration from a purely domestic standpoint. R.D. Collison Black took proper account of Wilmot's ideas in his authoritative study, *Economic Thought and the Irish Question, 1817-1870* (Cambridge, 1960); but emigration gets short shrift, and Wilmot himself is hardly mentioned, in J.R. Poynter's seminal *Society and Pauperism* (1969). As far as Wilmot is concerned, the work of this period culminates in the fine study by H.J.M. Johnston of British emigration policy in Wilmot's time. This brings together Wilmot's ideas, the response to them by politicians and economists, and the practical experience of assisted emigration in the period, in a satisfying and convincing whole.³⁸

The judgments in these works vary. Brynn, like Jones, thought that Wilmot 'deserves to be included in Britain's nineteenth century gallery of visionary

³² Edward R. Kittrell, 'The Development of the Theory of Colonization in English Classical Political Economy', *Southern Economic Journal*, 31 (1965), pp.189-206. See also Donald Winch, 'The Classical Debate on Colonization: Comment', and Edward Kittrell, 'Reply', both in *Southern Economic Journal*, 32 (1966), pp.341-9.

³³ Bernard Semmel, *The Rise of Free Trade Imperialism* (Cambridge, 1970), pp.103-24. See also J. Gallagher and R. Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', *Economic History Review*, 6 (1953), pp.1-15; O. MacDonagh, 'The Anti-Imperialism of Free Trade', *Economic History Review*, 14 (1962), pp.489-501.

³⁴ Edward Brynn, 'The Emigration Theories of Robert Wilmot Horton 1820-1841', *Canadian Journal of History*, 4 (1969), pp.45-65; idem., 'Politics and Economic Theory: Robert Wilmot Horton, 1820-1841', *Historian*, 34 (1972), pp.260-77.

³⁵ R.N. Ghosh, 'The Colonization Controversy: R.J. Wilmot-Horton and the Classical Economists', *Economica*, 31 (1964), pp.385-400.

³⁶ R.N. Ghosh, 'Malthus on Emigration and Colonization: Letters to Wilmot-Horton', *Economica*, 30 (1963), pp.45-62.

³⁷ Oliver MacDonagh, *A Pattern of Government Growth, 1800-60* (1961); Peter Dunkley, 'Emigration and the State, 1803-1842: the Nineteenth Century Revolution in Government Reconsidered', *HJ* 23 (1980), pp.353-80.

³⁸ H.J.M. Johnston, *British Emigration Policy, 1815-1830* (Oxford, 1972).

imperialists.’³⁹ For Winch, Wilmot was ‘primarily concerned with the effect of emigration on the mother country’, and it was left to Wakefield to develop a satisfactory theory of colonization.⁴⁰ Kittrell agreed on this point.⁴¹ Johnston, however, concluded that ‘one should not underestimate Wilmot Horton.’ His system was more sophisticated and comprehensive than it had generally been given credit for, but was too novel and ambitious for cautious ministers to accept.⁴²

Latterly there has been some revival of interest in early nineteenth century attitudes to empire, prompting the occasional modern reassertion of Wilmot’s significance in this context. Karen O’Brien argued that the advocates of state-assisted emigration, including Wilmot, ‘exerted disproportionate influence upon the reconceptualisation, in the first half of the nineteenth century, of Britain’s relationship with its colonies’.⁴³ That aside, Wilmot has received little attention in recent decades, though his parliamentary career has been written up by R.G. Thorne and Philip Salmon.⁴⁴ Despite the best efforts of Jones and Johnston, his general reputation continues to languish. His thinking on economic and social problems in Britain and colonization abroad, and his involvement in the question of slavery in the West Indies, have not been reassessed for forty years or more. His contributions to other crucial debates, such as the Catholic question and parliamentary reform, have not been addressed since Jones’s thesis eighty years ago. In the meantime – in the last forty years in particular – much has been done to uncover the ideologies, motives, and instincts which animated the political ‘right’ in Wilmot’s time. This thesis aims to re-evaluate Wilmot’s activities, and contemporary reactions to them, in the light of these new insights, and thus contribute towards a deepened understanding of the complex ideas and attitudes which comprised ‘liberal Toryism’.

³⁹ Brynn, ‘Emigration Theories’, p.45.

⁴⁰ Winch, *Colonies*, p.72.

⁴¹ Kittrell, ‘Colonization’, pp.192-3.

⁴² Johnston, *Emigration*, pp.149, 173.

⁴³ Karen O’Brien, ‘Colonial Emigration, Public Policy, and Tory Romanticism, 1783-1830’, in Duncan Kelly (ed.), *Lineages of Empire* (Oxford, 2009), p.163.

⁴⁴ R.G. Thorne, ‘Robert John Wilmot’, in R.G. Thorne (ed.), *The House of Commons, 1790-1820* (5 vols., 1986), v, pp.599-600; Salmon, ‘Wilmot’.

II

The terms ‘liberal Tory’ and ‘liberal Toryism’ were hardly used before the latter half of the 1820s, and not much then. The common use of these terms by historians is therefore somewhat artificial, as W.R. Brock pointed out.⁴⁵

Canning and some other ministers had been described as ‘liberal’ – without the ‘Tory’ – well before this. Canning himself did much to bring the word into currency, though he often used it playfully.⁴⁶ As a noun, ‘liberal’ was a recent term in English usage, originally derived from the Spanish ‘liberales’ – the champions of ‘constitutional’ government, based on notions of popular sovereignty, as opposed to autocratic (or, in conservative terms, ‘legitimate’) government. Its first connotations in English usage therefore related to constitutional questions and to foreign policy.⁴⁷ In this sense ‘liberal’ was a fiercely contested term, which many conservatives sought to equate with ‘radical’ and ‘Jacobin’.⁴⁸ However, the word soon acquired broader and vaguer meanings, drawing on the older, adjectival, meaning of ‘liberal’ as ‘generous’ and ‘large-minded’: to be ‘liberal’ in politics implied – to liberals – a certain openness of mind and breadth of knowledge and understanding. As J.C.D. Clark observed, once ‘liberal’ existed as a noun, liberal attitudes could be ‘reified ... into “liberalism”’; but the concept remained vague, a ‘portmanteau term’ into which different meanings could be inserted.⁴⁹

In this broader sense, liberal ideas were more commonly associated with opposition Whigs than with government ministers, though some ministers were credited with liberal attitudes towards a wide range of issues in foreign affairs, trade and commercial policy, fiscal and monetary policy, religious

⁴⁵ W.R. Brock, *Lord Liverpool and Liberal Toryism, 1820 to 1827* (2nd edn., 1967), p.2. The earliest example in Wilmot’s papers is from 1826: ‘... by liberal tory principles, I mean, those of Mr. Peel, Mr. Canning, and Mr. Huskisson’: WH2927, R. Torrens to Horton, 25 May 1826. In 1827 Wilmot described Goderich as ‘not a Whig at heart, though a thorough Liberal Tory’: PRO 30/29/9/6, Horton to Granville, 22 Jun 1827.

⁴⁶ Jonathan Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (1993), p.8; *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 8, c.1483, 30 Apr 1823.

⁴⁷ Halévy, *Liberal Awakening*, pp.81-2.

⁴⁸ David Craig, ‘The origins of “liberalism” in Britain: the case of *The Liberal*’, *Historical Research*, 85 (2012), pp.469-87.

⁴⁹ J.C.D. Clark, *English Society 1660-1832* (Cambridge, 2000), pp.6-8.

toleration, and the administration of justice.⁵⁰ The same range of application is found in early uses of ‘liberal Tory’,⁵¹ and of another slightly more common coinage from about the same time, ‘the principles of Mr. Canning’.⁵² In the 1820s, these ministers were often credited with implementing policies which had previously been identified with the Whigs. Peel’s reforms of the criminal code, for instance, were seen – probably wrongly – to be ‘giving effect to the maxims of Bentham, and treading in the steps of Romilly and Mackintosh’;⁵³ Ward praised Robinson and Huskisson for adhering to ‘the liberal system in trade’, and taking ‘the credit and benefit of those principles which for so long were considered as the property of the Whig opposition.’⁵⁴

It was perfectly possible to be ‘liberal’ on some dimensions but not others.⁵⁵ Peel, liberal in economics but not in religion, is the obvious example. Canning observed that the line dividing ‘the supposed liberals and illiberals’ in Cabinet was not straight but ‘serpentine’.⁵⁶ As Stephen Lee pointed out, this has ‘implications for attempts by historians ... to establish a basis for permanent division in the Cabinet.’⁵⁷

‘Tory’ was of course a much older word. It had almost fallen out of use at Westminster late in the eighteenth century, except as a way of stigmatizing the governing party, or a tendency within it, as over-keen on ‘church and king’; unacceptable to ministers for most of the 1800s and 1810s, it became steadily less so after 1820.⁵⁸ After the break-up of the party in 1827, into those who supported Canning and those who did not, the ‘seceding’ ministers were

⁵⁰ For two early instances from Wilmot’s papers, see below, p.55.

⁵¹ *Examiner*, 20 May 1827; *Blackwood’s*, 144 (Oct 1828), pp.425-6; *British Critic*, 9 (Jan 1829), p.157.

⁵² *Chronicle*, 11 Jan 1823; *The Examiner*, 6 May 1827; *Manchester Courier*, 1 Sep 1827.

⁵³ *Examiner*, 20 May 1827; cf. Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People?* (Oxford, 2006), pp.318-20.

⁵⁴ WH2782, Ward to Wilmot, 1 Apr 1824.

⁵⁵ As D.C. Moore observed, ‘political, religious and economic “liberalism” were not merely different forms of the same thing’: *The Politics of Deference* (Hassocks, 1976), p.227.

⁵⁶ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., vol 12, c.75, 3 Feb 1825.

⁵⁷ Stephen M. Lee, *George Canning and Liberal Toryism, 1801-1827* (Woodbridge, 2008), p.139.

⁵⁸ A.S. Foord, *His Majesty’s Opposition, 1714-1830* (Oxford, 1964), pp.441-4; R.G. Thorne, ‘Introductory Survey’, in Thorne, *Commons 1790-1820*, i, pp.345-6; Hilton, *Mad*, pp.195-7.

designated 'Tory', and by extension the use of 'liberal Tory' to describe their Canningite former colleagues became more common.

Even before 1827, there was evident antipathy between the 'liberal' element in the ministry and 'high' Tories – inside the ministry or outside it – who rejected liberal values.⁵⁹ Distrust, dislike, and incomprehension ooze from the pages of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and Mrs. Arbuthnot's diary.⁶⁰ This ill-feeling was exacerbated by the acrimonious split of 1827, and after Canning's death there were those in his immediate circle and beyond who blamed the Tories for harrying him to his grave.⁶¹ It was natural that the early, near-hagiographic, biographies of Canning should have stressed his liberal credentials,⁶² as did H.W.V. Temperley's *Life of Canning* of 1905. The liberal tendencies of Canning's colleagues seemed to be confirmed in 1830, when the main surviving remnant of them joined the Whigs in coalition under Grey; while their intellectual successors, the Peelites, later supplied one of the main tributaries of 'Gladstonian liberalism'.⁶³ Within a whiggish framework for early nineteenth-century British history, emphasizing the 'triumph of free trade' and peaceful constitutional development, the key political divide seemed to be between Tory and liberal, not between Tory and Whig. Historians have paid more attention to what divided liberal Tories from high Tories, than to what divided them from Whigs.

Many historians identified different social and economic interests behind the 'liberal Tory' and 'high Tory' camps. For Trevelyan, liberal Tories such as Canning and Huskisson recognized that 'England's future lay in commerce rather than in agriculture'; their outlook was therefore 'very different from

⁵⁹ The term 'high Tory' will acquire definition as the argument proceeds.

⁶⁰ *The Journal of Mrs. Arbuthnot, 1820-1832*, edited by Francis Bamford and the 7th Duke of Wellington (2 vols., 1950).

⁶¹ A. Aspinall, 'The Last of the Canningites', *EHR* 50 (1935), pp.645-9.

⁶² For instance: A.G. Stapleton, *The Political Life of the Right Honourable George Canning* (2nd edn., 3 vols., 1831); R. Therry, 'Memoir' in *Speeches of the Right Honourable George Canning*, ed. R. Therry (3rd edn., 6 vols, 1836), i, pp.1-178; Robert Bell, *Life of the Rt. Hon. George Canning* (1846).

⁶³ Hilton, *Mad*, pp.297, 308, 315; cf. Parry, *Liberal Government*, pp.20, 166.

that of the squires and rural clergy who composed the nucleus of their party.⁶⁴ Brock's view of the support base of each wing echoed Trevelyan's – on one side, 'the imponderable mass of the Tory aristocracy', on the other the 'commercial interest' inside and outside parliament, and much of the press.⁶⁵ Underlying these different economic interests were competing ideals of social policy, or, as Keith Feiling put it, 'two bodies fighting for the Tory soul.' High Tories cherished 'an incorporation of Church and State, a customary society built on natural affections', while liberal Tories attached more value to 'Malthusian teaching', political economy, and 'a tough individualist Protestantism.'⁶⁶ These competing interests and philosophies naturally led to different policies. As Halévy put it, the government 'could ally itself with the manufacturing middle class by adopting a programme of fiscal retrenchment and economic individualism', and, 'on the plea of respecting the worker's freedom, refuse him its protection'; or it could 'resign itself to bear the expense of the Poor Law, develop the principle of paternal government implicit in the Tory doctrine, and pose as the protector of the workman against the plutocrat of the factory.' Halévy thought that the government 'oscillated' between the two until 1819, when the return to cash payments marked the victory of liberalism.⁶⁷ That emphasis on 1819 supported Brock's argument that Liverpool, as much as Canning, was the mainstay of liberal Toryism within the Cabinet.⁶⁸ Canning's arrival as Foreign Secretary and Leader of the Commons, in 1822, was not quite the watershed between 'repressive' and 'liberal' phases in Liverpool's administration that it once seemed.⁶⁹

In the 1970s and 1980s this interpretation was challenged by Boyd Hilton, who argued that Tory divisions were more philosophical than socio-economic. Again, the resumption of cash payments was key. For Hilton, this was not a defining instance of the sacrifice of landed or agricultural interests to financial

⁶⁴ G.M. Trevelyan, *British History in the Nineteenth Century and After* (2nd edn., 1937), p.204.

⁶⁵ Brock, *Liverpool*, p.231.

⁶⁶ K.G. Feiling, *The Second Tory Party, 1714-1832* (1938), p.305.

⁶⁷ Halévy, *Liberal Awakening*, p.46.

⁶⁸ Brock, *Liverpool*, pp.2-3.

⁶⁹ See also: Michael J. Turner, *British Politics in an Age of Reform* (Manchester, 1999), p.142; Hilton, *Mad*, p.307.

and mercantile ones, but ‘an act of retrospective justice’ towards creditor interests which had suffered from wartime inflation, including landlords and rentiers. It was supported by much of the landed gentry, and few foresaw the sharp deflation which subsequently caused such harm to the agricultural interest. While the policy was certainly identified with the ‘liberal’ Tories, Hilton showed that their purpose was to restore a stable and sound currency, not to promote commercial interests at the expense of agriculture.⁷⁰ Similarly the contentious relaxation of the corn laws, in 1827-28, did not reflect an ideological commitment to free trade, but a pragmatic conclusion that some trade in corn was necessary to guarantee food supplies.⁷¹ There was no straightforward socio-economic divide between liberal and high Tories. ‘High’ Tories certainly favoured agriculture on both economic and social grounds, and equally certainly suspected that the liberals did not;⁷² the liberals were more neutral. As Lord Liverpool observed, agricultural, manufacturing, and commercial interests all needed each other: ‘any attempt to legislate in favour of one of those interests, to the exclusion of the others, would be most destructive to the whole.’⁷³

Hilton argued that the real differences lay deeper. The liberals did adhere to a free-trade ideology, but it was not the familiar ‘Ricardian’ or ‘professional’ model, characterized by Hilton as dynamic, growth-oriented, industrial, and cosmopolitan, and based on the pursuit of individual self-interest. This model, Hilton argued, was not particularly influential in the early nineteenth century. Instead, Hilton uncovered an ‘evangelical’ model of free trade, characterized as ‘static (or cyclical), nationalist, retributive and purgative,’ and based on ‘the supremacy of economic conscience.’ This model was developed by a number of ‘amateur’ Christian economists, of whom Thomas Chalmers was the most influential, to reconcile the seemingly gloomy conclusions of Malthusian population theory with the presumed benign purposes of God. They argued that Malthus had discerned essential features of the ‘moral training ground’

⁷⁰ Boyd Hilton, *Corn, Cash, Commerce* (Oxford, 1977), pp.31-66.

⁷¹ Hilton, *Corn*, pp.272-301.

⁷² High Tory views of social and economic policy, and their reactions to the supposed biases of the liberal Tories, are considered below, pp. 169-70, 175-9.

⁷³ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 1, c.567, 26 May 1820.

that God had provided for mankind. Scarcity, and the swings of the economic cycle, inculcated prudence, restraint, diligence, and self-denial. Free trade brought moral benefits which these Christian economists valued more highly than material ones.⁷⁴

In his detailed study of the development of this ‘Christian political economy’, A.M.C. Waterman argued that ‘in 1819 political economy still united all who studied it,’ and that the distinction between ‘professional’ and ‘amateur’ was false. There was one political economy, not two: clerical and secular practitioners spoke the same language, and were engaged in the same field of enquiry. True, ‘within a decade this unity was to disappear,’ because political economy came to be ‘tainted by association’ with a Westminster radicalism which, by the 1820s, was seen as ‘anti-clerical, even godless.’⁷⁵ But throughout the 1810s and 1820s, ‘with the sole exception of the macroeconomic issue variously alluded to as “effectual demand”, “aggregate demand”, “Say’s Law” or “general gluts”, Malthus and Chalmers were at one with Ricardo, McCulloch and the Mills.’ Their religious opinions did not drive their economic analysis.⁷⁶

Economic analysis as such was not Hilton’s primary concern, but nonetheless this has implications for his argument that liberal Tory ministers were influenced by ‘evangelical’ economics. Hilton did not maintain that they consciously adopted this model, rather that they were steeped in the same evangelical *zeitgeist* and shared many of the same assumptions. There was little direct evidence for this: the ‘links between economic and theological thought mostly took place below the surface of consciousness’, and – as these

⁷⁴ Hilton, *Atonement*, pp.vii-viii, 36-70.

⁷⁵ A.M.C. Waterman, *Revolution, Economics and Religion* (Cambridge, 1991), pp.196, 202-3.

⁷⁶ Waterman, *Revolution*, p.245. ‘Say’s Law’ proposed that supply must always create an equivalent demand; markets might therefore suffer from short-term fluctuations but there could be no sustained deficiency in demand. Malthus by contrast argued that ability to spend was not always matched by willingness to spend and that markets could suffer from an enduring ‘general glut’ of produce. He saw in human nature an element of ‘indolence or love of ease’, overlooked by Ricardo, which could leave capital lying idle: T.R. Malthus, *Principles of Political Economy* (3 vols., 1820), i, p.503. Malthus’s position, unorthodox at the time, was endorsed by Keynes. For Joseph Schumpeter, the attempt to trace philosophical influences for economic opinions was ‘one of the most important sources of pseudo-explanations of the evolution of economic analysis’: *History of Economic Analysis* (1954; repr. Oxford, 1986), p.32.

ministers were ‘ideologically reticent’ – had to be ‘adduced, with caution, from linguistic parallels’.⁷⁷ Those parallels existed in words such as ‘natural’, ‘artificial’, ‘sound’, ‘excess’, ‘blot and sin’, ‘purge’ and ‘purify’.⁷⁸ The caution is necessary, though. However powerful the influence of evangelicalism may have been in the early nineteenth century, it cannot simply be inferred from the use of moralistic language. While theodicy was no doubt a particular concern of clerical economists such as Chalmers, J.B. Sumner, and Malthus himself, their concern with virtue was shared by their secular counterparts, especially in relation to the problem of poverty. This was a natural reaction to the problems of scarcity raised by Malthus, and the concern with virtue was not primarily spiritual, as it was with Chalmers, but practical – more a matter of resolving the problems of this world than preparing for the next.⁷⁹

This is not to deny the importance of the evangelical refurbishment of Malthus, but simply to say that Malthus’s influence might operate without passing through an evangelical prism.⁸⁰ Malthus has emerged in the last thirty to forty years as perhaps the central figure in the political economy of the early nineteenth century,⁸¹ as historians have rediscovered the significance of natural theology in the development of the ‘moral sciences’ at this period, and have rejected the tendency towards ‘premature secularisation’ of political economy. As Malthus himself observed, ‘the science of political economy

⁷⁷ Hilton, *Atonement*, pp.297, 226.

⁷⁸ Hilton, *Corn*, pp.307-13; idem., *Atonement*, pp.218-36.

⁷⁹ A.W. Coats, ‘The Classical Economists and the Labourer’, in A.W. Coats (ed.), *The Classical Economists and Economic Policy* (1971), pp.144-79. Approaches to poverty are considered in more detail in Chapter 3.

⁸⁰ Malthus himself had reservations about Chalmers, who was prone to the ‘Ricardian vice’ of assuming that theoretical ‘equilibrium’ models were the norm in real life: Waterman, *Revolution*, pp.242-3, 251-2; Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty* (Cambridge, 1996), pp.381-5.

⁸¹ Winch, *Riches*, *passim*. A teleological approach to the development of economic theory had previously tended to place Malthus in Ricardo’s shadow: Stefan Collini, Donald Winch & John Burrow, *That noble science of politics* (Cambridge, 1983), pp.3-7. For D.P. O’Brien, for instance, Smith and Ricardo were ‘without doubt the two major figures of Classical economics’, while Malthus belonged in a secondary group which also included Say, Mill, McCulloch, Senior, Tooke and Torrens: *The Classical Economists* (Oxford, 1975), pp.2-5. ‘Ricardianism’ provides the template of political economy in Barry Gordon’s studies of parliamentary debate, *Political Economy in Parliament 1819-1823* (1976) and *Economic Doctrine and Tory Liberalism 1824-1830* (1979). In this thesis, Ricardian economics is termed ‘orthodox’, more because that is how historians have traditionally described it than because it was so regarded in the 1820s.

bears a nearer resemblance to the science of morals and politics than to that of mathematics'. Until the mid-1820s, at least, that was the normative approach.⁸²

Hilton did not quite explain why liberal Tories, in particular, should have been susceptible to evangelical influences. He argued that the liberal Tories in Cabinet were younger than the high Tories and so were “‘formed” in the wake of the French Revolution ... and amid the darkening gloom of Malthusianism,’ rather than amid the Paleyan daylight of the late eighteenth century.⁸³ This argument does not work even within the Cabinet, where the age differences between figures such as Wellington, Castlereagh, Canning and Huskisson, were trivial; outside the Cabinet, debate between liberal and high Tories was engaged, on both sides, by writers of all ages.

Hilton offered a slightly modified view in 2006, placing more emphasis on the utilitarian or mechanistic conceptions underlying liberal Toryism, and less on evangelical religion. Liberal Toryism was seen to represent, at bottom, a ‘love of system’. Taking, with apparent approval, J.S. Mill’s aphorism of 1840 that ‘every Englishman of the present day is by implication either a Benthamite or a Coleridgean’, Hilton argued that each could be understood through their metaphors. For the Coleridgean high Tories, ‘the world was not expected to operate in a logical, rational, or predictable way, nor were consequences the inevitable outcomes of particular actions. Society was thought of as a web, an organism, a fabric, or a jungle, and was impossible for mortals to comprehend.’ For liberal Tories, on the other hand, ‘the world was a perfectly contrived machine’, in which individuals ‘should be left free to make their own choices.’ However this ‘machine philosophy’ derived not from Bentham, but from the natural theology of Paley. Liberal Tories ‘wanted the State to operate neutrally according to rule’, whereas high Tories believed in ‘management, interference, and discretion’.⁸⁴

⁸² Winch, *Riches*, pp.23-7.

⁸³ Hilton, *Atonement*, p.220.

⁸⁴ Hilton, *Mad*, pp.312-6.

Hilton's arguments have been criticised in individual cases. Norman Gash took exception to Hilton's redefinition of Peel as a doctrinaire ideologue.⁸⁵ Stephen Lee has questioned the limited evidence offered by Hilton that Canning's politics were affected by strong religious convictions. Lee criticized 'the all-too prevalent desire among historians to explain political ideology in terms of something else,' and argued that liberal Toryism had to be understood 'in its own terms'. Canning's conception of his own politics was that it constituted 'a balancing act between unthinking reaction ... and heedless radicalism'. This notion of 'balance' between contending principles was central to Canning's rhetoric, and it is also central to Lee's understanding of liberal Toryism. Canning's acknowledged debts were to Burke and Pitt rather than to 'any religious influence'. In the case of Burke, Lee refers us merely to his hostility, engendered by the French Revolution, to rapid or systematic political change; in the case of Pitt, to the 'reformism of the 1780s', shorn of any sympathy towards parliamentary reform. Lee's definition of liberal Toryism is therefore rather reductive, but his references to Burke and Pitt reflect his aim to rediscover what was conservative about Canning's liberal Toryism.⁸⁶

This question had been much neglected.⁸⁷ Much depends on the view taken as to what conservatives wanted to conserve, and it is only within the last fifty years or so that this question has received thorough and sympathetic attention. Historians in the whig tradition could see only bigotry and reaction,⁸⁸ while Namier and his followers had little patience with political ideology of any kind.⁸⁹ By the 1970s, though, Harry Dickinson and others had recovered a

⁸⁵ Norman Gash, 'Review: *The Age of Atonement*, by Boyd Hilton', *EHR* 104 (1989), pp.136-40. Hilton countered that Gash's review was full of inaccuracies and misrepresentations (*Atonement*, p.390). Richard Gaunt offers modulated support for Hilton's view of Peel, in relation to Peel's role in the resumption of cash payments, in *Sir Robert Peel: The Life and Legacy* (2010), pp.41-57.

⁸⁶ Lee, *Canning*, pp.140-44, 150-51, 103-6, 2. Hilton also noticed the importance of 'balance' in Canningite liberalism: *Mad*, p.317.

⁸⁷ As Bruce Coleman complained, it was 'really very strange' that the great figures of nineteenth-century conservatism had been 'elevated ... to the Pantheon of the Progressive': *Conservatism and the Conservative Party in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (1988), p.3.

⁸⁸ For instance: Temperley, *Canning*, pp.94-5; A.V. Dicey, *Law and Public Opinion in England* (1905), pp.63, 83.

⁸⁹ Lewis Namier, 'Human Nature in Politics', in Sir L. Namier, *Personalities and Powers* (1955), pp.4-7.

conservative ideology of ‘considerable appeal, endurance, and intellectual power’.⁹⁰ In Dickinson’s largely secular account, conservatives emphasised the difficulty of maintaining ‘a political order which was both stable and liberal’. They upheld the mixed constitution established in 1688, which, they argued, achieved an ideal balance between the ‘principles’ of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, preventing any of them from becoming dominant. Just how much power should be allowed to the Crown was a continuing source of dissension between ‘Tory’ and ‘Whig’, but it was common ground that an over-powerful monarchy would tip into despotism, while unbridled democracy would descend into demagoguery and anarchy and then into the tyranny of some military strongman. Somehow the danger of too much aristocracy was never stated with equal clarity: rather, the aristocracy and gentry, with their solid masses of landed property, were thought to bring stability to the state and to provide a bulwark against either extreme. The primary functions of government were the maintenance of stability and law, and the defence of property: these were the principle guarantors of liberty, conceived as the right to live under equitable and impartial laws. Parliamentary sovereignty was paramount: the legislature was not subordinate to the will of the people and must not become so. The franchise was therefore properly restricted to men of property, and actual political power to those who had the leisure and the education to prepare them for it

As the House of Commons had become the dominant element in the legislature, the necessary balance had to be achieved within it. This justified forms of representation which gave preponderating political weight to property, but which also allowed the Crown a measure of influence – such as the proliferation of proprietary boroughs and the presence of ‘placemen’ in the House – against radical calls for a more rational or democratic representation. These arguments were rehearsed in the dispute with the American colonies in the 1760s and 1770s. While radicals at home picked up the American claim for ‘no taxation without representation’, conservatives argued that pocket boroughs allowed the ‘virtual’ representation of interests which were not

⁹⁰ H.T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property* (1977), p.272.

directly represented, while also facilitating the admission of talent into the House.⁹¹

The conservative case had deeper philosophical justifications. Conservatives discounted the radical concepts of the natural rights of man, or natural equality. They dismissed notions of a 'state of nature' preceding civil society, and of civil government created by contract; they rejected appeals to an 'ancient constitution' which, in their view, was intrinsically unknowable. Instead they stressed man's observable inequality, and his fallibility and imperfectibility. Reason alone could not make a civilized society: the constitution was the product of history and tradition, it worked, and it should not be recklessly tampered with. While many conservative writers continued to emphasise the divine origin of government, this pragmatic or 'prescriptive' justification of the existing order came to carry equal weight. It received its most systematic expression in Paley's *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, published in 1785, and its most passionate one in Burke's prescient *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790).⁹²

This was not originally a 'party' philosophy, but it began to generate party divisions in the mid-1790s, after the lurch into violence and terror in France had vindicated Burke's prophesies. The Whig opposition split, and a substantial contingent (the 'Portland Whigs') joined Pitt in coalition. The coalition was not permanent, and was never as ideologically committed to the struggle against radical principles as ideologues demanded, but it was certainly more inclined to fight France and to harry radicals at home than the 'Foxite' Whigs in opposition. Many historians have traced the origins of the nineteenth-century Conservative Party to the Pitt-Portland coalition,⁹³ finding

⁹¹ John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge, 1976), pp.201-18, 240-64; Dickinson, *Liberty*, pp.272-89.

⁹² Dickinson, *Liberty*, pp.286-318; Norman Gash, 'The Origins', in Lord Butler (ed.), *The Conservatives: a History from their Origins to 1965* (1977), pp.24-30; I.R. Christie, *Stress and Stability in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 1984), pp.156-82.

⁹³ Richard Pares, *King George III and the Politicians* (Oxford, 1953), p.194; Gash, 'Origins', p.21; Robert Stewart, *The Foundation of the Conservative Party, 1830-1867* (1978), pp.6-8; Frank O'Gorman, *The Emergence of the British Two-Party System, 1760-1832* (1982), pp.44-51; David Wilkinson, 'The Pitt-Portland Coalition of 1794 and the Origins of the "Tory" Party', *History*, 83 (1998), pp.249-64.

continuity above all in the characteristically conservative ‘defensive response’⁹⁴ of the coalition and its successor administrations to calls for radical political reform. Pitt, originally a reformer himself, argued against any reform at home while France was being convulsed by revolution. Thereafter, for Pitt and his successors, the time never was right for any systematic reform. Canning vigorously opposed reform all his life and other liberal Tories followed his lead. The liberal Tories of the 1820s were willing to accept piecemeal reform to rectify proven abuses, but were as determined as their high Tory colleagues to resist systematic constitutional change. This was a key factor unifying the Tories. Their firmness in resisting ‘revolutionary principles’ generated a distinctive Tory approach in other areas, too. Tories favoured a relatively strong state, and in foreign policy they were always more determined to prosecute the war against France, and more interested in maintaining and extending empire overseas.⁹⁵

J.C.D. Clark offered a radically different perspective in the 1980s, arguing that the conflict between radicals and conservatives had religious foundations. The roots of radicalism lay in unorthodox Dissent, and the reaction to it was not distinctively conservative or Tory, but rather that of a homogeneous Whig ruling elite, supported by the intellectual defences of an orthodox, Trinitarian, established Church. The link between state and established church lay at the heart of the 1688 constitution, and provided the foundation for Whig dominance. In the early nineteenth century the insistence of the Foxite Whigs on a separation of church and state (symptomised by their support for the relief of Dissenters from the Test and Corporation Acts), created a new division within the Whig elite. Ministerial Whigs such as Eldon, who continued to defend the eighteenth century settlement, came to be called Tories. Opposition Whigs and some on the ministerial side joined in seeking to undermine the confessional basis of the constitution as Clark interpreted it.⁹⁶ This insistence on a religious basis for the constitution therefore tends to emphasise the differences between ‘high’ and ‘liberal’ Tories.

⁹⁴ Lord Butler, ‘Introduction’, in Butler, *Conservatives*, pp.11-12.

⁹⁵ See below, pp.128-33.

⁹⁶ J.C.D. Clark, *English Society, 1688-1832* (Cambridge, 1985) pp.349-420.

Clark's insistence upon a religious basis for political opinion was widely criticised,⁹⁷ and his reliance on sources drawn largely from the Anglican high church tradition arguably produced a distorted view even of Anglican thought, let alone of Dissent and radicalism. Nonetheless, his work contributed to a fruitful shift in perspective: after Clark, it has become normal to consider the influence – conscious or unconscious – of religious belief on political and economic thought.⁹⁸ Religion was central to J.J. Sack's exploration of 'right-wing' ideology between 1760 and 1832. For him, the most important and distinctive 'common thread' was 'a marked insistence, increasing by the early nineteenth century, on the spiritual, Christian, Anglican basis of English political life.' The characteristic preoccupations of the right – the fear of Catholics and Dissenters, the role of the monarchy, a concern for prescriptive rights and a suspicion of abstract principles – could be traced back to the English experience in the seventeenth century. The defence of the Church of England stood above all other concerns.⁹⁹ Attitudes which Clark describes as Whig are, in Sack, essentially right-wing or Tory. For any period after about 1810 Sack's usage seems more natural, since by then the ideology he describes was indeed coming to be called a Tory one. Despite Sack's comment, that 'the rightist perspective ... was not especially welcomed by successive ministries',¹⁰⁰ it is evident that it remained important to the seceding ministers of 1827.

Neither Dickinson, nor Clark, nor Sack, argued that the ideologies they described were particularly closely associated with the ministries of Pitt and his successors, and in fact none of them had taken much account of Pitt himself, who was seen as a distinctly unideological figure and as a rather accidental leader of the 'right'.¹⁰¹ Yet it was Pitt, rather than Burke, whose

⁹⁷ R.W. Davis, 'The politics of the confessional state, 1760-1832', *PH* 9 (1990), p.48; Joanna Innes, 'Jonathan Clark, social history and England's "ancien regime"', *Past & Present*, 115 (1987), pp.193-4.

⁹⁸ Notably in the work by Hilton and Sack considered here; see also Robert Hole, *Pulpits, Politics and Public Order in England, 1760-1832* (Cambridge, 1989); J.E. Bradley, *Religion, Revolution, and English Radicalism* (Cambridge, 1990).

⁹⁹ J.J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative* (Cambridge, 1993), pp.2, 31-7.

¹⁰⁰ Sack, *Jacobite*, p.254.

¹⁰¹ See, for instance: Gash, 'Origins', p.31.

legacy was claimed by various shades of conservative after his death, all professing to act according to 'Pitt's principles' as they understood them.¹⁰² Clearly there was some magic in his name, and it is Boyd Hilton, again, who has provided the richest explanation of his appeal. The key thing about Pitt, Hilton argues, was his successful projection of an image of personal virtue, disinterestedness, fiscal prudence and administrative ability. The image may have been somewhat bogus, but 'image and rhetoric often counted for more than reality.' Measures such as the Sinking Fund, increased taxation, and retrenchment of expenditure all projected an image of austerity, thrift, probity, and resolve.¹⁰³

This image appealed, Hilton thought, to an emerging 'rentier' or 'upper-middle' class, whose defining economic characteristic was to have money to invest. This class was dominated by landowners, merchants and professionals from London and the south, rather than by provincial industrialists (who were invariably borrowers). Their main opportunity for investment was the national debt, and Hilton estimated that there were about 250,000 British fundholders by 1815 (compared with an electorate of 400,000 or so). Thus 'capital investment, especially in the funds, was the hallmark of the regime that was consolidated under Pitt and his successors.'¹⁰⁴ However, again rejecting simple socio-economic explanations, Hilton argued that Pitt's appeal was best explained 'in psychological rather than material terms.' Despite his religious indifference, Pitt also won the support of the evangelicals, as his personal image of probity and restraint appeared to echo evangelical values.¹⁰⁵

An inherited image of thrift, probity, and administrative competence, helped the Pittite ministries of the 1810s and 1820s to survive the pressure for 'economical reform' in those decades. As Philip Harling showed, this was not just a question of bending to pressure. It was also a matter of conviction: by the time of Liverpool's administration, at least, ministry and opposition both

¹⁰² J.J. Sack, 'The memory of Burke and the memory of Pitt: English conservatism confronts its past, 1806-1829', *HJ* 30 (1987), pp.623-40.

¹⁰³ Hilton, *Mad*, pp.54, 112-21, 192.

¹⁰⁴ Hilton, *Mad*, pp.124-32.

¹⁰⁵ Hilton, *Mad*, pp.139-40, 191.

subscribed at least in theory to the same belief in a small and frugal state.¹⁰⁶ However, this came more naturally to the younger generation. Older men such as Eldon and his brother Stowell, who ‘both led lives of relentless toil’ and unremitting attention to business, ‘took a correspondingly broad estimate of the proper fruits of their labours.’ ‘Most younger Pittites, however, regardless of their differences over matters of policy, were more scrupulous about their official profits.’ Many of this generation left office poorer than they came in.¹⁰⁷

Their projection of an image of administrative competence and probity was also a political weapon, intended to justify elite rule and to stave off political reform by showing it to be unnecessary.¹⁰⁸ It was the liberal Tories who best understood the need to appeal to public opinion in this way. As Stephen Lee observed, ‘liberal Toryism in the 1820s ... was as much about showing that the political system, by virtue of its ability to initiate reform in such fields as economics or the law, was not in itself in need of reform, as it was about the reforms themselves.’¹⁰⁹ In the case of Canning, at least, there was a further element. Public opinion was not just a judge to be appealed to, but a resource to be exploited. Canning ‘brought in popular opinion as his ally’ in his diplomatic contests with other European states, through oratory and the selective publication of diplomatic correspondence.¹¹⁰ This appeal to public opinion was anti-oligarchic in tendency, and it conveyed the flattering message that ‘by tapping public support, an immense addition could be made to the material and moral energy of the state.’¹¹¹ It was a style of politics somewhat shocking to high Tories who believed that political questions were best left to the political elite. Mrs. Arbuthnot complained that Canning made himself ‘ridiculous’ by ‘going round the country *speechifying* and discussing the acts and intentions of the government.’ This was ‘a new system’ and it excited ‘great indignation’.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ Philip Harling, *The Waning of ‘Old Corruption’* (Oxford, 1996), pp.1-8.

¹⁰⁷ Harling, *Old Corruption*, pp.153-60.

¹⁰⁸ Harling, *Old Corruption*, pp.1-8.

¹⁰⁹ Lee, *Canning*, pp.114-7, 151.

¹¹⁰ Brock, *Liverpool*, pp.230-1.

¹¹¹ Parry, *Liberal Government*, p.43.

¹¹² *Mrs Arbuthnot’s Journal*, i, 275; Hilton, *Mad*, pp.310-11.

We can therefore discern at least two principal bases for the support given to the ministries of Pitt and his successors. The first was the 'Tory' ideology, variously analyzed by Dickinson, Clark and Sack, of attachment to church and king, which upheld the privileged positions of the established church and of the landed interest, and valued the mutual social obligations which were underpinned by both. This appears to have been widespread among the provincial clergy and squirearchy. The second was the ministry's projection of an image of competence, probity and thrift, which appealed to the class of gentlemanly capitalists. These constituencies were not mutually exclusive: the landed gentry were free to invest in the funds.¹¹³ The 'liberal Tories' did not depreciate either the church or the land, but did not think that these specific interests, or the nation as a whole, were strengthened by giving them exclusive privileges. Their main points of agreement with 'Tory' philosophy were, first, their support for a relatively strong executive, and second, their resistance to radical political change, which could find expression in foreign as well as domestic policy. The points of difference, over religious toleration and economic policy in particular, justify Hilton's observation that 'liberal conservative' would be a less misleading term than 'liberal Tory'.¹¹⁴

Turning to structural considerations, much attention has been paid to the question whether the Pittites or Tories were ever a 'party' much before 1830. Macaulay's assumption of a continuous 'corporate existence of the two great parties,' from 1641 onwards,¹¹⁵ has not been sustainable since the 1920s. Halévy questioned the validity of the two-party model for the early nineteenth century,¹¹⁶ and Namier shattered it for the mid-eighteenth century, revealing instead a system of shifting factions or 'groups' in which the king remained of

¹¹³ Hilton, *Mad*, p.151.

¹¹⁴ Hilton, *Mad*, p.308.

¹¹⁵ T.B. Macaulay, *The History of England* (Everyman edn. 1906, 3 vols), i, p.82.

¹¹⁶ Halévy, *Liberal Awakening*, p.viii. See also G.M. Trevelyan, *The Two-Party System in English Political History* (Oxford, 1926), p.6.

central importance.¹¹⁷ Namier showed that the 'Tory party' of the early eighteenth century was disintegrating by 1760.¹¹⁸

Namier did however insist on the crucial importance of party in the transition from royal to prime ministerial rule which evidently took place in the first half of the nineteenth century, though it was hard to say how or when. He referred with uncharacteristic vagueness to 'intermediary forms' of party development, preceding the full emergence of modern parties later in the century.¹¹⁹ Clearly much depended on circumstances. 'The accident of personalities' influenced the balance of power between the king and his ministers. George III went mad, and George IV was weak and unpopular: for ministers he was 'never a master whom they could love or respect very much.'¹²⁰ The long process of 'economical reform' slowly reduced the number of 'placemen' in parliament, reducing the value of the king's patronage and making ministries more dependent on backbenchers.¹²¹ 'Public opinion', meaning both backbench opinion, and opinion out-of-doors, was growing in importance – a reflection both of social and economic trends and of the proliferation of newspapers and other press in ever more accessible and affordable forms.¹²²

These factors, it is argued, contributed to the coalescence of the 'politicians' – that is, leading parliamentarians who competed for power, as opposed to the 'country gentlemen' on the backbenches – into something approaching a two-party system, so that by 1820 George IV 'found his action hampered by the existence of two parties, each of which were bound together by strong ties of loyalty, from neither of which was it possible to detach individual members.'¹²³ However, party was much easier to discern in the Whig opposition than in the government. The Whigs had an ideology of party,

¹¹⁷ Lewis Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (1929); *England in the Age of the American Revolution* (1930).

¹¹⁸ Lewis Namier, 'Monarchy and the Party System' (1952), reprinted in Sir L. Namier, *Crossroads of Power* (1962), p.220.

¹¹⁹ Namier, 'Monarchy', pp.214, 231.

¹²⁰ Richard Pares, *George III*, pp.61, 167.

¹²¹ A.S. Foord, 'The Waning of the Influence of the Crown', *EHR*, 62 (1947), pp.484-507; Harling, *Old Corruption*, *passim*.

¹²² Hannah Barker, *Newspapers, politics, and public opinion in late eighteenth-century England* (Oxford, 1998); Jeremy Black, *The English Press, 1621-1861* (Stroud, 2001).

¹²³ Brock, *Liverpool*, pp.58-9.

derived originally from Burke's *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*,¹²⁴ and could trace some continuity of structure and personnel from the Rockingham Whigs through to the parties of Fox and Grey.¹²⁵ On the government side there was no comparable evidence of party organization, as distinct from Treasury organization.¹²⁶ Tellingly, knowledge advanced through biographies rather than party histories.¹²⁷ Denis Gray argued convincingly for a marked increase in Cabinet solidarity during Perceval's premiership, and Norman Gash concurred that 'between the crown ... and the Commons ... a cabinet system, in the sense of a succession of professional politicians bound by loyalty to a chief and able to work the machinery of state, had emerged as a kind of third political force.'¹²⁸

Was Cabinet solidarity enough to make a party? For Ian Christie, 'a final break with the eighteenth century political system necessitated ... the dissociation of the ministerial side from the crown and the adoption by "ministerial" politicians of the opposition ethos of political activity.'¹²⁹ There is no agreement as to when this took place, except that it was not during the premiership of Pitt, who inherited the Chathamite motto of 'measures, not men', who accepted the king's right to appoint (and dismiss) his ministers from the best talents available, who 'repudiated the principle of party connection', and who never cultivated any substantial parliamentary following

¹²⁴ Foord, *Opposition*, pp.317-21; Ian Christie, *Myth and Reality in late Eighteenth Century British Politics* (1970), p.13.

¹²⁵ Frank O'Gorman, *The Rise of Party in England* (1975); John Brooke, 'Introductory Survey', in Sir L. Namier & J. Brooke (eds.), *The House of Commons 1754-1790* (3 vols., 1964), i, pp.183-204; Ian Christie, *The End of North's Ministry, 1780-1782* (1958); John Cannon, *The Fox-North Coalition* (1969); D.E. Ginter, *Whig Organization in the General Election of 1790* (Berkeley, Cal., 1970); Frank O'Gorman, *The Whig Party and the French Revolution* (1967); Austin Mitchell, *The Whigs in Opposition, 1815-1830* (Oxford, 1967).

¹²⁶ A. Aspinall, 'English Party Organization in the Early Nineteenth Century', *EHR* 41 (1926), pp.389-411; idem., *Politics and the Press, c.1780-1850* (1949), pp.326, 329-41; Jupp, *Eve of Reform*, pp.254-6.

¹²⁷ Norman Gash, *Mr. Secretary Peel* (1961); Denis Gray, *Spencer Perceval* (1963); P.J.V. Rolo, *George Canning* (1965); P. Ziegler, *Addington* (1965); C.J. Bartlett, *Castlereagh* (1966); W.D. Jones, *'Prosperity' Robinson* (1967); Wendy Hinde, *George Canning* (1973); Peter Dixon, *Canning, Politician and Statesman* (1976).

¹²⁸ Gash, *Secretary Peel*, pp.9-10.

¹²⁹ Ian Christie, 'Review: *His Majesty's Opposition 1714-1830*, by A.S. Foord', *EHR* 80 (1965), p.807.

of his own.¹³⁰ It has been argued that this ‘administrative ethic’ animated later Pittite governments, whose members saw themselves primarily as the king’s ministers, devoted to efficient and disinterested administration in the national interest rather than to any party programme.¹³¹ Liverpool and his colleagues were ‘the imbibers of a tradition of government which insisted that they exercise power in a national view.’¹³² This underlies the bold claim that ‘the tory party in parliament ... did not exist’ between the early 1760s and the late 1820s.¹³³

Others have argued that the Pittite ‘administrative ethic’ began to fray even before Pitt’s death. Canning did his best to tug Pitt into opposition in 1801-2;¹³⁴ and Pitt finally did go into overt opposition in 1804, arguably demonstrating that his ‘Chathamite principles’ were hollow.¹³⁵ After his death, his ‘Friends’ soon went into opposition to the ‘Talents’ ministry, and some historians have found in this the decisive shift in attitude which marked the Pittites as a ‘party’.¹³⁶ The judgment depends on a number of less tangible factors which created a much greater *appearance* of durable bipolar politics than had hitherto been the case: the sheer duration of the contest between Pitt and Fox, the posthumous myth-making which turned them into patron saints of their respective parties, the sharper ideological divide created by the conservative reaction of the 1790s, the new importance of projecting a recognizable image to opinion outside the House, and the facilities provided by the press for doing so.¹³⁷ Boyd Hilton concluded that ‘there was a vigorous two-party atmosphere, but as to the reality the evidence is ambiguous’,¹³⁸ a more cautious view than O’Gorman’s, that, for all its shortcomings, party ‘provided the fundamental cohesion and continuity which underpinned the

¹³⁰ D.G. Barnes, *George III and William Pitt, 1783-1806* (1939); Foord, *Opposition*, pp.306-10; Frank O’Gorman, *Emergence*, p.51.

¹³¹ J.C.D. Clark, ‘A General Theory of Party, Opposition and Government, 1688-1832’, *HJ* 23 (1980), pp.308-9.

¹³² J.E. Cookson, *Lord Liverpool’s Administration, 1815-1822* (Edinburgh, 1975), p.14.

¹³³ Clark, ‘General Theory’, p.305.

¹³⁴ P.C. Lipscomb, ‘Party Politics, 1801-1802: George Canning and the Trinidad Question’, *HJ* 12 (1969), pp.445, 466.

¹³⁵ Foord, *Opposition*, p.430.

¹³⁶ Foord, *Opposition*, pp.435-6; J.R. McQuiston, ‘Rose and Canning in Opposition’, *HJ* 14 (1971), pp.503-27; Lee, *Canning*, p.41.

¹³⁷ O’Gorman, *Emergence*, pp.51-68.

¹³⁸ Hilton, *Mad*, p.198.

activities of both government and opposition and which contributed in such large measure to their political stability.’¹³⁹ As for the liberal Tories specifically, it is generally accepted that they were never organized as a party, after Canning disbanded his following in 1813, at least until his death in 1827.¹⁴⁰

As regards the party alignment of backbenchers, Austin Mitchell’s pioneering research into the 1820-1826 parliament has now been superseded by the more comprehensive findings of the History of Parliament Trust. 408 members generally supported the government, and 298 the opposition, with only 50 ‘waverers’.¹⁴¹ This however represented a peak in voting consistency for the broader period, no doubt reflecting Liverpool’s success in binding together the various elements of the Tory coalition. His stroke in 1827 ‘ushered in a four-session period of confusion and fragmentation in the party political situation in the Commons.’¹⁴² Between 1828 and 1830, according to Peter Jupp, less than one half of members were ‘committed’ to party.¹⁴³ Looking at the wider period, Jupp accepted the existence of a ‘two-party polarity’ determining the conduct of around half of MPs, but insisted that the non-alignment of the other half was ‘crucial when estimating the impact of party on government.’¹⁴⁴

III

The study of liberal Toryism has reached an interesting juncture. Despite the criticisms of Gash and Lee, Boyd Hilton’s work still offers the most profound analysis available of liberal Tory instincts and assumptions. Research into liberal Toryism has focused, naturally enough, on its great figures – on

¹³⁹ Frank O’Gorman, ‘Party Politics in the Early Nineteenth Century (1812-32)’, *EHR* 102 (1987), p.67.

¹⁴⁰ A. Aspinall, ‘The Canningite Party’, *TRHS* 17 (1934), pp.177-226; Stewart, *Foundation*, pp.14-15. The position from 1827 to 1830 is more complicated and will be considered in Chapter 8.

¹⁴¹ Mitchell, *Whigs in Opposition*, pp.64-76; D.R. Fisher, ‘Politics and Parties’, in Fisher, *Commons 1820-1832*, i, pp.319-22.

¹⁴² Fisher, ‘Politics and Parties’, p.333.

¹⁴³ Jupp, *Eve of Reform*, pp.308-12.

¹⁴⁴ Jupp, *Governing*, p.199.

Canning, Huskisson, and Peel – and on important areas of policy such as the Catholic question, foreign affairs and economic policy in the broadest sense. Lesser men have received less attention, and as a result we know little of liberal Toryism below Cabinet level. By attending to some of the ‘liberal’ figures below Cabinet level, we may find confirmation for, or an extension or revision of, our existing understanding of liberal Toryism, whether it is considered as a set of instincts and assumptions, as a political ideology, or as embodied in a political *bloc*.

Wilmot Horton is an obvious candidate for such attention. As a serial pamphleteer, he has the advantage to the student of being somewhat less ‘ideologically reticent’¹⁴⁵ than many of his peers. He possesses many of the characteristics to be expected in a liberal Tory of this period – strongly in favour of Catholic emancipation, distinctly lukewarm on parliamentary reform, an enthusiast for ‘political economy’ and a supporter of Huskissonite commercial policies. However, there are obvious idiosyncrasies in Wilmot’s political position. In the first place, despite serving as a minister under Liverpool, Canning and Goderich, his attachment to party was never very strong. Secondly, his strongly-held views on matters of political economy and, in particular, on the critical question of poor relief – which Hilton identified as a major fault line between ‘high’ and ‘liberal’ Tories – led him to policy prescriptions which often run counter to the non-interventionist, ‘minimal-state’ thinking which supposedly dominated ‘liberal’ ideology at this time. In fact, Wilmot did not conform to any of the models of liberal Toryism which have just been reviewed.

Wilmot Horton was a prolific (and prolix) writer, and the most obvious source for his views is his own published work. He wrote some 30 pamphlets, to which may be added a series of ten lectures delivered at the London Mechanics’ Institution in 1830-31, four articles for the *Quarterly Review*, regular letters or series of letters to the press either in his own name or under a variety of pseudonyms, and official publications such as the three Reports of

¹⁴⁵ Above, p.22.

the Select Committees on Emigration of 1826 and 1827. Reports of Wilmot's parliamentary speeches supplement this corpus of published material. The principal topics covered are emigration, Catholic emancipation, and slavery, but there is also material on such subjects as taxation and expenditure, the corn laws, colonial policy, Malthus, Napoleon, and artificial memory systems. Some of the pamphlets are rare, but broadly speaking all of this material has always been available to scholars.

Wilmot's published work is supplemented by archival material, forming part of the larger collection of Wilmot and Horton family papers preserved at Derbyshire Record Office under reference D3155. The collection runs to 129 boxes and most of it has been publicly available since 1959. Wilmot Horton's papers are mostly contained within the 'WH' series of files. Within this there is a broad division between family and estate papers, and political papers, with most of the political material falling in the range WH2741 to WH3083. However there are many files of political material which fall here and there outside this range. Within the central range just stated, there are about 160 files of correspondence with particular individuals, and about 180 organized by subject matter, or, in some cases, hardly organized at all. Some copy letters are now so badly faded as to be illegible from the front, though some of those on flimsy paper may still be deciphered from the back, with the aid of a mirror. In addition to the 'WH' series of files, there is a miscellaneous collection of 7000 or so letters (not all relating to Wilmot Horton) numbered in a 'C' series, and a small but separate collection of letters to Wilmot Horton under the reference D4576. Wilmot's correspondents include, among politicians and diplomats, Earl Bathurst, T.F. Buxton, Canning, Stratford Canning, J.W. Croker, Edward Ellice, Charles Ellis, Goulburn, Earl Granville, Grenville, Huskisson, Littleton, James Macdonald, Palmerston, Peel, Viscount Ponsonby, F.J. Robinson, Spring Rice, Stanley, Ward, and Wilberforce; and among economists and others, Thomas Chalmers, Maria Edgeworth, John Galt, John Gladstone, R.W. Hay, Reginald Heber, Zachary Macaulay, J.R. McCulloch, Malthus, James Mill, Robert Owen, Francis Place, Ricardo, Nassau Senior, Sydney Smith, Thomas Tooke, and Robert Torrens.

In an undated letter, probably of autumn 1818, James Macdonald advised Wilmot: 'As you are keeper of letters do also be a copier of your own.'¹⁴⁶ It is unfortunate that Wilmot did not receive this advice earlier, for few of his own letters survive before this date. The collection is therefore of limited value as a record of the early evolution of his thinking. Sadly his most important correspondents in this period (Heber, Macdonald, Ward) were not themselves 'keepers of letters', and so only the incoming half of Wilmot's correspondence with them has survived.

E.G. Jones made good use of the 'political' material in this collection, while Johnston and others have accessed the 'economic' correspondence, but many parts of the collection remain under-used and largely unfamiliar. Attention to these has yielded many new insights. Wilmot's correspondence with Viscount Ponsonby, for instance, is highly revealing as to his political positioning in the crisis year of 1830, a time of difficult choices for many liberal Tories. His correspondence with Christopher Gallwey, a land agent in Killarney, in 1827, brings to light an unauthorized, politically dangerous, and short-lived channel of communication between Wilmot and Daniel O'Connell. Exchanges with Edward Blount, secretary of the British Catholic Association, reveal much about Wilmot's uneasy co-operation with that body and about the genesis of his earlier pamphlets on Catholic emancipation. These examples could be multiplied.

In terms of archive material, Jones supplemented Wilmot's own papers with material from the Huskisson, Liverpool, and Peel Papers at the British Library. The Peel and Huskisson papers in particular are invaluable, filling out the picture of Wilmot's relations with the two political superiors who were perhaps of most importance to his career.

Several other archival sources have been accessed for the present thesis. A substantial collection of letters between Wilmot and his departmental chief, Bathurst, dating from 1824 to 1827, is preserved at the Mitchell Library, New

¹⁴⁶ WH2837, pp.107-8.

South Wales. This collection is especially useful in connection with the policy of 'amelioration' being pursued by the Colonial Office in relation to slavery in the West Indies, and has previously been used in that connection by Neville Thompson.¹⁴⁷

Among the archives of Wilmot's friends and confidants, probably the most useful is that of Earl Granville, at the National Archives. One of Wilmot's closest friends from about 1820, Granville had the further advantage, from 1824, of being safely tucked away in Paris. This made him a suitable recipient for some of Wilmot's most candid expressions of dissatisfaction with his political colleagues, with his own political progress, and with the reception given to his ideas. Another close friend was the Canningite member for Staffordshire, E.J. Littleton, whose correspondence and diary are preserved in the Hatherton Papers at Staffordshire Record Office. The diary mentions Wilmot frequently, and the correspondence includes a significant run of letters from him spanning the 1820s. Both these sources were used extensively by Philip Salmon in his biography of Wilmot for the History of Parliament Trust, while Johnston makes some use of the former.

Some other collections in the same general category help to fill out a rounded picture of Wilmot and of the impression he made on his friends. The papers of F.S.N. Douglas at the Bodleian Library carry glimpses of Wilmot attempting to make his way in the politico-social world of London in the 1810s. The Bromley Davenport Muniments at John Rylands Library include letters to Wilmot's cousin, Edward Davies Davenport,¹⁴⁸ from some of their Whiggish mutual friends. Those dating from the period 1819-20 show sharp displeasure at Wilmot's political choices. The correspondence of Ralph Sneyd, in the Sneyd Papers at Keele University, brings insights into Wilmot's political life and choices as a new member of parliament in the same period.

Several archives help to illuminate Wilmot's experience as parliamentary candidate, and member of parliament, for Newcastle-under-Lyme. The

¹⁴⁷ See below, p.207.

¹⁴⁸ Wilmot's mother-in-law was a Davenport.

Chetwode Family Papers, contained within the Raymond Richards collection at Keele University, incorporate the papers of Sir John Chetwode, Wilmot's opponent in 1815. Two files of political papers, relating to the election of 1815 and subsequent events, do not appear to have been used before. The Aqualate MSS at Staffordshire Record Office include the papers of Wilmot's opponent in 1818, John Fenton Boughey, while the Sutherland Papers, also at Staffordshire Record Office, elucidate the role in Newcastle's electoral politics of Wilmot's supposed patron, the Marquess of Stafford. Both these collections have been used extensively before, particularly for the articles on Newcastle by the History of Parliament Trust,¹⁴⁹ but new discoveries in them, in conjunction with other material, have permitted a re-evaluation of Wilmot's candidacy and the degree of support he received from the 'Stafford interest'. The records of Newcastle Corporation, particularly regarding freeman admissions, were also invaluable in this context. For a slightly later period, the papers of John Evelyn Denison at Nottingham University detail the shenanigans surrounding Wilmot's re-election at Newcastle in 1826, as well as casting fresh light on liberal Tory manoeuvres in the late 1820s.

The minutes of the British Catholic Association, together with other items in the Arundel Castle Archives, illuminate Wilmot's significant dealings with the English Catholics in 1826, both in co-operation in the early part of the year and in falling out with them later. This material has not previously been explored for this purpose. The Grey Papers at Durham University fill out the picture of the half-hearted courtship between Wilmot and the Whigs in late 1830, while also throwing much light on Lord Howick's emigration bill of 1831 and Wilmot's reactions to it: these papers have previously been used for the latter purpose by Johnston. The papers of the Earls of Derby at Liverpool Record Office reveal the considered support given to Wilmot on the Emigration Committees by the young Edward Stanley, the future 14th Earl. Wilmot's letters to his publisher, John Murray, preserved in the latter's archives, reveal something of his tribulations as a pamphleteer.

¹⁴⁹ R.G. Thorne, 'Newcastle-under-Lyme', in Thorne, *Commons 1790-1820*, ii, pp.360-62; P.J. Salmon, 'Newcastle-under-Lyme', in Fisher, *Commons 1820-1832*, iii, pp.14-21.

Certain other collections, of which much might in theory have been expected, yielded little. These include the papers of Wilmot's friend and Colonial Office colleague, R.W. Hay, and those of his close friend Reginald Heber, both at the Bodleian Library. The correspondence of the Colonial Office clerk and future playwright, Sir Henry Taylor, also at the Bodleian, contains occasional sardonic glimpses of Wilmot as his official superior.

In a study of this kind, focused on a single individual, there is an obvious danger of getting him out of proportion, attributing to him a greater importance than is really merited. The natural defence against such a danger is to read more widely. This thesis is therefore grounded in the historiographical frames of reference which were introduced in section II above, and which will be explored in more detail, where relevant, in later chapters. It also makes use of a wide range of published primary sources, such as pamphlets, journals, newspapers, and parliamentary debates, in order to place Wilmot's contribution firmly in the context of the wider debates in which he took part.

Before setting out in the next section what is done in this thesis, it may be worth stating a couple of things which might have been done, but are not. First, the question of the development of colonial policy is not addressed, except in relation to emigration. This is not a study of Wilmot's official career at the Colonial Office, but of his career as a politician intent on influencing selected aspects of domestic and colonial policy. The principal reason for this is that the study of Wilmot's official career would have involved a fundamentally different research base, focusing more closely on Colonial Office records and parliamentary papers. It also seemed probable that research focused on Wilmot himself would not be the most fruitful way of examining areas of policy in which the initiative was often held by other departments, notably the Board of Trade. Second, there is no attempt to consider Wilmot's role as Governor of Ceylon from 1831 to 1837, again because a different research base would have been required. Useful work could be done in both these areas.

IV

The structure and content of this thesis was to some extent suggested by Wilmot himself. Following his departure from office in early 1828, Wilmot produced a remarkable memorandum, setting out his disagreements with government policy on three issues which he had devoted himself to – assisted emigration, Catholic emancipation, and the ‘amelioration’ of West Indian slavery.¹⁵⁰ These were Wilmot’s causes, and they are fundamental to any assessment of him. The treatment of them occupies the central core of this thesis, chapters 3 to 7. Two framing chapters, numbers 2 and 8, focus on the beginning and end of Wilmot’s political career in England. They explore Wilmot’s political character and political behaviour, his attitude to party, and his approach to the question of parliamentary reform.

The first section of Chapter 2 considers Wilmot’s entry into political life, his choice of party, and his accession to office, taking into account both his own attitudes and the constraints of the political environment he found himself in. Section II explores a key element in Wilmot’s political character – his attachment to ‘political economy’ – and begins to define his liberalism. Sections III and IV identify fundamental ideological positions which helped to determine Wilmot’s choice of party: his reverence for property rights and his hostility to parliamentary reform. These sections begin to define his conservatism.

Chapters 3 to 5 consider Wilmot’s great cause of assisted emigration. Chapter 3 looks at emigration in relation to pauperism in England and Ireland, and shows how Wilmot’s view of the role of emigration changed over time, reflecting changes in his understanding of the causes and cure of pauperism. This chapter engages closely with Malthusian thinking and with the ‘Christian political economy’ which, according to Hilton and Waterman, strongly influenced liberal politicians of this period. In Chapter 4 the focus switches to the colonial or imperial dimension to Wilmot’s ideas, and on the way in which

¹⁵⁰ Wilmot Horton’s Statement of 6 Jul 1828, WH2932/2933. There is a further copy in the Huskisson Papers, Add. MS 38762, ff.173-6.

his specific plan of colonization reflected his views on colonial development and the relationship between Britain and its colonies. The imperial dimension to the protectionist economics of the Tory 'right', as revealed in the work of Anna Gambles,¹⁵¹ is an important part of the context here. The chapter also explores key differences between Wilmot's scheme of colonization and that of Wakefield. Chapter 5 puts Wilmot's emigration ideas in the wider context of key contemporary political and economic debates. This chapter explores Wilmot's responses both to the liberal agenda for minimal government and reductions in taxation, and to the protectionist case of Tory (and Whig) agriculturalists; it shows that Wilmot was far from accepting 'orthodox' Ricardian ideas in their entirety. The chapter also considers how Wilmot's emigration ideas were received by *laissez faire* liberals and Tory protectionists, and concludes with an assessment of their practicability.

Chapter 6 deals with Wilmot's work as Colonial Undersecretary in connection with the amelioration of slavery in the West Indies. At the ideological level there are links between this subject and that of emigration, in that the zeal shown by the abolitionists towards the slaves, compared with the relative indifference shown to the condition of the labouring classes at home, has appeared to require explanation. The answers have tended to relate to '*laissez-faire* individualism', whether inspired by religious conviction or by classical economics. The chapter considers whether Wilmot was influenced by such considerations, or by more pragmatic concerns.

Chapter 7 considers Wilmot's interventions in debate on the Catholic question. The focus therefore shifts onto Wilmot's thinking on constitutional questions, and to the validity of his claim to be a proponent of Catholic emancipation with a conspicuous zeal for the safety and prosperity of the Churches of England and Ireland. The detailed story of Wilmot's efforts in this area is almost wholly unknown, and the chapter therefore adds to our knowledge of liberal Tory responses to this issue, while drawing out the idiosyncrasies of Wilmot's approach.

¹⁵¹ Anna Gambles, *Protection and Politics* (Woodbridge, 1999).

The first section of Chapter 8 resumes the assessment of Wilmot's relationship to party, for the period between his leaving office and his departure for Ceylon. Section II considers his attempts to appeal to public opinion through non-parliamentary channels – a prominent example of an 'outward turn' in political behaviour of a kind previously associated primarily with Canning among liberal Tories.¹⁵² Section III examines his response to the reform crisis of 1830-31: like other liberal Tories who survived into the 1830s, Wilmot was forced by the course of events to reconsider his earlier hostility to parliamentary reform, and this section considers how far his responses matched those of other liberal Tories.

Chapter 9 brings together the conclusions of the preceding seven to evaluate the character of Wilmot Horton's liberal Toryism, and to assess how far he fits existing models.

Wilmot Horton was in many ways a political maverick, and by most normal standards his political career ended in relative failure. He typifies no-one and nothing else, and so it is only with great care that any conclusions relating to Wilmot individually can be given wider application. The interest in his career revolves around his ability to provoke debate over the idiosyncratic but usually highly pertinent positions he took up on a range of important political, social, and economic questions. For all his shortcomings – and they were many – he emerges at his best as a figure of much liberality and generosity of mind, who deserves a place in the history of the 1820s.

¹⁵² Above, p.30. There are also comparisons to be made with Brougham: see W.A. Hay, *The Whig Revival, 1808-1830* (Basingstoke, 2005).

2

‘Unattached to either party’?

Motivations, principles, and allegiances

In March 1819, a few weeks after taking his seat as the new member of parliament for Newcastle-under-Lyme, Wilmot dashed off a high-spirited verse letter describing his life as an ‘independent’ back-bencher. There were social drawbacks to his political neutrality, he admitted, but he felt well enough compensated:

The dinners flag, on some occasions,
'Tis true, one gets one's invitations
But pray be secret, I implore ye
I've none from Whig and few from Tory
For both *the factions* (no aspersion)
Retain 'the neutrals' in aversion.

But after all 'tis something glorious
To predicate oneself 'Whigtorious'
And unattached to either party
To hear their curses loud and hearty
Sink quietly in sullen grumble
'Betwixt two stools the knave will stumble.'¹

Wilmot's political opinions naturally placed him near the political centre-ground. As his friend J.W. Ward observed, his 'political creed' was 'not strictly speaking that of either party', and would permit him 'without any iniquitous sacrifice of opinion, to join with either.'² By 1819, however, Wilmot's professions of neutrality did not convince anyone who knew him well. Ward was sure that Wilmot intended to support the government, and

¹ Keele University, Sneyd Papers, SC11/102, Wilmot to Sneyd, Mar 1819.

² WH2782, Ward to Wilmot, 25 Aug 1818.

Wilmot's friends – or former friends – among the Whigs had come to the same conclusion.³

This chapter considers why Wilmot chose the government side in politics and, at the same time, explores some fundamental aspects of his political character. Section I offers a condensed narrative of his political career up to his appointment as a minister in late 1821, and considers the part played by ambition in his choice of party. Section II considers an essential element of Wilmot's 'liberalism' – his devotion to the science of political economy. Sections III and IV look at Wilmot's defences of property rights and of the constitution to explain why he was more at home on the Tory side of the House.

I

Wilmot's entry into parliament was the culmination of a long search for a seat, going back at least to 1810, and the first step towards the fulfilment of much larger political ambitions.⁴ His friend Reginald Heber described Wilmot as looking beyond a seat in parliament to 'further objects' and 'an interminable vista of other pursuits and other honours.'⁵

Wilmot's first political friendships were formed at Christ Church, Oxford. Matriculating in 1803, Wilmot's years there fell between those of two of his future political superiors, Canning and Peel, and during the long dominance of its 'great' Dean, Cyril Jackson, under whom the college was 'established ... firmly as a place of good, liberal, wide-ranging education for young men who would make their way in the world.'⁶ It stood 'aloof from political faction', as the 'educator of statesmen, not the tool of parties.'⁷ Several of Wilmot's

³ WH2837, James Macdonald to Wilmot, 5 Sep 1818; John Rylands Library, Bromley Davenport Muniments, I/5/iv, J.N. Fazakerley to E.D. Davenport, 6 Oct 1818; WH2789, Fazakerley to Wilmot, 6 Oct 1818; WH2782, Ward to Wilmot, Jan 1819.

⁴ WH2810, Heber to Wilmot, 20 Apr 1813 (marginal note by Wilmot, c.1838).

⁵ WH2810, Heber to Wilmot, 2 Aug 1812.

⁶ Judith Curthoys, *The Cardinal's College* (Oxford, 2012), p.200.

⁷ A.D. Godley, *Oxford in the Eighteenth Century* (1908), p.214.

Christ Church friends combined with him in 1812-13 to form the nucleus of a new political dining club, meeting at Grillion's hotel in Mayfair on alternate Wednesdays during the parliamentary session. Grillion's was from the start a 'non-party' club, born out of a belief as to the 'serious damage that London society suffered from the violence of political controversy'. It was open to members of both parties, or none, and, according to the later testimony of the 14th Earl of Derby, it was always characterised by its 'generous and courteous comprehension of diversities of political views'.⁸ Wilmot was also elected to Alfred's, a discussion and dining club frequented by serious-minded liberal Tories, sometime between 1809 and 1812.⁹

Wilmot's own politics at this time were indeterminate enough, or centrist enough, that there were men on both sides of the Westminster party divide willing to help him find a seat. This apparent lack of partisanship is suggestive – as is the *raison d'être* of Grillion's Club – of a certain camaraderie among those who considered themselves to occupy a 'centrist' position in politics. In 1810 Richard Wellesley and the Earl of Desart, both at the time supporters of Perceval, interested themselves on Wilmot's behalf, though nothing came of it.¹⁰ James Macdonald, an active member of the Whig opposition, advised Wilmot of potential openings from 1812 onwards. Their correspondence provides ample evidence of the ineffectiveness of Curwen's Act of 1809 which in theory outlawed the sale of parliamentary seats.¹¹ Macdonald advised against an attempt upon Coventry in 1812, to the disappointment of Heber who thought that Wilmot would have prospered there – a gentleman being, he supposed, 'so like a black swan in Coventry that some small civilities ... may go a good way in gaining the affections of its

⁸ P.D.G. Egerton, *Grillion's Club: From its Origin in 1812 to its Fiftieth Anniversary* (1880), pp.vi, 4-5, 12-13. Founder members included the whiggish J.N. Fazakerley and H. Gally Knight, and the tory-ish R.H. Inglis and Richard Wellesley; other founder or early members were Sir T.D. Acland, Stratford Canning, Earls Dartmouth, Desart and Gower, the Hon. F.S.N. Douglas, Charles and Robert Grant, Viscount Hamilton, R.W. Hay, Reginald Heber, E.J. Littleton and Joseph Planta.

⁹ Jones, '*Prosperity*' *Robinson*, pp.29-32; WH2810, Heber to Wilmot, 10 Jun 1812; WH2777, Doyle to Wilmot, n.d. [1817].

¹⁰ D4576/17/7, Wellesley to Wilmot, [May 1810]; WH2810, Heber to Wilmot, 2 Aug 1810 & 12 Nov 1812.

¹¹ For instance: WH2837, Macdonald to Wilmot, 6 Jul 1812.

burgesses.’¹² Instead, Macdonald advised Wilmot to keep an eye on Derbyshire, reporting that ‘it was said at the D[uke] of Devonshire’s table that if Mr Mundy¹³ withdrew, *you* would probably be member for Derbyshire, and no one present dissented.’¹⁴ This was wishful thinking: there was no vacancy, and Wilmot’s pro-Catholicism would not have appealed to the Derbyshire gentry who sustained Mundy. The Derbyshire Loyal True Blue Club, to which many of them belonged, had been formed in 1812 as a loyalist and ‘anti-Jacobin’ society, and rapidly took on the characteristics of a provincial Pitt Club. Like Pitt Clubs elsewhere in the country, it descended by the 1820s into a violent anti-Catholicism.¹⁵ Wilmot was a member, but the tone of the club cannot have been congenial to him, and he scarcely figures in its history. Apart from this there is no evidence of Wilmot courting the Derbyshire gentry. He did however apply to the Cavendish family for their patronage at some stage during 1813 – an approach which he soon regretted, lest it be construed as giving a prospective pledge to the Whig party. However Macdonald made no attempt to draw Wilmot further into the Whig camp. Instead, himself dissatisfied with the Whig leadership, Macdonald advised Wilmot that ‘in the present state of Politicks (without dissembling your opinions upon subjects as they occurred) you should abstain from committing yourself to *any party*.’¹⁶

Balked of a seat in parliament, Wilmot tried other ways of advertising his talents. In April 1814 he travelled to Paris, partly for pleasure, but also hoping to recommend himself to the political and diplomatic bigwigs assembled there. He was disappointed, finding that ‘without the advantages of high family, fortune, parliament or official situation’, he could not get himself noticed. Always somewhat combustible, but also self-aware, Wilmot confessed himself ‘devilish angry’, and likely to ‘leave Paris in a sulky fit’.¹⁷ He had more success the following year with his first extant political

¹² WH2837, Macdonald to Wilmot, [Jul 1812]; WH2810, Heber to Wilmot, 12 Nov 1812.

¹³ Edward Miller Mundy (1750-1822), MP for Derbyshire 1784-1822.

¹⁴ WH2837, Macdonald to Wilmot, 21 Jan 1814.

¹⁵ Sack, ‘Memory of Burke’, pp.635-8; H.D. Inglis, *History and Proceedings of the Derbyshire Loyal True Blue Club* (1829).

¹⁶ WH2837, Macdonald to Wilmot, 20 Aug 1813.

¹⁷ WH2895, Wilmot to Mrs. Wilmot, ‘Tuesday’ & ‘Thursday’ [3 & 5 May 1814?].

pamphlet, the anonymous *Letter to a Noble Lord*. Published in early April 1815, this argued the case for an offensive campaign against Napoleon after the latter's escape from Elba.¹⁸ If Wilmot hoped by his title to evoke comparisons with Burke,¹⁹ it is as well that none were forthcoming, but the pamphlet is well enough argued and written, and may well have earned its author a measure of gratitude from Castlereagh. It certainly set Wilmot apart from the Foxite Whigs in the area of foreign policy.

Wilmot fought his first parliamentary election, at Newcastle-under-Lyme, four weeks after the more consequential encounter at Waterloo. It has been generally accepted that he was the 'clandestine' candidate of the Marquis of Stafford, of nearby Trentham, who had previously exerted strong influence over the borough, but who had ostensibly renounced any further involvement in its politics after the election of 1812.²⁰ This would have entailed some loss of political independence on Wilmot's part, since the Marquis did not allow his members complete freedom of action.²¹ Wilmot's 'clandestine' candidacy is however a myth, invented by the so-called 'independent' party in the borough, whose electoral interest it was to paint Wilmot as the Trentham candidate. Wilmot might have *liked* to have been the Marquis's candidate, but the Marquis was genuine in his determination not to interfere. Wilmot was therefore what he claimed to be, an independent candidate seeking to establish a new interest in the borough.²²

¹⁸ For the attribution of this pamphlet to Wilmot, its argument, and its reception, see Stephen Lamont, 'Letter to a Noble Lord, 1815', *Notes & Queries*, 258 (2013), pp.237-8.

¹⁹ Edmund Burke, *Letter to a Noble Lord* (1796).

²⁰ J.C. Wedgwood, 'Staffordshire Members of Parliament, iii', *Collections for a History of Staffordshire* (1933-4), p.45; S.M. Hardy & R.C. Baily, 'The Downfall of the Gower Interest in the Staffordshire Boroughs, 1800-30', *Collections for a History of Staffordshire* (1950-51), pp.271-4; Thorne, 'Newcastle', p.362; Hannah Barker and David Vincent (eds.), *Language, Print and Electoral Politics 1790-1832* (Woodbridge, 2001), p.xxi.

²¹ James Macdonald gave up Sutherland in 1816 after a policy disagreement with Lord Stafford: Thorne, *Commons 1790-1820*, iv, p.488. Lord F.L. Gower expected to have to give up the same seat, for the same reason, in 1828: Staffs RO, Sutherland Papers, D593/P/22/1/5, letters of F.L. Gower, 23 & 25 Jan 1828.

²² For a detailed account of the 1815 and 1818 elections in Newcastle-under-Lyme, justifying this interpretation of Wilmot's candidacy, see Stephen Lamont, 'Independence and Corporations in Pre-Reform Freeman Boroughs: A Case Study – Newcastle-under-Lyme in the 1810s', *PH* 34 (2015), pp.218-36.

Wilmot lost the Newcastle election of 1815, but won in 1818, when, in keeping with his emerging conservatism, he presented himself as the defender of property, order, and the constitution.²³ Both elections turned almost entirely on local questions, and Wilmot was not obliged to define his political position in any detail or to identify with either Westminster party. As far as concerns the electorate, this tells us only about Newcastle-under-Lyme: some other places were more politicized.²⁴

Wilmot therefore arrived in parliament with his political independence intact. Ward advised him against preserving his neutrality for long, saying that ‘a man must be very whimsical or very dishonest to be long detached from party after he comes into parliament.’²⁵ Meanwhile Wilmot made it clear enough to his Whig friends that he was at least not going to join them. His grounds of dissatisfaction with the Whigs were, it appears, threefold: that they had ‘leaned towards Bonaparte’, that they had chosen Tierney to lead them in the next session, and that their parliamentary tactics had been to oppose all government measures, good or bad.²⁶ There was disappointment and recrimination from Whig friends who assumed that Wilmot’s choices were governed by ambition.²⁷ Macdonald complained that Wilmot had worked himself into the creed which he deemed ‘upon the whole the most convenient’.²⁸ This was sour grapes, but the more sympathetic E.J. Littleton, a Staffordshire and Grillion’s friend, also noted Wilmot’s ambition:

Wilmot has great attainments, much quickness and fluency in conversation, many faults such as indecision, unsteadiness of principle, and levity, and many disadvantages in his family and pecuniary affairs, but an immense ambition,

²³ *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 4 Jul 1818.

²⁴ Frank O’Gorman, *Voters, Patrons and Parties* (Oxford, 1989); John A. Phillips, *Electoral Behavior in Unreformed England* (Princeton, 1982); idem., *The Great Reform Bill in the Boroughs* (Oxford, 1992).

²⁵ WH2782, Ward to Wilmot, 28 Jul 1818.

²⁶ WH2837, Macdonald to Wilmot, 9 Oct 1818.

²⁷ WH2837, Macdonald to Wilmot [late 1818]; WH2789, Fazakerley to Wilmot, 6 Oct 1818; John Rylands Library, Bromley Davenport Muniments, I/5/iv, Fazakerley to Davenport, 8 Mar 1819.

²⁸ WH2837, Macdonald to Wilmot, 9 Oct 1818.

which I think may ultimately connect him with parties of power in the country.²⁹

A degree of calculation in Wilmot's choices can be inferred from Ward's response that 'you somewhat underrate the chance of success on the side of opposition. It is not a good game, but still ... not so desperate a game as you represent it.'³⁰ The calculation was explicit in 1821, in a discussion between Wilmot and Ellenborough as to the surest route to office. Ellenborough argued that 'the only way for a man to obtain *important office* was to make himself feared and hated by a government by an annoying and vexatious system of opposition.' Wilmot, on the other hand 'maintained that the true way was to work hard at details, and to serve a government sedulously and zealously.' Looking back on this conversation in 1828, with Ellenborough in the Cabinet and himself out of office, Wilmot concluded that Ellenborough had been right,³¹ but this had not been his view for most of the intervening period.³²

Wilmot followed Ward's advice, starting out expressly 'independent' of party, but moving towards explicit support of government by the end of his first session.³³ In the 1819 session he is recorded as having given four votes in favour of government, and one against,³⁴ but he probably voted with government on other occasions for which lists have not survived. The solitary vote against government was on Mackintosh's motion for a select committee on capital punishment. His maiden speech was in support of the government's proposals for the Windsor establishment, which included a salary of £10,000 for the Duke of York as custos to the king, to be paid from public funds, and not, as some Whigs wanted, from the privy purse.³⁵ The defence of government spending against enthusiasts for 'economical reform' was to be a significant theme of Wilmot's parliamentary and official career.

²⁹ Hatherton Papers, D260/M/F/5/26/2, Littleton's diary, 22 & 23 Feb 1819.

³⁰ WH2782, Ward to Wilmot, 25 Aug 1818.

³¹ A. Aspinall (ed.), *The Correspondence of Charles Arbuthnot* (1941), pp.111-2.

³² Hatherton Papers, D260/M/F/5/27/5, Horton to Huskisson, 22 Jan 1828.

³³ WH2816, Rev. E.T.S. Hornby to Wilmot, 27 Oct 1818 & 22 Jun 1819.

³⁴ Donald E. Ginter (ed.), *Voting Records of the British House of Commons, 1761-1820* (6 vols., 1995), iv, p.1632.

³⁵ *Hansard*, 39, cc.587-8, 22 Feb 1819.

Castlereagh invited Wilmot to second the address to the King at the opening of the new parliament in 1820, often an indication of ministerial favour towards an up-and-coming man.³⁶ Even so, Wilmot did not give government unconditional support, voting for enquiry into the Irish Ten Percent Union Duties, and supporting a motion for reduction of malt duties in Scotland.³⁷ He supported ministers in excluding the Queen from the liturgy,³⁸ but later in the year he took alarm at the destabilizing possibilities of the Queen's trial.³⁹ In a deviation from his normal policy of dealing with what Ward called 'the whole ministerial firm', it appears that Wilmot – envisaging the possibility of a new ministry of Grenvillites and Canningites – tried to take out an insurance policy with Canning, but was rebuffed. Macdonald wrote: 'I ... am satisfied on your own authority of Canning's having rejected your overture on the ground of his having already "as many as he could provide for."' ⁴⁰

Wilmot reverted to his normal course, supporting ministers in two debates on the Queen in February 1821.⁴¹ By the end of the 1821 session, having established his usefulness in the Commons, he was a candidate for office. His willingness to speak in support of unpopular measures, such as the Six Acts and the Bill against the Queen, earned him the sobriquet 'Crony Wilmot' from J.C. Hobhouse,⁴² but it also won recognition from an administration which had sometimes seemed to lack 'the gift of the gab'.⁴³ After an effective speech on 15 May, against Burdett's motion for an inquiry into Peterloo, Wilmot wrote jubilantly to his wife:

³⁶ WH2897, Castlereagh to Wilmot, 14 Apr 1820.

³⁷ *Times*, 15 Jun & 6 Jul 1820.

³⁸ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 1, cc.1265-7, 22 Jun 1820.

³⁹ Keele University, Sneyd Papers, SC11/108, Wilmot to Sneyd, c.7 Oct 1820.

⁴⁰ WH2837, Macdonald to Wilmot, 29 Dec [1820] & 10 Jan 1821. See also WH2898, Littleton to Wilmot, 22 Oct 1820. According to Ward, it was some time since Canning had shown 'the smallest wish to extend his political connections': WH2782, Ward to Wilmot, 10 Apr 1819. Canning was in fact determined to avoid any party connection at this period: Aspinall, 'Canningite Party', p.203; Lee, *Canning*, p.136.

⁴¹ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 4, cc.321-2 & 654-7, 1 Feb & 13 Feb 1821.

⁴² P.W. Graham (ed.), *Byron's Bulldog – the letters of John Cam Hobhouse to Lord Byron* (Columbus, Ohio, 1984), Hobhouse to Byron, 15 Feb 1821.

⁴³ Cookson, *Liverpool's Administration*, p.307.

Castlereagh thanked me for my speech, and Macdonald told me that he dined at Cooks the day after, and that I was *much abused*, but that they said that they thought, barring Canning, I had made *as good a start* as any other man of the *Pitt School*.⁴⁴

Wilmot had had opportunities, in committee work over the previous three years, to demonstrate his immense energy and capacity for work. He was also acceptable to different shades of political opinion within the government, not being closely connected to Canning or too ostentatiously ‘liberal’. The dinner invitations had by now multiplied, and Wilmot was as likely to be found at the Arbuthnots as at the Cannings.⁴⁵ It may have helped that Canning was out of office in 1821, since it soothed the fears of the high Tories.⁴⁶

Discussing possible recruits to the ministry, J.W. Croker thought Wilmot preferable to Horace Twiss, who had ‘not yet weight enough with the House’, implying that Wilmot had shown greater substance. Goulburn, Croker reported, was ‘very anxious’ to have Wilmot.⁴⁷ Wilmot knew that he was in contention, having been informed by Lord Grenville ‘that he had *reason to believe* that I should have an *offer*’ during the summer. He also knew that he had only a relatively minor place in a larger scheme of reconstruction, and that ‘the Grenvillites will be provided for *first*.’⁴⁸

As part of the reconstruction of the administration in November and December 1821, Lord Wellesley went to Ireland as a ‘Catholic’ Lord-Lieutenant, and to balance him Goulburn became the ‘Protestant’ Chief Secretary. That left a vacancy in the Colonial Office, which Wilmot was

⁴⁴ WH2896, Wilmot to Mrs. Wilmot, n.d. [c. 18 May 1821].

⁴⁵ WH2896, Wilmot to Mrs. Wilmot, 22 May 1821 & ‘Monday’ [4 Jun 1821?].

⁴⁶ Mrs. Arbuthnot welcomed Wilmot’s appointment in December, noting that ‘Mr. Wilmot, (a very sensible, agreeable man) succeeds Mr. Goulburn ...’. Her tone was very different a year later, after Canning’s return, when Bathurst told her that, ‘Mr. Wilmot repeated everything to the Canning party ... such is the state of confidence in which we are with our new ally!’ *Mrs. Arbuthnot’s Journal*, i, pp.130, 210-11.

⁴⁷ L.J. Jennings (ed.), *The Croker Papers* (3 vols., 1885), i, pp.187, 189.

⁴⁸ WH2896, Wilmot to Mrs. Wilmot, ‘Monday’ [14 May 1821?] & 29 May 1821 (postmark). On the negotiations to strengthen the government in 1821, see J.J. Sack, *The Grenvillites 1801-29* (1979), pp.184-95; Cookson, *Liverpool’s Administration*, pp.333-40; neither mentions Wilmot.

invited to fill. He took office as Undersecretary of State at a salary of £2000 per annum.

The old view that Wilmot was appointed through the influence of Harrowby, Peel, and Goulburn, in order to implement a scheme of emigration for the relief of Ireland,⁴⁹ has been rightly rejected by Jones and Young.⁵⁰ Young instead suggests that Wilmot's appointment was 'a favour to Canning's supporters in the ministry.' There is little reason to think so. Wilmot was on excellent terms with Canningites such as Granville, Littleton, and Ward, but his relations with Canning himself were cordial rather than close, and, as has just been shown, Canning had rejected Wilmot's overtures less than a year earlier. The evidence is that Wilmot had been 'in the frame' for appointment for some months before the event. Wilmot himself saw Castlereagh, the Leader of the House of Commons, as holding the key to his advancement, and was probably right.

Wilmot was already 37 years old when he took office. He had not had the benefit of that apprenticeship in junior roles which had helped to forge many of his new colleagues and to give the ministry its 'administrative ethic'.⁵¹ He was too much the theorist and idealist entirely to share that ethic, hard though he tried to be a practical 'man of business'. He was also too ambitious, and had had to wait too long, to be willing to settle comfortably into a purely subordinate role. Wilmot told his wife that his office was 'considered as one of the, if not the most laborious office in the government but one of great importance and responsibility and which *if well done* must be the *political making* of the doer.'⁵² In other words he saw it as a stepping-stone to greater things. Wilmot had made a perfectly legitimate choice, given his political convictions and temperament, but all the same it was in some respects a marriage of convenience, which would be good only as long as Wilmot believed that it served, or might come to serve, his own purposes.

⁴⁹ Adams, *Irish Emigration*, p.274.

⁵⁰ Jones, 'Wilmot Horton', pp.32-3; Young, *Colonial Office*, p.48.

⁵¹ Above, p.34.

⁵² WH2896, Wilmot to Mrs. Wilmot, n.d. [Dec 1821].

II

While ambition clearly played a part in Wilmot's thinking, by 1818 he was also more comfortable, intellectually and politically, on the government side of the House. But, before he was a Tory, he was a liberal, and this section considers the basic positions which made him so. The main emphasis will be on Wilmot as a 'political economist' in parliament, focusing on the cast of his mind rather than the content of his ideas.

Some of the ambiguities in the term 'liberal'⁵³ are apparent in Wilmot's correspondence. In 1818, Ward already discerned a 'liberal party in the government':

Robinson, to be sure, is a Tory, but he is for the Catholics, and the appointment of Charles Grant to the post of Chief Secretary *vice* Orange Peel is of the best omen for their cause. It proves that Castlereagh is very much in earnest, and that his credit is high.⁵⁴

Here the approach to the Catholic question is key – hence Castlereagh being counted as a 'liberal' while Peel is not. Macdonald, writing after Peterloo and the Six Acts, was probably thinking more of political liberties when fantasizing about 'a treaty between all sound Liberals, by which you may be made to give up Castlereagh and the Doctor'⁵⁵ on one side, whilst we will renounce P. Moore, Hobhouse, Joseph Hume ... on the other.⁵⁶

Neither Ward nor Macdonald doubted that Wilmot belonged among the liberals. Although there is only scanty evidence for Wilmot's early opinions, enough survives to know why this was so. Wilmot consistently supported Catholic emancipation throughout his political life, but his devotion to 'political economy' was more significant. Long before he entered parliament, Wilmot embarked on a 'reading scheme' to prepare himself for public life,

⁵³ Above, pp.16-17.

⁵⁴ WH2782, Ward to Wilmot, 28 Jul 1818.

⁵⁵ Sidmouth.

⁵⁶ WH2837, Macdonald to Wilmot, 29 Dec [1820].

and ‘political economy’ was evidently a large part of it.⁵⁷ He was a ‘bullionist’ on the currency question by 1812;⁵⁸ in 1813 he wrote a pamphlet, now lost, defending Malthus against an attack by Southey;⁵⁹ in 1816 he argued that Britain’s ‘more expensive colonies’ should be abandoned, in view of the ‘necessity of retrenchment’;⁶⁰ in 1817 he wrote on tax and finance, proposing that the government should relieve its difficulties by taking out new loans.⁶¹ For the *Quarterly Review*, Wilmot argued that the standard ‘classical education’ received by budding statesmen left them deficient in subjects such as law and political economy. He recommended the use of artificial memory systems to remedy the deficiency; among the sort of things that one might want to remember was ‘the pith of Mr. Huskisson’s pamphlet on the bullion question’.⁶² Wilmot’s attitude to the study of history also suggests a would-be schematic mind, given to think that political principles were to be arrived at through the accumulation of data and logical reasoning:

as a political lesson, the whole chain of history is fraught with valuable instruction, but its value is in precise proportion to the degree of chronological accuracy with which the events are recorded. It is of the utmost moment to ascertain the precise time when the operation of certain causes conspired to produce certain effects; and it is the induction of these effects, which constitutes the essence of the philosophy of history.⁶³

Once in parliament, Wilmot presented himself as the advocate of ‘scientific principles’ tempered by practical considerations. He declared his zeal to help the poor, ‘as far as sound political economy, as far as the progress of political science’ afforded the means, and he regretted that ‘political economy and political science were not acted upon so far in some points as he thought right and salutary.’⁶⁴ He clearly kept himself up to date with opinion among

⁵⁷ WH2830, Legge to Wilmot, 3 Oct 1811; C5921, Wilmot to Eusebius Horton, 3 Mar 1812; Murray Papers, Ms.40581, Wilmot to Murray, 8 Feb 1816.

⁵⁸ D4576/17, R. Wellesley to Wilmot, 12 Apr 1812.

⁵⁹ WH2812, Heber to Wilmot, 20 Apr 1813 (marginal note); WH2761, Stratford Canning to Wilmot, 9 Aug 1813.

⁶⁰ WH2810, Heber to Wilmot, 5 Nov 1816.

⁶¹ WH2897, Cunliffe to Wilmot, 10 Aug 1817.

⁶² [R. Wilmot], ‘Feinagle and Grey’s *Artificial memory*’, *QR* 17 (Mar 1813), pp.137-9. See also WH2830, Legge to Wilmot, 1 May 1812.

⁶³ [Wilmot], ‘Feinagle’, p.134.

⁶⁴ *Hansard*, 40, c.1480, 1 Jul 1819.

leading practitioners, and enjoyed mutually respectful correspondence with several of them. He was a member of the Political Economy Club – the most important institutional link for practising political economists – from 1829 to 1831.⁶⁵

However, Wilmot also thought of himself as a pragmatist. ‘Scientific principles’ could not be applied without reference to circumstances. He opposed Ricardo’s proposal to repeal the Corn Laws in 1820, observing that ‘the principles of political economy might serve as beacons to enable us to direct our course; but as, in mechanics allowance must be made for friction and resistance, so in legislation reference must be had to the actual situation of affairs.’⁶⁶ It was necessary to make allowances both for the existing state of institutions, and for the ‘resistance of opinions’ not yet freed from ‘early and unfounded prejudices.’⁶⁷ This awareness of the problems of transition from one state of affairs to another was a distinguishing feature of Wilmot’s approach to economic questions.⁶⁸

Many of the leading liberal Tories, aware of the unpopularity of ‘political economy’ in the Commons, were wary of appearing overly enthusiastic about the science.⁶⁹ Whilst he was a minister at least, Wilmot shared this reticence, to a degree. In relation to his own favourite subject, assisted emigration, he observed, ‘I have *all* ... the leading Political Oeconomists *with me*’, but added ‘they are not a class to be quoted ...’.⁷⁰ To show too much respect for ‘speculative’ men was to invite ridicule, as was brought home to Wilmot when, accused by Hume of being ‘unsound’ in his principles, he incautiously retorted that he had the agreement of J.R. McCulloch to thirty separate questions connected with his emigration proposals.⁷¹ *The Times* condemned him for listening to ‘the opinions of fanciful men, dabblers in political economy.’⁷² Wilmot sought support for his emigration projects both from

⁶⁵ O’Brien, *Classical Economists*, pp.12-13; Gordon, *Tory Liberalism*, p.2.

⁶⁶ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 1, c.720, 31 May 1820.

⁶⁷ WH2927, ‘National Policy’ (MS, n.d.).

⁶⁸ Below, pp. 164-5, 173.

⁶⁹ Gordon, *Tory Liberalism*, pp.2-4.

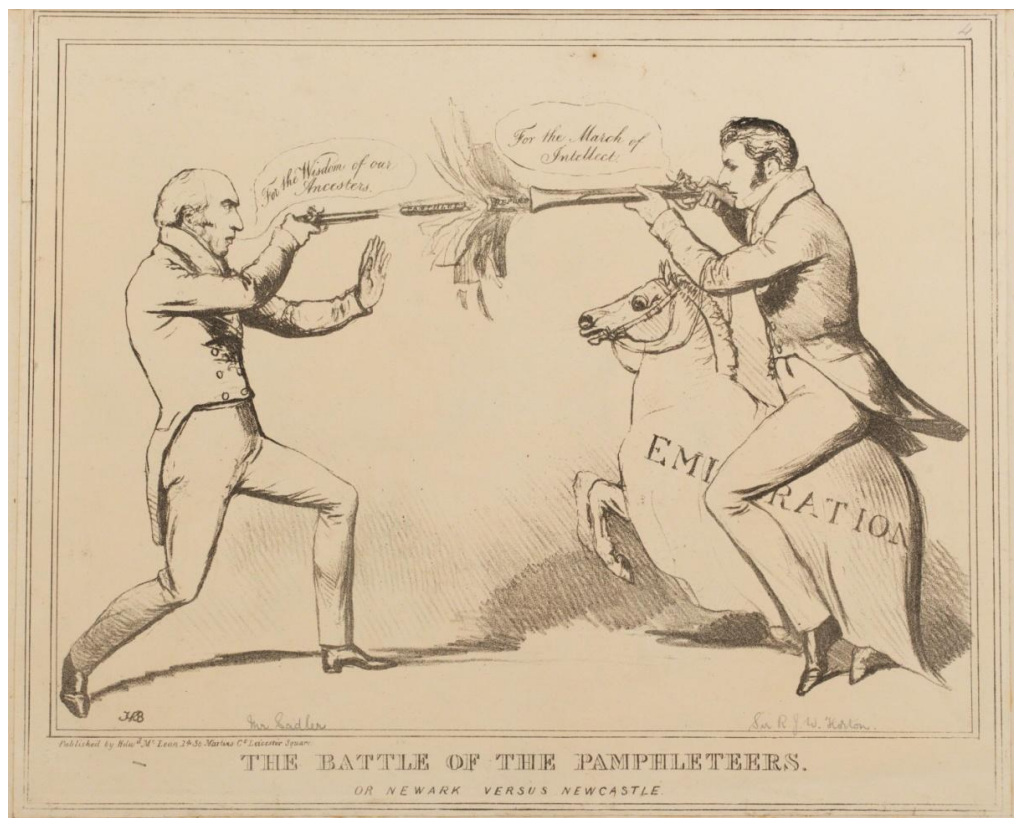
⁷⁰ PRO 30/29/9/6, Horton to Granville, 8 Sep 1826.

⁷¹ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 16, c.511, 15 Feb 1827.

⁷² *Times*, 17 Feb 1827.

those he called ‘practical’ men, or ‘men of business’, and from ‘scientific’ or ‘speculative’ men, but remained conscious that, for some in the Commons, ‘speculative’ and ‘philosophical’ were terms of abuse.⁷³ He recommended the House not ‘to confide exclusively in the views either of speculative or of practical men’, but ‘to look attentively at both, and to decide as circumstances warranted.’⁷⁴ This was a fair summary of his own approach, at least until he left office.

Publication of the Emigration Reports in 1826 and 1827, and the attack upon them by Michael Sadler, propelled Wilmot into the front line of argument as to the value of ‘political economy’. The subsequent controversy between Sadler and Wilmot became, for a while, a proxy for larger battles over political philosophy.⁷⁵



John Doyle, The Battle of the Pamphleteers

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⁷³ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., vol 21, c.1722, 4 Jun 1829.

⁷⁴ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 16, c.512, 15 Feb 1827.

⁷⁵ Below, pp.176-9.

John Doyle satirised the conflict between the two men in 1829 in *The Battle of the Pamphleteers*, showing Wilmot riding his hobby-horse, 'Emigration', and firing a pamphlet 'for the march of intellect' while Sadler returns fire with another 'for the wisdom of our ancestors'.

Wilmot's reaction was characteristic. Now out of office, he threw off restraint and became much more assertive in his advocacy of political economy, however it might play in the Commons:

I have often been cautioned against political economists, but I cannot abide by that caution. For any legislator to ground practical measures upon mere abstract theories of political economy, would necessarily be in the highest degree irrational and absurd. But, diligently to study the course and progress of scientific enquiry upon such subjects, to ascertain those points upon which men of science agree, and those upon which they differ, – to endeavour to adjust abstract principles to the machinery of social life, – to attempt to introduce improved systems, without too rashly or rapidly hazarding the interests of those parties who, on the faith of the perpetuity of worse systems, have embarked their fortunes and interests, – if these pursuits mark a member of the legislature as dangerous, I am content to be so marked.⁷⁶

James Mill praised Wilmot as being 'nearly solitary' among British statesmen, for his example 'of grounding practical measures upon scientific principles, without which all legislation is but groping in the dark.'⁷⁷ Wilmot however tended to overrate the influence of economists on public opinion: he thought that their 'coincidence of opinion' on the subject of emigration 'could not fail, when duly understood, to produce an adequate effect upon the public mind.'⁷⁸ He believed that the science would soon 'find its true level ... among those sciences which have for their peculiar object the improvement and happiness of mankind'. However, to do so, it would have to slough off 'some of those extravagances, purisms and generalities, which materially mar its progress.'⁷⁹

⁷⁶ *Causes*, pp.iii-iv. See also *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 18, cc.1550-51, 17 Apr 1828.

⁷⁷ WH2847, James Mill to Horton, 15 Feb 1830.

⁷⁸ *Inquiry*, Fourth Series (first version), p.34.

⁷⁹ *Inquiry*, Third Series, pp.32-3.

Wilmot was no slave to political economy in its purest and most abstract form. His Whig friend Viscount Ponsonby wrote of him:

His diligence is incomparable, his knowledge of political economy and finance remarkably sound and extensive, and free from the deformation with which theorists are so almost universally tainted. I know of no man so ready to limit general sweeping propositions and to permit practice and experience to be the rule of their application.⁸⁰

Wilmot saw himself as part of a rising 'common-sense class' steering 'an impartial course between prescription and innovation', and desirous of 'correcting "the wisdom of our ancestors" by the stores of modern science and improved opinions.'⁸¹

And yet there was a dogmatism to Wilmot's approach which was uniquely his own. Having once worked out his conclusions, based on principles adapted to circumstances, Wilmot struggled to understand how others could fail to come to the same point of view. Rather like Mr. Panscope, whose 'synthetically deduced opinions' were 'transcendentally self-evident, categorically certain, and syllogistically demonstrable',⁸² Wilmot argued that there was no concept in political economy, as it applied to practical legislation, 'which is not capable of being clearly and mathematically brought down to the understanding, not only of every educated gentleman, but also of an averagely educated labourer and artisan.' Wilmot maintained that the way to explain such concepts was by 'interlocutory argument', such as took place in House of Commons select committees, by which 'a series of consecutive propositions' could be gradually worked out. A select committee, adequately manned, was, in Wilmot's view, 'an admirable instrument for the establishment or refutation of opinions capable of mathematical proof.' A debate on the floor of the House, was, by contrast, useless, because false assumptions were easily hidden in long speeches. Wilmot imagined that questions such as 'free trade' and 'currency' would long since have been settled for good had they been

⁸⁰ Grey Papers, GRE/B48/1/67, Ponsonby to Grey, 9 Nov 1830.

⁸¹ *Lectures*, 'Correspondence and Resolutions' p.17.

⁸² Thomas Love Peacock, *Headlong Hall* (1816), ch.5.

‘discussed in interlocutory argument’.⁸³ In 1830, he suggested that government should institute an enquiry into the merits of further reductions in taxation and cuts in government establishments. He had no doubt that such an enquiry must prove to everyone’s satisfaction that distress could not be relieved by such methods, and he looked forward gleefully to having men such as Cobbett, and Black of the *Morning Chronicle*, examined, ‘and if they were not shewn up to the public as liars and jugglers *beyond doubt*’ he promised to give up public life forever.⁸⁴

This reveals more than a touching faith in the power of fairly conducted argument to settle complex questions. Unlike Malthus, Wilmot evidently saw political economy as a science more akin to mathematics than to morals or politics,⁸⁵ capable of arriving at definitive conclusions, provided that they were worked up logically from sound foundations. Despite recognising that principles had to be adjusted to circumstances, he did not appear to understand that other people would judge circumstances differently, attaching different weight to different factors; even less did he make allowances for imperfect knowledge or for conflicting interests. Despite a decade of experience as a practical politician, Wilmot could be surprisingly oblivious to political realities. With the loss of office and responsibility after 1827, the speculative and theoretical aspects of his thinking became more prominent and his proposals became less pragmatic and practical.⁸⁶

There was an evident moral element in Wilmot’s approach to political economy. Supporting the Newspaper Stamp Duties Bill in 1819, he complained that the cheap press ‘taught the poor ... to rebel against the dispensations of Providence.’ Radical agitators deluded the poor with a vision of their future condition, after a radical reform, which was ‘incompatible with human nature, and with those immutable laws which Providence has established for the regulation of civil society.’⁸⁷ Instead, ‘prosperity depended

⁸³ *Inquiry*, First Series, pp.28-32.

⁸⁴ WH2858, *Observations*.

⁸⁵ See above, pp.22-3.

⁸⁶ Below, pp. 112-5, 167-9.

⁸⁷ *Hansard*, 41, c.1358, 20 Dec 1819.

on the sobriety and industry of the community at large.’⁸⁸ Wilmot did not often base his economic arguments upon an appeal to Providence; when he did, it was normally – as here – to avoid engaging with any fundamental critique of existing property rights.

The place of virtue and morality in Wilmot’s thinking in relation to pauperism – and the extent to which it reflects Malthusian preoccupations, or is to be explained by subliminal evangelical influences – is considered below.⁸⁹ For now it may be observed that Wilmot was no evangelical. As he was not given to discussing his religious beliefs, this must be inferred from indirect evidence. First, there is nothing in his correspondence, at least in the phase of his life covered here, to suggest that he was especially devout, or that he fretted over the state of his soul, or anyone else’s. When he did refer to religion he typically made use of circumlocutions such as ‘Providence’⁹⁰ or ‘the Divine Founder of Christianity’⁹¹ rather than referring to God or Jesus directly. Writing letters one Sunday morning, Wilmot was aware that he ought to be in church, but was unabashed – it was raining. ‘To do business on a Sunday’, though, would have been ‘clearly wrong’.⁹²

Second, Wilmot’s manners were not evangelical manners. In his pre-ministerial life he was something of a man-about-town, enjoying society and dining out.⁹³ He liked to live well: wardrobe and cellar were both well stocked.⁹⁴ His favourite recreations were shooting and cards.⁹⁵ On entering public life he accepted the code of honour which might require him to fight a

⁸⁸ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 1, c.35, 27 Apr 1820.

⁸⁹ See pp.90-92, 103-8, 111-2, 119-20.

⁹⁰ *West India Question*, p.82.

⁹¹ R.W. Horton, *A Letter to the Duke of Norfolk* (1825).

⁹² PRO30/29/9/6/17, Horton to Granville, 7 Mar 1824.

⁹³ WH2782, Ward to Wilmot, Jan 1819 & 2 Sep 1823.

⁹⁴ WH2403, Horton’s Confidential Memorandum Book, 1828-29, pp.10-14, 38-41.

⁹⁵ The sources are legion: see for instance, Hatherton Papers, D260/M/F/5/26, Littleton’s Diary, 12 Oct to 3 Dec 1818, *passim*; K. Bourne (ed.), *The Palmerston-Sullivan Letters, 1804-1863* (1979), pp.169-70. Wilmot was not an expert shot, on one occasion killing his host’s favourite dog: WH3375, Wilmot to Mrs. Wilmot [n.d.]. Evangelicals disapproved of gambling. See, for instance: E.M. Howse, *Saints in Politics* (1953), pp.121-2; Donald A. Low, *The Regency Underworld* (1982; 2000 edn.), p.130. Wilmot dabbled, but was not addicted.

duel; and at least once he instigated discussions which might have led to one.⁹⁶ He had a roving eye, and, while he did not exactly scatter his seed, neither did he confine operations strictly to the Home Farm.⁹⁷ He was free-spending, generous, and far from prudent, entangling himself in heavy debts by the late 1820s: his appointment to Ceylon was a financial lifeline.

Wilmot's was a worldly, rather than other-worldly temperament, but this is not to suggest that his religion was purely nominal. He appears to have been an orthodox Trinitarian Anglican from the same Christ Church mould as Canning and Peel. His faith was perhaps impersonal, but nonetheless genuine. He saw himself as a staunch friend of the Church of England, but more on constitutional and social grounds than spiritual ones.⁹⁸ He thought that Protestantism represented a 'purer' system of faith than Roman Catholicism, having been 'filtered and refined at the period of the Reformation.'⁹⁹ His concern for the poor was certainly informed by gospel values,¹⁰⁰ but his concern for West Indian slaves was not urgent enough for the 'Saints'.¹⁰¹ Religion informed Wilmot's very conventional opinions on such virtually unmentionable subjects as contraception,¹⁰² and homosexuality.¹⁰³ His hand in the destruction of Byron's memoirs shows a similar concern for propriety and appearances.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁶ WH2810, Heber to Wilmot, 20 Mar 1819; WH2897, G. Dawson to Horton, 17 Mar 1827; WH2900, Horton to Dawson, 17 Mar 1827; WH2897, J.E. Denison to Horton, 18 Mar 1827; D4576/13/3, Stanley to Horton, 19 Mar 1827. Evangelicals disapproved of duelling, as putting the favour of men before the favour of God: Donna T. Andrew, 'The code of honour and its critics: the opposition to duelling in England, 1700-1850', *Social History*, 5 (1980), p.426-7. For a case in point, see R.A. Gaunt, *Unrepentant Tory* (Woodbridge, 2006), pp.83, 128.

⁹⁷ WH2782, Ward to Wilmot, 21 Feb & 23 Jul 1817; WH2810, Heber to Wilmot, 29 Sep 1819; WH2855, Palmerston to Horton, 18 Aug 1825; WH2686, Horton to Messrs. Allan & Harris, 27 Jul 1837.

⁹⁸ Below, pp. 220-23.

⁹⁹ *Newcastle*, pp.19, 34.

¹⁰⁰ *Lectures*, Lecture V, pp.11-12; below, pp.110-11.

¹⁰¹ Below, pp.205, 211.

¹⁰² 'There are those who have all but advocated infanticide ... supposing a man to be utterly void of all religious faith, is it possible to suppose that any unnatural remedy can be permanently substituted against a natural evil?': WH2843, Horton to Malthus, n.d. [1826].

¹⁰³ Wilmot insisted upon the exile of one offender as the only alternative to his 'irretrievable ruin', which would besides leave 'an almost ineffaceable stain upon his own "caste" in society.' Add. MS 40380, ff.227-30, Horton to Peel, n.d. [1825].

¹⁰⁴ Fiona MacCarthy, *Byron, Life and Legend* (2002), p.539. Bodleian Library, Dep. Lovelace Byron: 354, F.H. Doyle to Horton, 18 May 1825; 383, Horton to Lady Byron, 17 May 1824,

Finally, Boyd Hilton suggested that those with a ‘dynamic’ conception of history rather than a ‘static-cum-cyclical’ one were best able to resist evangelical influences.¹⁰⁵ It may be noted that Wilmot was an optimist with regard to the potential for future progress, despite his concerns about over-population. In relation to Ireland, for instance, he thought the time might come when it could contain ‘six times’ its present population, ‘without necessarily involving the consequence of a redundancy’ of labourers, due to capital accumulation in the meantime.¹⁰⁶

III

Macdonald told Wilmot in late 1819, ‘we are farther than ever asunder in politics, for domestic events all tend to draw out your latent Tory principles which you would fain even have concealed from yourself for some time.’¹⁰⁷ Macdonald was undoubtedly right. The years 1816-19 were marked by great distress and political turbulence. Neither Tories nor Whigs had much sympathy with radical agitation, but they differed as to how to respond to it, and Wilmot's defensive response was characteristic of conservative attitudes at this time.

The defence of existing property rights was fundamental to Wilmot's political creed. His basic test for legislation was that it ‘should violate no private right, nor sacrifice one class of the community for the benefit of another.’¹⁰⁸ His strong sense of what was due to property is evident in many areas of his public life – for instance in his expansive view of the compensation due to slave owners, in his defence of the Church of Ireland's right to its tithes, or in his

Hobhouse to Horton, 23 Nov 1824. Add. MS 31,037, ff.47-57, Horton to Mrs. Augusta Leigh (5 letters, all undated).

¹⁰⁵ Hilton, *Atonement*, pp.33-4.

¹⁰⁶ *Inquiry*, Third Series, pp.77-8. This chimed with Malthus's opinion, offered to the Emigration Committee in 1827, that in the longer term Ireland ‘might be a very rich and a very prosperous country’: P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.327.

¹⁰⁷ WH2837, Macdonald to Wilmot, 8 Nov 1819.

¹⁰⁸ *Inquiry*, Third Series, p.6.

view of the deference due to landlords by their voting tenants.¹⁰⁹ Wilmot conceived property first as a source of stability, a defence against disorder and turbulence, rather than as a Whiggish bulwark against oppression. Security of property was ‘the main keystone in the arch of civil society’, ‘without which no country could prosper.’¹¹⁰

Wilmot also accepted more positive arguments in favour of property, developed or refurbished by Malthus as part of his refutation of the ‘perfectibilist’ speculations of Godwin and Condorcet.¹¹¹ Written in the wake of the French Revolution, these had looked forward optimistically to the progress of human society towards perfection, and to the withering of institutions such as marriage, property, and government, which, they argued, impeded this progress. Malthus argued, on the other hand, that these institutions had been ‘the ladder’ by which man had risen to his ‘present eminence’, and the ladder could not safely be thrown down. Property rights were an essential element in the moral framework of ‘Christian political economy’, encouraging ‘moral restraint’, thrift, diligence, energy and invention.¹¹² Property, and inequality, were further beneficial to the progress of society, in that spending by the wealthy encouraged growth in all kinds of trades and manufactures – providing employment, stimulating invention and improvement, and promoting civil liberty by enlarging the ‘middling ranks’ of society.¹¹³ Wealth ‘trickled down’, in other words. With these arguments, Malthus had been able to ‘wrest the idea of “progress” from the grasp of the Jacobins and to make it instead the legitimate property of reformist whigs and subsequently of a new generation of post-war “liberal conservatives”’.¹¹⁴

Wilmot did not assert that ‘the actual state of society is abstractedly the best’, but he did argue that current property rights could not be ‘suddenly and

¹⁰⁹ See pp.200-205, 226, 70-71.

¹¹⁰ WH2843, Horton to Malthus, n.d. [1827].

¹¹¹ William Godwin, *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (1793); Marquis de Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique* (1795).

¹¹² See below, pp. 83-4.

¹¹³ T.R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798; ed. G. Gilbert, Oxford, 1993), pp.115-8. This part of the argument drew on eighteenth century ideas as to the ‘benefits of luxury’; Waterman, *Revolution*, pp.41-50.

¹¹⁴ Waterman, *Revolution*, pp.139-42.

extensively changed, without the hazard of calamitous consequences.’ Spending on luxuries and conveniences, by those who had income to spare, provided employment to millions of labourers and artisans, and set in motion the ‘constant succession of exchanges’ by which demand percolated through the community. To confiscate wealth would be to destroy that demand, and ‘every trade must share in the common calamity.’¹¹⁵

It was on these grounds that Wilmot attacked the ‘co-operative system’, when he found it to be gaining popularity among working people in 1830. He would undoubtedly have had fundamental objections to the principle of co-operation, if it meant as he thought it did ‘the principle of community of possessions, instead of that of individual property’, but he was able to place his objections on practical grounds. Co-operation, as Wilmot understood it, involved ‘a change in the whole existing structure of society, too great to be hastily effected, and for which no precedent is to be found in the history of the world.’ As a remedy for present poverty, it was too visionary to be contemplated. Wilmot acknowledged that the co-operators were right to focus on the problem of competition in the labour market: his remedy, emigration, aimed to reduce excessive competition, while theirs, co-operation, promised to eliminate competition entirely. Wilmot was convinced that his own remedy was to be preferred, because it could be ‘immediately and easily applied’, while a co-operative system, even if it were desirable, could not be brought into being quickly.¹¹⁶

Wilmot therefore defended inequality and the current distribution of property on the practical grounds that they provided the motive power for economic activity. He coupled this with a more analytical justification of capital as, in essence, the accrued result of past labour, properly paid for at the time:

Property is that which is appropriated, whether it consists of land, houses, ships, docks, or any other kind of possessions. The greater part of property is the result of past and accumulated labour. ... Accumulated labour is the result of exchanges made at a former period between certain capitalists and certain

¹¹⁵ *Lectures*, Lecture VI, pp.21-6; Lecture IX, pp.28-9.

¹¹⁶ *Lectures*, Lecture IV, pp.20-23; Lecture V, pp.20-21; Lecture X, p.9.

labourers. Those labourers received what at that time was an equivalent for their labour, and consequently the parties who employed them had a right to the result of that labour.

Current production arose from the combination of capital and labour, and Wilmot therefore rejected the idea that the labourers of the present had a claim in equity to 'the whole or the greater part of that combined produce.' It would be 'just as reasonable to argue, that the cook is entitled to eat the largest part of the dinner.'¹¹⁷

This argument applied to land just as much as to any other form of property, and Wilmot believed that landed property stood in particular need of defence. He was a landowner himself, and one who normally stood in urgent need of his rents. Nothing was more common, he thought, 'than to hear a country gentleman, or a nobleman inheriting or possessing a landed property, described as an indolent lazy drone, one who without exertion on his own part derives his revenue from the exertions of others.' But landed property was 'nothing more than the concentration of the aggregate results of former industry', which an individual was as much entitled to invest in land as in manufacturing or trade. Wilmot feared that the rising prejudice against landed property would, if left unchecked, 'put to hazard the independence of this country.' He believed that the political economists had done good service in this context by their elucidation of the doctrine of rent. They had countered the prejudice that 'high rents were the result of a combination among the aristocratical landlords', by showing that rent was in fact determined by the market price for agricultural produce. The landed gentry ought to be grateful, Wilmot thought, but instead he noted sadly that 'the class which is most inveterately opposed to all doctrines of political oeconomy is undoubtedly the class of country gentlemen', especially those who were in the House of Commons.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ *Lectures*, Lecture V, p.10.

¹¹⁸ WH2843, Horton to Malthus, n.d. [1827]. Wilmot's analysis of rent in this letter is pure Ricardianism: 'The market price of agricultural produce being governed by that price which is sufficient to remunerate the capitalist who embarks his capital upon an inferior class of land, on which there is no surplus for rent, the measure of rent on all other land is of necessity the

In his justifications of property, Wilmot tended to glide over the issue of inheritance, merely assuming that the child's right to enjoy inherited property must be the same as the parent's. Against the contrary proposal, 'at the death of any member of the community, to abolish the exclusive claims of the widow and children, and to divide his property among all the members of the society who have arrived at adult age', Wilmot offered only a doubtfully relevant attack on the notion of equality:

Providence has not offered an analogy to such principles in the course of nature. Climate, seasons, talent, physical strength, age and youth, health and sickness, all mark inequality as the order of the natural world. Revealed religion denies her sanction to such principles.¹¹⁹

Again the appeal to religion indicates that argument was running out.

While Wilmot thought that any sudden change in the distribution of property would be catastrophic for all classes, he did not defend extremes of inequality which existed all around him. He supported a more gradual and evolutionary change:

an alteration in the present state of society in this country, which would add something to the condition of the labourer, if such a change was effected gradually and imperceptibly, by the silent operation of natural causes, would tend, in the whole, to the increase of human happiness¹²⁰

This, in essence, is what Wilmot hoped to achieve through state-aided emigration. His decade-long devotion to that cause makes sense only as an attempt to lift the living conditions of working people, and he was well aware that this required a redistribution in their favour. He believed that this was imperatively called for both out of compassion, and in the enlightened self-interest of property itself.

measure of their comparative fertility over this newly cultivated land, which could not and would not be cultivated at all unless its cultivation afforded the profits of stock, to the farmer.'

¹¹⁹ *Lectures*, Lecture V, p.12.

¹²⁰ *Lectures*, Lecture VI, p.31. Wilmot extracted this last passage from *Essay on the Progress of Society* (1830), by the Scottish philosopher Robert Hamilton.

IV

Wilmot's defence of property went hand-in-hand with his defence of existing constitutional arrangements. In this area Wilmot's thinking was largely conventional and derivative, and he frequently resorted to quotation to make his case. He accepted in its entirety the 'conservative' case outlined in Chapter 1,¹²¹ starting with the standard notion of a 'balanced' constitution designed to prevent either monarchy or democracy becoming over-powerful, and he noted certain democratizing tendencies which were already in operation. A great increase in the number of freehold voters in proportion to the population, brought about by inflation and by increasing prosperity, had 'given the representation in general a much more popular character.' To this Wilmot added: 'the very creation of public opinion by means of the press in its present improved state, and the necessity of the ministers of the Crown, consulting and assaying that opinion, previous to their adoption of any measures of importance.'¹²²

Wilmot did not believe that the legislature should be primarily concerned to represent the wishes of the people. He cited Fox to the effect that 'we have higher obligations to justice than to our constituents,' and that one duty of parliament was 'to keep the privileges of the very freemen we represent, as much within their proper limits, as to control any unwarrantable exertion of the royal authority.' To introduce 'a democratical form of government,' would be a derogation of duty.¹²³ Wilmot naturally endorsed the Burkeian proposition that members of parliament should not be bound by the instructions of their constituents:

a deliberative assembly, however elected, where freedom of discussion and debate was completely permitted would be more likely to preserve and to transmit to posterity the sacred flame of freedom, than an assembly elected

¹²¹ Above, pp.25-6.

¹²² *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 5, c.391, 17 Apr 1821. The growth of the English electorate in the decade or so prior to 1832 is summarised by P.J. Salmon in Fisher, *Commons 1820-1832*, i, pp.410-12.

¹²³ *Hansard*, 40, cc.1481, 1 Jul 1819.

upon the purest principles of representation, where such a degree of freedom of debate was not practically enjoyed.¹²⁴

Along with the sacred flame of freedom, Wilmot argued, the principles of political economy fared better in the existing House of Commons than they would in a reformed one. Although they were not acted upon as much as he might like, they would have even less weight ‘in a body collected merely to obey the will of the people, and compelled to abandon one course of policy for another at the command of the people.’¹²⁵ He therefore regarded the unreformed House as comprising the ‘natural protectors’ of the poor, but he did not quite trust the poor to see this for themselves. He approved the principle expressed by the Friends of the People in 1795, that ‘those who had no property should not have the privilege of the elective franchise, because they would evidently have no common interest in the preservation of property.’¹²⁶

For Wilmot the political influence of property was more than a purely political matter. It was a reflection of a justly ordered, hierarchical society, founded on well-understood mutual obligations between landlord and tenant. He believed that property – landed property, at least – had a just claim to the deference of voters within its sphere of influence. He was horrified by the conduct of Irish priests in certain county elections in 1826, and the Clare by-election of 1828, who used their influence to persuade Catholic voters to reject their landlord’s preferred candidate. To Wilmot this seemed a dangerous violation of ‘the mutual engagements incident to property.’¹²⁷ Where was the virtue, he asked, in the priesthood:

endeavouring, through the means of religion, to break that link, and to destroy that relation of mutual dependence and protection, which if it subsist not between the landlord and the tenant, must be fatal to the prosperity of any country where property exists?

¹²⁴ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 5, cc.394-5, 17 Apr 1821.

¹²⁵ *Hansard*, 2nd ser, 1, c.35, 27 Apr 1820.

¹²⁶ *Hansard*, 40, c.1358, 20 Dec 1819. See also *Reform*, pp.53-4.

¹²⁷ WH2933, Horton to Pierce Mahony, 13 Aug 1828.

There could be no ‘true religion,’ Wilmot thought, in ‘resisting the wishes of a benevolent landlord.’¹²⁸ Were this to become the normal and permanent way of conducting elections in Ireland, ‘no condition of society could be worse.’ Wilmot recognised that the 40s freeholder franchise had been abused by many Irish landlords, who had subdivided their property minutely in order to create hordes of dependent voters.¹²⁹ He therefore favoured a significant increase in the minimum voting qualification in Ireland, but not as a measure coupled with Catholic emancipation: to connect the two measures would be ‘invidious and objectionable,’ because Catholic proprietors ought to be – and, Wilmot believed, were – ‘precisely as much interested in preserving and consolidating the natural relations growing out of property, as Protestants are.’¹³⁰

In addition to property, a sound voter required some education. In 1819 Wilmot argued that the right of suffrage should be raised, rather than lowered, so that the franchise was put in the hands of men of ‘education and independence’.¹³¹ Much depended on circumstances, though. Wilmot thought that the ‘lower classes’ should be given as much education as possible – especially education in the hard truths of political economy – and he believed that a time might arrive when they would have learnt enough to reject, of their own accord, the delusive rhetoric of radical agitators; but, in 1819, too many of them languished in a ‘disastrous twilight’ of education which left them unable – in the face of radical propaganda – to form accurate and undistorted ideas on political subjects. In Wilmot’s case, therefore, resistance to reform was coupled with an appeal to the march of mind. Wilmot defended the Newspaper Stamp Duties Bill by an analogy with the excise duty on spirits: both made it harder for the poor to injure themselves, whether by imbibing

¹²⁸ Arundel, MD469, BCA Minute Book, Horton to Blount, 28 Jul 1826.

¹²⁹ The Emigration Committee heard evidence that this was a cause of over-population in Ireland: P.P. 1826-27 (550), pp.260-61, 268, 271.

¹³⁰ WH2933, Horton to Pierce Mahony, 13 Aug 1828. O’Connell commented contemptuously that ‘Mr. Horton as a Tory thinks it is property which should be represented, not men. ... His notions are fit for the ancient ladies of the present day.’ O’Connell saw the ‘democratic principle’ making ‘silent but steady progress’ among the young; ‘mere jobbers in politics’ such as Wilmot would soon be like boats stranded by an ebbing tide: Maurice R. O’Connell (ed.), *The Correspondence of Daniel O’Connell, vol iii, 1824-1828* (Dublin, 1974), p.408. Edward Blount, Secretary of the BCA, thought that the landlords had been taught to ‘cease to claim ... compliances which their own honourable feelings should have told them they ought never to have demanded’: WH2753, Blount to Horton, 6 Aug 1826.

¹³¹ *Hansard*, 40, c.1479, 1 Jul 1819.

intoxicating liquids or ingesting ‘the torrent of sedition and blasphemy which deluged the country.’¹³²

Wilmot did not contend that the constitution was in the abstract the best that could possibly be imagined (though it was ‘the most perfect of any age or country’).¹³³ He argued that in practice it worked very well: ‘the representation is good enough, and fully answers its purpose, ... the milk throws up the cream.’ It was apparent that no other country enjoyed ‘that extension of freedom which it is our singular lot to experience and yet to vilify’: not even the United States, where nearly one-fifth of the total population were slaves.¹³⁴ Wilmot dismissed radical appeals to the ‘ancient constitution’, wondering how it could be asserted ‘that liberty was better understood and more enjoyed at periods when portions of the people were transferred, like cattle, from one lord to another;’¹³⁵ he ridiculed the idea that universal suffrage and triennial parliaments had once formed part of the constitution of the country.¹³⁶ He thought that the demand for reform reflected the country’s ‘pecuniary difficulties’, which were in turn the result of a necessary war which had been supported by the people.¹³⁷

Wilmot’s resistance to parliamentary reform was closely bound up with some of the basic tenets of his political economy: that working people were as interested as anyone in the preservation of property and inequality, and that poverty could not be relieved by retrenchment in taxation and expenditure.¹³⁸ With these views, Wilmot was fiercely hostile to the radical argument that relief depended on prior political reform to bring into being a popularly-elected parliament mandated to cut taxes, reduce government and redistribute wealth. His bitterest invective was directed against ‘demagogues’ who ‘pretended’ that distress could be relieved by political reform. Opposition to this form of political radicalism was the main theme of Wilmot’s early

¹³² *Hansard*, 41, cc.1357-60, 20 Dec 1819.

¹³³ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 1, c.35, 27 Apr 1820.

¹³⁴ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 5, c.394, 17 Apr 1821.

¹³⁵ *Hansard*, 40, c.1478, 1 Jul 1819.

¹³⁶ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 5, cc.388-91, 17 Apr 1821.

¹³⁷ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 5, c.387, 17 Apr 1821.

¹³⁸ On the latter point, see below pp.162-5.

parliamentary speeches; it lent urgency to his work on emigration; and in 1830-31 it underlay both his attempts to appeal directly to the artisan classes and his changed attitude to reform.¹³⁹

Wilmot adopted from Windham a description of the principle of Jacobinism: 'the embodying the inevitable discontents and misfortunes of mankind, and of attributing them to the errors of civil government for the purpose of overthrowing it.'¹⁴⁰ He feared (this time with Burke) that as long as this 'spirit of disaffection' was kept alive by radical agitators, it was 'absolutely impossible that some moment should not arrive when they will be able to produce a pretended reform but a real revolution.'¹⁴¹ He opposed Burdett's motion on parliamentary reform in July 1819, suspecting that it was brought on to coincide with 'seditious' meetings around the country, and fearing that it would inflame the 'lower and more turbulent classes.'¹⁴²

Wilmot's conservatism lay not so much in the defence of property and the constitution *per se*, but in the manner and detail of it. His first clear breach with Whig views of domestic policy came in March 1817, when he declared his support for the suspension of *habeas corpus*. It may be inferred that his attitude owed something to Burke, since Macdonald told him to reconsider and to 'leave Burke upon his shelf'.¹⁴³ Wilmot was however ready to be robust in defence of the constitution. Supporting the Six Acts in December 1819, he quoted from a speech by Henry Fox in 1737, to condemn 'irresolution and weakness' which would only give courage to the enemies of the constitution. It was worth a 'temporary sacrifice' of liberty, Wilmot argued, to ensure the preservation of the constitution; but in fact the Seditious Meetings Prevention Bill was 'calculated to preserve the liberties of the

¹³⁹ Below, pp. 261-7.

¹⁴⁰ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 5, c.388, 17 Apr 1821.

¹⁴¹ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 1, c.34, 27 Apr 1820. The reference to Burke is from 'Observations on the Conduct of the Minority', in *Two Letters on the Conduct of Our Domestic Parties, with regard to French Politics* (2nd edn., 1797), p.78.

¹⁴² *Hansard*, 40, c.1478, 1 Jul 1819.

¹⁴³ WH2837, Macdonald to Wilmot, 10 Mar 1817.

people, instead of infringing on them. There was ... a material difference between liberty – a rational liberty – and licentiousness.’¹⁴⁴

Wilmot was generally impatient at accusations of corruption against parliament and public men which, he thought, had been ‘uttered even to nausea’.¹⁴⁵ Nonetheless, like most defenders of the constitutional *status quo*, he considered himself ‘an enemy to corruption’, and he supported the piecemeal reform of corrupt boroughs as occasion arose.¹⁴⁶ He shared the anxiety of his liberal Tory colleagues that such reform should not establish a precedent, or suggest a principle or system of representation which could be applied more widely. For instance, in 1821, debating the disposal of the seats of the corrupt borough of Grampound, Wilmot argued that their transfer to a great town, Leeds, need set no precedent, and that it was not necessary even to consider the general question of extending the franchise to large unrepresented towns. He dissented from the option preferred by ministers at that time – transfer to the West Riding – on the conservative ground that to transfer the representation to a borough was less of an innovation than to transfer it to a riding.¹⁴⁷

V

Both Wilmot himself, and all the friends he consulted, seem to have been entirely clear that, once elected, a man with ambitions for office had to make his choice between ministry and opposition. There was however some asymmetry between these two options. For all the shortcomings of their leadership, the Whigs as Macdonald described them were a surprisingly cohesive party, some 150 to 200 strong in the House of Commons. They were also, as was tartly pointed out to Wilmot, a socially exclusive party: as a government supporter he was no longer welcome in Whig houses.¹⁴⁸ The

¹⁴⁴ *Hansard*, 41, cc.650-53, 2 Dec 1819.

¹⁴⁵ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 5, c.393, 17 Apr 1821.

¹⁴⁶ *Hansard*, 40, c.1478, 1 Jul 1819.

¹⁴⁷ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 4, cc.598-9, 12 Feb 1821.

¹⁴⁸ WH2789, Fazakerley to Wilmot, 6 Oct 1818; WH2837, Macdonald to Wilmot, 9 Oct 1818.

ministry could not count on a coherent body of support on such a scale. The term 'party' is used freely enough in the correspondence of Ward and others, confirming the existence of a 'two-party atmosphere', but Wilmot's dealings were not with a 'party' but with a group of ministers. Normally, they were sufficiently well-entrenched, and sufficiently cohesive, to reduce Wilmot's choice to the binary one of ministry or opposition, but circumstances could on occasion appear to generate other options. That was briefly the case in 1820, when the unhappy progress of the Queen's trial induced Wilmot to make his overture to Canning, but by 1820 Canning had given up party games.

Wilmot's deep devotion to 'political economy' was a fundamental part of his political make-up, though his conception of himself as a common-sense pragmatist, able to blend his knowledge of economic theory with a judicious grasp of practical conditions, was perhaps a little wide of the mark. He was a system-builder, and if his structures were internally logical they sometimes rested on rickety foundations. The exploration of his economic thinking will proceed in the next three chapters.

In examining Wilmot's conservatism or 'Toryism' we have so far focused on what made him favour the government side in 1818-19. His defence of property and the constitution sat squarely within the conservative philosophy described by Dickinson.¹⁴⁹ However there were economic and religious dimensions in Wilmot's thinking which might arguably be described as 'Tory' and which remain to be explored in later chapters.

Wilmot shared the view of his liberal Tory colleagues that it was necessary to provide conspicuously good and responsive government, in order to head off the demand for political reform. It turned out, though, that Wilmot's ideas as to what good government meant were distinctive and idiosyncratic. This was true above all in relation to the problem of pauperism, to which we now turn.

¹⁴⁹ Above, pp.25-6.

3

The Abstraction of Superfluous Labour: Pauperism and Emigration

Throughout his parliamentary career, Wilmot Horton devoted himself tirelessly to the cause of state-aided emigration as a means of relief for pauperism. This chapter considers Wilmot's analysis of the causes of pauperism and his reasons for advocating emigration as a remedy for it. By placing Wilmot's ideas in the context of contemporary ideas relating to poverty, it contributes to our knowledge of the connections between liberal Toryism and the different conceptions of contemporary 'political economy' introduced in Chapter 1.¹ The discussion is largely theoretical, involved more with ideas and attitudes towards poverty and emigration than with the reception of Wilmot's ideas at the level of practical politics. Section I provides a brief account of Wilmot's involvement with emigration and pauperism from 1822 to 1831: this serves as a narrative introduction to this and the next two chapters. Section II summarises the state of opinion, in relation to pauperism and emigration, at the time Wilmot entered public life, with particular attention to the 'Christian' political economists. Section III considers Wilmot's analysis of the causes of pauperism and the extent of the problem, while section IV analyses his changing justifications of emigration as a remedy, or as the necessary precondition to a remedy, for pauperism. Section V explores changing attitudes to poor relief in the later 1820s, and Section VI describes Wilmot's own proposals for a reformed poor law. Section VII summarises the response of the main political economists to Wilmot's ideas, and places his approach to pauperism in relation to theirs.

¹ Above, pp.19-24.

I

Wilmot believed that emigration could serve both to relieve pauperism at home and to strengthen Britain's colonies, and it is natural to ask which of these motives prompted him to take up the subject. H.J.M. Johnston maintained that Wilmot's primary concern was with colonial development, and that his arguments relating to pauperism were added later to provide further justification for his projects: he 'started with a remedy and went on to make a diagnosis.'² This thesis argues the opposite, that the relief of pauperism was Wilmot's main concern, and that colonial development, though also genuinely important to him, was ultimately secondary. Wilmot made comments at different times which lend support to both views,³ and the view taken here depends on the weight of evidence, in terms of what Wilmot said and wrote over a decade. The subject also appealed to Wilmot's ambition: when he took office he found in emigration 'the only new great subject which presented itself.'⁴

In 1822 Wilmot produced an 'Outline of a Plan' for the emigration of redundant paupers from English agricultural parishes to Upper Canada. This was published in 1823.⁵ Wilmot's papers contain a Précis of 31 replies.⁶ Under this plan, the government was to undertake the transport and resettlement of paupers, to be selected by parish officers from those volunteering to go. Parishes were to repay the government by an annuity secured on parish rates, but would enjoy an immediate saving on their current expenditure on poor relief. Wilmot's example supposed the transfer of 100 able-bodied labourers or their dependants, each costing the parish £10 per annum to maintain in idleness. They could be transferred, resettled in Upper Canada, and maintained until self-sufficient, at an estimated cost of £35 per

² Johnston, *Emigration*, p.60.

³ *Inquiry*, First Series, p.34; WH2843, Horton to Malthus, n.d. [1827?]; WH2810, Heber to Wilmot, 20 Apr 1813 (marginal note, 1836); *Burdett*, p.2. See also CO 384/12, ff. 292-9, J.B. Robinson to Horton, 14 Jun 1825: 'your first attention to the subject of emigration was excited by the desire of finding a remedy for the pressure of the poor-laws in England.'

⁴ PRO30/29/9/6, Horton to Granville, 8 Sep 1826.

⁵ P.P. 1823 (561), pp.168-80.

⁶ WH2868, Précis.

person (this estimate proved too high). The total cost of £3500 could be repaid, with interest at 4%, by an annuity of £225 for 25 years, thus giving the parish an immediate saving of £775 per annum. Emigrating paupers would be required to ‘give up for themselves and children, present and future, all claims upon parochial support.’

Wilmot obtained most of his information about Upper Canada, and the method and cost of settlement there, from J.B. Robinson, the Attorney General of the province, and Colonel Thomas Talbot, the developer of a successful settlement on the shore of Lake Erie, both of whom were in England in the summer of 1822. Each family was to be granted 100 acres of land, subject to certain requirements as to cultivation, and supported for a year to eighteen months. Wilmot soon reduced this to 70 acres, with a further 30 available for ‘good conduct’. The plan was clearly designed with the agricultural labourer, and the rural parish, in mind.⁷

Wilmot’s Plan had no immediate practical results, but in July 1823 the government agreed to a small assisted emigration from the south of Ireland. As with earlier assisted emigrations from Scotland in 1819-21, this was a response to political pressure generated by local distress, a way of being seen to do something.⁸ Wilmot, charged with organising the emigration, seized the opportunity to describe it as an ‘experiment’ by which the idea of colonization as a remedy for pauperism could be tested in practice.⁹ However the method of settling new land in Upper Canada was well established. The only points really in doubt were, first, the cost, and second, the suitability of the proposed settlers. There was no tradition of pauper emigration from the south of Ireland,¹⁰ and it was not known whether Roman Catholic peasants from this area would want to go, whether they could succeed as settlers, or whether they could integrate successfully with the existing, largely Protestant, population of

⁷ P.P. 1823 (561), pp.168-70; WH2744, J.W. Bannister to Horton, 5 Nov 1823; CO 324/95, ff.13-15, Horton to Dalhousie, 13 Feb 1825.

⁸ Add MS. 37301, ff. 65-7, Goulburn to Wellesley, 13 May 1823; Cowan, *Emigration*, p.69.

⁹ *Chronicle*, 24 Jun 1823. (There is no report in *Hansard*.)

¹⁰ There was already significant emigration from the northern and midland counties, but it consisted mainly of ‘the better sort of tenantry with some capital’: CO 42/197, ff. 225-7, John Astle to W. Gregory, 30 Jun 1823.

Upper Canada. Over the next few years, southern Ireland loomed increasingly large in Wilmot's thinking as he tried to adapt his remedy to conditions there.¹¹

568 Irish paupers were taken out in 1823, superintended by Peter Robinson (the brother of J.B. Robinson), and settled on virgin land in the Perth district.¹² The 'experiment' was judged to have been sufficiently successful to justify a repeat on a larger scale in 1825. This time 2024 settlers went out, again superintended by Peter Robinson.¹³ Of the six government-assisted emigrations since 1815, this was the only one to be undertaken, not in response to some temporary political difficulty, but with a view to colonial development and to assessing emigration as a means for the relief of pauperism.¹⁴ However it was also the last. While the experiments were reasonably successful, in that many of the emigrants were able to establish themselves and eventually to prosper, they did not prove that assisted emigration could be conducted at acceptable cost.¹⁵ The mood of the Commons was hostile to further grants for emigration until the question had been fully considered by a Select Committee.¹⁶

This put at least a temporary stop to state-assisted emigration.¹⁷ Wilmot sought instead to attract private capital to the colonies, giving encouragement to several joint stock companies, in particular the Canada Land Company.¹⁸ He also began to try to influence public opinion out-of-doors through his first pamphlet on emigration, *A Letter to Sir Francis Burdett* (1826).

¹¹ Black, *Economic Thought*, pp.203-15.

¹² CO 384/12, ff. 63-74, P. Robinson to Horton, 2 Apr 1824; P.P. 1825 (200), pp.249-52.

¹³ CO 384/12, ff.243-60, P. Robinson to Horton, 31 May 1825.

¹⁴ CO 43/64, ff. 31-2, Memorandum, Bathurst to Liverpool, 10 Apr 1824; CO 384/13, ff. 459-60, G. Harrison to Horton, 28 Mar 1825.

¹⁵ There are detailed accounts of the 1823 and 1825 emigrations in Carol Bennett, *Peter Robinson's Settlers* (Renfrew, Ontario, 1987); Cowan, *Emigration*, pp.70-80; Johnston, *Emigration*, pp.69-90.

¹⁶ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., vol 12, cc.1358-61, 15 Apr 1825.

¹⁷ Liverpool RO, 920 DER (14), 115, 5, Horton to Stanley, 16 Nov 1825.

¹⁸ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., vol 12, cc.1033-9, 15 Mar 1825; CO 42/375 *passim*; [John Galt] 'Bandana on Emigration', *Blackwood's*, 117 (Sep 1826), pp.470-78; Bathurst Letters, Bathurst to Horton, 3 & 7 Aug, 6 & 25 Nov 1825.

Select Committees on Emigration sat under Wilmot's chairmanship in 1826 and 1827. The 1826 Committee reported in May (the 'First Emigration Report'). It set out two basic principles for state-aided emigration: that emigration should be voluntary, and that any expense on the part of government should ultimately be repaid. It also presented a mass of evidence as to the extent of redundancy in Britain and Ireland, the availability of fertile land in the colonies, the willingness of paupers to emigrate, the cost, and the prospects for repayment. On these grounds, it recommended assisted emigration in principle without putting forward any specific scheme.¹⁹ A government agent, Colonel Francis Cockburn, was sent to North America to investigate the practicalities of emigration and to identify suitable land for settlement.

An interim report of the 1827 Committee, (the 'Second Report'), highlighted the distress of handloom weavers in northern England and Scotland, and recommended a grant of £50,000 to enable 1200 families to be relocated in Canada.²⁰ Canning soon scotched that proposal, arguing that trade had picked up and that the relief was no longer required.²¹ The Committee's final report (the 'Third Report') appeared at the end of June with a mass of new material, including the evidence of Wilmot's prize witness, Thomas Malthus. This report endorsed the general conclusions of the First Report, with a greater weight of evidence, and proposed a simpler and cheaper scheme of emigration than that in Wilmot's 'Plan'. Government assistance was now to start at Quebec; the passage across the Atlantic was to be funded by parishes or landlords, or by emigrants themselves; on arrival at Quebec, emigrants certified to be paupers could choose whether to settle on granted land (receiving government assistance and incurring obligations for repayment), or to make their own way as labourers; Wilmot's complex annuity arrangements between parish and government were dropped. The anticipated cost of resettling emigrants was reduced to £60 for a family of five. The Committee suggested that assistance might be given to 19,000 families over a three-year

¹⁹ P.P. 1826 (404).

²⁰ P.P. 1826-27 (237), pp.3-7.

²¹ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., vol 17, cc.927-30, 21 May 1827. The predicament of the handloom weavers was of course crueller than Canning recognised.

period (in the proportions 4:6:9) at a cost of £1,140,000. The priority was now firmly given to emigration from Ireland rather than from England.²²

It was Wilmot's bad luck that the Emigration Reports were overtaken by events. Liverpool's stroke removed a supportive prime minister; of his successors, Canning was unsympathetic, Goderich never faced parliament, and Wellington and Peel postponed any decision by appointing a second agent, John Richards, to investigate conditions in Canada. Wilmot left office at the end of 1827 and left the Commons at the general election of 1830. He was unable, despite many attempts, to secure parliamentary time for his emigration proposals. By this stage there were parishes, such as Benenden in Kent, which had on their own initiative helped their redundant poor to emigrate;²³ others, such as Frome, wished to be allowed to borrow for the purpose just as Wilmot proposed.²⁴ The Emigration Reports meanwhile were viciously but effectively attacked by Michael Sadler, the new darling of the Tory right.²⁵ Wilmot turned increasingly to correspondence with political economists, and appeals to public opinion in the form of pamphlets. He replied to Sadler in *Causes and Remedies of Pauperism in the United Kingdom considered* (1829); in his *Inquiry into the Causes and Remedies of Pauperism* (1830), he developed ideas for the reform of the poor laws and for the employment of paupers on public works. In late 1830 he tried new ways of influencing opinion, instructing a 'special class' at the London Mechanics' Institution, and presenting a series of public lectures there over the winter of 1830-31, later published as *Lectures on Statistics and Political Economy* (1832). The depredations of 'Captain Swing' in the agricultural south concentrated minds and, for a time, shifted opinion in Wilmot's favour. He was warmly commended in the periodical press for his efforts to promote remedies for pauperism,²⁶ and the new government introduced an emigration bill incorporating many of his ideas. This bill was lost when the government

²² P.P. 1826-27 (550), pp.3-41.

²³ WH2843, Horton to Malthus, n.d. [1830].

²⁴ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 25, c.367, 15 Jun 1830; Grey Papers, GRE/B124/6J, Scrope to Howick, 2 Dec 1831.

²⁵ M.T. Sadler, *Ireland, its Evils and their Remedies* (1829). See below, pp.176-9.

²⁶ [J. Miller?], 'Moral and Political State of the British Empire', *QR* 87 (Jan 1831), pp.291-2; [Fullarton], 'Parliamentary Reform', p.592; [McCulloch], 'Causes and Cure', p.53.

was dissolved in the spring of 1831, and, as tensions abated in the agricultural districts, so interest in assisted emigration waned.²⁷ Wilmot's departure for Ceylon in 1831 deprived him of any further opportunity to influence domestic opinion, while E.G. Wakefield was at the same time emerging as the new leader of the colonization movement.

II

Sydney Smith wrote in 1820 that 'all men of sense' admitted two things, 'first, that the Poor Laws must be abolished; secondly, that they must be *very gradually* abolished.'²⁸ Abolition was both necessary, because the poor laws undermined the 'fabric of society', and practically impossible, because to deny relief to the destitute was to invite revolution. This was the *impasse* which Wilmot sought to resolve through emigration.

Abolitionist attitudes towards the poor laws were at their strongest in these post-war years, fuelled by Malthusian fears of over-population and increasing immiseration.²⁹ Population, Malthus argued, had a tendency to increase more quickly than the supply of food, and must therefore receive some kind of check – either a 'positive' check which increased the death rate, such as war, famine, or disease, or a 'preventive' check to the birth rate.³⁰ Poor relief did not increase the supply of food, but merely redistributed it from those with work – by definition the 'more industrious and more worthy' – to those without, while tempting the latter to marry and procreate despite lacking independent means of support. The poor laws therefore tended to 'create the poor which they maintain', and were 'calculated to eradicate' the 'spirit of independence' among the poor.³¹ Malthus denied any right to poor relief, and

²⁷ Wendy Cameron and Mary McDougall Maude, *Assisting Emigration to Upper Canada: the Petworth Project 1832-1837* (Montreal, 2000), pp.31-41.

²⁸ [Sydney Smith], 'Poor Laws', *ER* 65 (Jan 1820), p.95.

²⁹ Poynter, *Pauperism*, pp.223-48.

³⁰ Malthus, *Essay*, *passim*; Winch, *Riches*, pp.232-6.

³¹ Malthus, *Essay*, pp.39-40.

called for repeal of the existing poor laws; he later became more gradualist in approach while still arguing for ultimate abolition.³²

These views were sharply criticised, especially from the Tory right, first as tending to subvert belief in a benign deity (who would not order things so as to involve mankind in inevitable misery), second as tending to erode a sense of obligation to the poor and weak. For Robert Southey, Malthus's analysis was not just wrong, but 'impious'. Poverty was attributable to errors in human policy 'and not to any inherent evil in the laws of nature'.³³ Southey's attack prompted Wilmot's first interest in questions of population and emigration: Wilmot leapt to Malthus's defence in a pamphlet, now lost.³⁴

A handful of 'Christian political economists'³⁵ made Malthusian ideas morally and theologically respectable. The key concept was that of 'moral restraint', given new emphasis by Malthus himself in the second edition of his *Essay* (1803). Moral restraint – that is, delayed marriage and abstinence from other sexual relations – might, Malthus now argued, be an effective 'preventive check', if reinforced by self-interest. Thus the pressure of population on scarce resources did not lead to inevitable misery, but was instead calculated to promote virtues such as activity, inventiveness, prudence and self-restraint. Malthus himself remained rather pessimistic, and these positive implications remained largely latent in his own work: their elaboration by J.B. Sumner, Thomas Chalmers, Edward Copleston and others has been charted in detail by Soloway, Hilton and Waterman.³⁶ The overriding concerns of these writers were, first, the vindication of God,³⁷ and second, the moral and spiritual consequences of the choices made by both rich and poor. They emphasized

³² Malthus, *Essay*, p.43; Winch, *Riches*, pp.269-73.

³³ [R. Southey], 'Inquiry into the Poor Laws', *QR* 16 (Dec 1812), pp.324-7. In fact Southey and other Tory romantics had more in common with Malthus than they cared to believe: their differences were as Malthus said 'rather a matter of feeling than argument': Winch, *Riches*, pp.288-322; Poynter, *Pauperism*, pp.249-54.

³⁴ WH2810, Heber to Wilmot, 20 Apr 1813.

³⁵ See above, p.21.

³⁶ R.A. Soloway, *Prelates and People* (1969), pp.85-159; Hilton, *Atonement*, pp.74-108; Waterman, *Revolution*, pp.136-252. With a specific focus on the poor law, see also Peter Mandler, 'Tories and Paupers: Christian Political Economy and the Making of the New Poor Law', *HJ* 33 (1990), pp.81-103.

³⁷ J.B. Sumner, *A Treatise on the Records of Creation* (2 vols, 1816); [idem.], 'Malthus on Population', *QR* 34 (Jul 1817), p.397.

the moral superiority of voluntary systems of relief over compulsory ones. For Copleston, nothing was ‘less congruous with the nature of man, and with that state of discipline and trial which his present state of existence is clearly designed to be’, than the notion that ‘what all individuals *ought to do*, it is the business of the laws to *make* them do’. To make virtue compulsory was a contradiction in terms, for ‘an action to be virtuous must be voluntary’; in fact it reflected insufficient benevolence, as ‘man would be virtuous, be humane, be charitable *by proxy*.’³⁸ Chalmers eloquently denounced the failings of compulsory systems: where compulsory contributions had been levied in Scotland, he found, pauperism had increased, because the knowledge that they would always be provided for made the poor feckless.³⁹ So long as a legal right to relief was persisted with, he asserted, pauperism would continue to grow; a well-organised voluntary system, though, would bring back ‘all the piety, and all the kindness of the olden time.’⁴⁰

Sumner and Chalmers helped to make an abolitionist approach to the poor law respectable and almost orthodox, just as post-war economic dislocation was driving poor rates up to unprecedented levels.⁴¹ This conjunction was reflected in the reports of Sturges Bourne’s Select Committee on the Poor Laws of 1817-19, which roundly condemned the principle of relief for able-bodied paupers, as only plunging the labouring classes ‘deeper and more hopelessly into the evils of pauperism’:

true benevolence and real charity point to other means, which Your Committee cannot so well express as in the emphatic language of Mr. Burke, ‘patience, labour, frugality, sobriety, and religion, should be recommended to them; all the rest is downright fraud.’⁴²

For most secular economists the ‘prudential check’ of moral restraint, and the demoralising tendency of the poor laws, remained key considerations, though

³⁸ E. Copleston, *A Second Letter to the Right Hon. Robert Peel ...* (1819), pp.17-19.

³⁹ [T. Chalmers], ‘Causes and Cure of Pauperism’, *ER* 55 (Mar 1817), p. 6.

⁴⁰ T. Chalmers, *Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns* (1819), quoted in *Blackwood’s*, 31 (Oct 1819), p.21.

⁴¹ Poynter, *Pauperism*, pp.186, 223.

⁴² P.P. 1817 (462), p.10. The quotation from Burke is from *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* (1795; 1800 edn.), p.4.

as was suggested above their interest in prudential virtues was more material than spiritual.⁴³ The difficulty was to know how best to adjust incentives: the fear of want was useful, but actual want was deemed destructive, for, as Malthus said, ‘indigence palsies every virtue’. Those who had something to lose were more likely to exercise prudence.⁴⁴ McCulloch thought it vital to maintain the labourers’ own standards and expectations.⁴⁵ Torrens, though confident that prudential checks would work well in time, when initiatives such as the Bell and Lancaster schools, and savings banks, had taken full effect, was equally confident that they did not work at the present, and that attempts to relieve poverty by redistribution were futile.⁴⁶ Copleston argued that the problem could be resolved by distinguishing between two different levels of subsistence: first, a ‘socially determined’ subsistence level, which varied with the progress or regress of society, and second, the absolute minimum necessary for life, which he took to be a constant. If poor relief were held below the first level, but above the second, no encouragement to population would be given: it might therefore be possible to relieve pauperism by law, ‘without necessarily extending the evil.’⁴⁷ John Barton argued that the poor law did force population, not by its generosity but by its inadequacy, leading those who were dependent on poor relief to despair and lose all restraint.⁴⁸

These emergent trends of thought – the power of ‘moral restraint’, the focus on the way relief was administered, emphasis on fear of want rather than actual want, the distinction between absolute and socially-determined levels of subsistence – pointed away from outright abolition, and were to become more important later in the 1820s.⁴⁹ In the meantime, the difficulty of the issues was reflected in the indecision of the leading journals. The *Quarterly Review*

⁴³ Above, p.22.

⁴⁴ Coats, ‘Classical Economists’, pp.150-57.

⁴⁵ [J.R. McCulloch], ‘Ricardo’s Political Economy’, *ER* 59 (Jun 1818), p.87.

⁴⁶ R. Torrens, ‘A Paper on the Means of Reducing the Poors Rates’, reprinted in *The Pamphleteer* (1817), pp.518-9.

⁴⁷ Copleston, *Second Letter*, pp.26-33. Copleston attributed the rise in pauperism to depreciation of the currency, which had affected working people disproportionately. He did not share the view that poor relief had demoralised labourers: *A Letter to the Right Hon. Robert Peel ...* (1819), pp.25-35; *Second Letter*, pp.82-9.

⁴⁸ Poynter, *Pauperism*, pp.268-9.

⁴⁹ See below, pp.106-8.

wobbled, sometimes denying any right to relief while asserting the charitable duties of the rich,⁵⁰ sometimes arguing that voluntary charity was unreliable and that a compulsory system could be administered rigorously.⁵¹ The *Edinburgh* was normally more consistent, but in the very issue in which Sydney Smith called for ‘very gradual’ abolition, McCulloch advocated completely different remedies.

McCulloch was a leading populariser of ‘Ricardian’ principles of political economy. Ricardo accepted Malthus’s population principle and sympathised with the aim of abolishing the poor law, but thought that other causes of distress and other remedies were more important. As was noted above, the main analytical difference between ‘Ricardian’ and ‘Malthusian’ economists lay in their attitude to ‘Say’s Law’.⁵² This led them to different interpretations of post-war economic conditions.⁵³

Ricardo saw the post-war depression as a temporary reverse, resulting from ‘sudden changes in the channels of trade’ at the end of the war. Markets would soon adjust, if policy-makers did not interfere: his prescriptions were to establish sound money by restoring the convertibility of bank paper, to encourage investment by reducing taxation, and to remove obstacles to the proper allocation of capital such as the corn laws. McCulloch observed that the poor law had been in force for two hundred years, and that other, more recent, causes must have been responsible for the recent growth in pauperism. He calculated that taxation, tithes, and an inflated price of corn imposed a burden on the ‘productive classes’ in excess of £100 million per year. The remedies were obvious: ‘an effectual reduction of taxation, and a cautious and gradual repeal of the restrictions on the trade in corn.’⁵⁴ These were the main remedies proposed by ‘orthodox’ political economists in the 1820s.

⁵⁰ [G. Taylor?], ‘Godwin and Malthus on Population’, *QR* 51 (Oct 1821), pp.166-7.

⁵¹ [G.R. Gleig & J.W. Croker?], ‘Poor-Laws’, *QR* 56 (Jan 1823), pp.349-58.

⁵² Above, p.21.

⁵³ The following two paragraphs draw on D. Winch, *Riches*, pp.358-71.

⁵⁴ [J.R. McCulloch], ‘Taxation and the Corn Laws’, *ER* 65 (Jan 1820), pp.155-87. McCulloch later accepted that outdoor relief of able-bodied labourers had had a pernicious effect: ‘Causes and Cure’, pp.43-9.

Malthus by contrast saw the post-war situation as a case of ‘general glut’, a ‘general deficiency in aggregate demand in relation to aggregate supply, leading all markets to become overstocked.’⁵⁵ It was not investment but expenditure which needed to be stimulated. Wartime levels of government spending should be unwound only slowly, public works should be kept up, and ‘unproductive’ expenditure on luxuries should be encouraged. Rental income was an essential factor helping to sustain aggregate demand, and therefore the corn laws should be maintained at least temporarily. Wilmot was much closer to Malthus than to Ricardo on these points.⁵⁶

The idea that pauperism might be relieved through emigration had been suggested by Bentham in 1800,⁵⁷ Patrick Colquhoun in 1814,⁵⁸ and James Grahame in 1816.⁵⁹ Malthus demurred, arguing that emigration would merely stimulate fresh population growth, but in 1817 he accepted that emigration could bring useful relief, where the labour market had been thrown into disequilibrium by temporary circumstances, as in Britain after 1815.⁶⁰ However this was still a temporary remedy for a special case. Robert Torrens anticipated Wilmot, arguing that people could be assisted to emigrate to the colonies at no net cost to the state, because of the increased returns obtained when ‘the skill and capital of a civilized country’ were applied to fertile new soil.⁶¹ Parliamentary discussion had tended to reflect the older idea that a nation’s strength was its people, and that emigration should therefore be deprecated,⁶² but a change of mood was evident in the recommendation of Sturges Bourne’s committee that ‘every facility that is reasonable’ should be given for emigration to British colonies. The committee hoped that through emigration the labour market could be brought into balance, creating

⁵⁵ Winch, *Riches*, p.360.

⁵⁶ See below, pp.162-7, 171-5.

⁵⁷ Winch, *Colonies*, p.32.

⁵⁸ Ghosh, *Classical Macroeconomics*, p.115.

⁵⁹ Poynter, *Pauperism*, p.267.

⁶⁰ T.R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (5th edn., 3 vols., 1817), ii, pp.304-5.

⁶¹ Torrens, ‘Poors Rates’, p.520.

⁶² See for instance: *Hansard*, 30, c.8 (George Philips, 6 Mar 1815); c.111 (Sir Francis Burdett, 10 Mar 1815); c.917 (Goulburn, 21 Jun 1815); 36, c.1297, (Vansittart, 3 Jul 1817).

conditions in which its ultimate object, the abolition of poor relief for the able-bodied, might be achievable.⁶³

Twelve days after the committee reported, parliament voted £50,000 to facilitate the emigration of 5000 people to the Zuurfeld region in the Cape Colony. There was no serious opposition: even Joseph Hume 'was sorry ministers had not gone farther.'⁶⁴ For the Colonial Secretary, Bathurst, this was the latest of many attempts to obtain funds to assist emigration to the colonies, but his objective was always to strengthen the colonies rather than to relieve pauperism.⁶⁵ He had struggled to secure funding, except when ministers wished to appear to be doing something to relieve distress: the main aim of emigration grants had been 'political rather than humanitarian'. Continuing political pressure prompted further grants to support the emigration of 2700 settlers from the Glasgow area to Upper Canada in 1820 and 1821, but the Cabinet showed no sustained interest in such projects.⁶⁶

These emigrations of 1819 to 1821 were more substantial than anything Wilmot was to achieve, no doubt reflecting Bathurst's greater influence as a cabinet minister. However the Zuurfeld expedition was a near disaster, while greatly exceeding its expected cost, and this dampened parliamentary and ministerial enthusiasm for sponsored emigration.⁶⁷ There was also resistance from colonies which found themselves swamped by poverty-stricken voluntary emigrants.⁶⁸ Parliamentary opinion on emigration fragmented again. Some members continued to see it as a vent for excess population;⁶⁹ radicals tended to oppose it – relying on 'the people' for support, they wanted

⁶³ P.P. 1819 (529), p.9.

⁶⁴ *Hansard*, 40, cc.1549-51, 12 Jul 1819. As if to compensate for this unwonted liberality, Hume went on to suggest that if able-bodied paupers were unwilling to emigrate, 'it might even be advisable to transport them without their consent.'

⁶⁵ Johnston, *Emigration*, pp.10-31; T.P. Woods, 'Lord Bathurst's Policy at the Colonial Office, 1812-1821' (D. Phil, Oxford, 1971), pp.111-3, 171-3, 306-15; Cowan, *Emigration*, pp.41-7.

⁶⁶ Johnston, *Emigration*, pp.32-7, 48-56.

⁶⁷ Johnston, *Emigration*, pp.39-48.

⁶⁸ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 1, cc.40-43, 28 Apr 1820.

⁶⁹ See for instance: *Hansard*, 40, c.1267 (Granville Venables Vernon, 21 Jun 1819); 2nd ser., 5, c.1482 (Stephen Lushington, 2 Jul 1821).

the people at home;⁷⁰ some Tories expressed residual distaste – according to Earl Stanhope emigration would ‘in former times ... have been considered as a punishment; exile from their country and their native soil’;⁷¹ others such as the Whig agriculturalist John Benett simply denied that there was any problem of over-population.⁷²

Continuing public interest in emigration was evidenced by the proliferation of guide-books to different parts of the world, and the equally regular flow of reviews in the main journals.⁷³ In 1820 one journal noted that ‘prophecies of depopulation’ had proven false, and that ‘the popular notion, that emigration is productive or symptomatic of national decay, is now scarcely any where entertained.’⁷⁴

Wilmot therefore came into office at a time when ‘abolitionist’ attitudes towards the poor law were orthodox, but subject to challenge. Voluntary emigration had become a respectable expedient, but after the Zuurfeld experience ministers were wary of taking direct responsibility for emigration projects, and parliament was wary of funding them. It was widely agreed that emigration could strengthen the colonies, but there was no consensus that it could significantly relieve pauperism at home.

III

Wilmot’s various ‘series of consecutive propositions’,⁷⁵ in relation to pauperism and emigration, took the following general form. The price of labour depended, like that of any other commodity, on the balance between supply and demand; there was an evident excess supply of labour in both

⁷⁰ *Hansard*, 40, cc.1550-51 (Alderman Wood, 12 Jul 1819).

⁷¹ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 1, cc.398-99, 16 May 1820.

⁷² *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 1, c.677, 30 May 1820.

⁷³ See for instance: [J. Barrow], ‘Notes on the Cape of Good Hope’, *QR* 50 (Jul 1821), pp.453-66; [Sydney Smith], ‘Botany Bay’, *ER* 63 (Jul 1819), pp.28-48; [R. Whately], ‘Emigration to Canada’, *QR* 46 (Jul 1820), pp.373-400.

⁷⁴ *Edinburgh Monthly Review*, 1 (Jan 1819), p.2.

⁷⁵ Above, p.60.

Britain and Ireland; as a result many labourers had no work, and the wages paid to those in work were depressed; the resultant distress could be relieved only by increasing the demand for labour or reducing the supply; there were no good means of quickly increasing the demand; it was therefore desirable to reduce the supply; government-assisted emigration was the best means to achieve this.⁷⁶

Wilmot offered different analyses of the causes of over-population in England and Ireland, and as between agricultural and manufacturing areas. In relation to English agricultural districts, his analysis was at least superficially ‘Malthusian’: the poor laws had tended to create their own poor. They had ‘checked all moral apprehension as to the condition of children’, and had destroyed ‘that moral sentiment which ought to be the basis of society, namely that it is criminal to be accessory to the bringing of children into the world without the power of maintaining them.’⁷⁷

Wilmot was as apocalyptic as Malthus or Torrens as to the consequences: ‘as long as they told the poor man that he had a right by law to be supported, so long must they continue to suffer under all the evils produced by a superabundant population.’ Unless the poor laws were changed, poor rates would ultimately absorb ‘the whole rental of the country.’⁷⁸ Fear for the security of property and for the maintenance of public order underlay Wilmot’s concern. Pauperism was a ‘deadly cancer ... increasing, wide-spreading and *as yet* immitigable’; if government did nothing to allay it, the country would ‘*perish* under its effect and that at no distant period.’⁷⁹

However, Wilmot’s definition of redundancy had little to do with over-population in the Malthusian sense. A redundant labourer was simply one for whose services there was no adequate demand (that is, a demand sufficient to enable the labourer to maintain himself and his family without support from

⁷⁶ See, for instance: *Hansard*, 2nd ser., vol 21, cc.1740-41, 4 Jun 1829; *Inquiry*, First Series, pp.6-7; *Lectures*, ‘Correspondence and Resolutions’, pp.10-11.

⁷⁷ *Causes*, p.91.

⁷⁸ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 18, cc.1541-42, 17 Apr 1828.

⁷⁹ PRO 30/29/9/6/41, Horton to Granville, 8 Sep 1826.

the parish).⁸⁰ This did not depend on the relationship between population and subsistence, and Wilmot maintained that his view of redundancy would remain valid, whether Malthus's theory of population was true or not.⁸¹ He never contradicted Malthus, but he did suggest that Malthus had not made 'sufficient distinction between the abstract existence or production of food, and the capacity of a certain part of the population to gain possession of food when produced.'⁸² Wilmot here glimpsed a fundamental criticism of Malthus made with greater clarity a couple of years later by Scrope – that his assumed relations between numbers, space, and subsistence, were of little practical relevance, since people did not in practice subsist only on food produced within their own district.⁸³ Wilmot's more practical focus on 'redundancy' is not liable to this objection.

While recognising that there was also much distress in manufacturing districts, Wilmot thought it hard to assess the true level of redundancy there, because manufacturing was particularly prone to fluctuations in the level of trade.⁸⁴ Without subscribing to the comprehensive indictment of the manufacturing system worked up by commentators such as Southey,⁸⁵ Wilmot was conscious of the vulnerability of manufacturing to over-production and to slumps in demand.⁸⁶ Temporary unemployment, arising from such causes, was not in his opinion a problem for which emigration could be an apt remedy. In such cases, 'the remedy must be supplied by the foresight and economy of the artisan himself', in other words he should save enough in good times to carry him through bad times, preferably in a savings bank.⁸⁷ Here too the poor law had been detrimental, Wilmot thought, having 'tended materially to prevent the exercise of this particular sort of prudence', but if 'the artisan' failed to save and later suffered for it, he would have little claim on charity and less on

⁸⁰ P.P. 1823 (561), pp.172-3; P.P. 1826 (404), p.1; P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.3;

⁸¹ *Causes*, p.65.

⁸² *Causes*, p.67.

⁸³ [G.J.P. Scrope], 'Malthus and Sadler – Population and Emigration', *QR* 89 (Apr 1831), p.136.

⁸⁴ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 16, c.487, 15 Feb 1827.

⁸⁵ [R. Southey], 'Emigration Report', *QR* 74 (Mar 1828), p.547.

⁸⁶ Below, pp.172-4.

⁸⁷ *Lectures*, Lecture VI, pp.9-10.

public funds.⁸⁸ Wilmot evidently believed that artisans, unlike agricultural labourers, were well enough paid to be able to save. In this he was aligned with the philanthropists of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge,⁸⁹ and distinguished from commentators such as David Robinson of *Blackwood's*, who insisted that 'the vast body of labourers in both town and country' received 'wages ... from which nothing could be taken, as a provision for the future, which would not be a subtraction from the necessities of life.'⁹⁰

Wilmot recognised that there could also be permanent redundancy among manufacturing workers, arising from the introduction of labour-saving machinery, as in the case of the hand-loom weavers. Such a case, when they had little prospect of finding other work, did call for 'public contribution', and emigration might be a suitable remedy;⁹¹ this was the whole purport of the Second Emigration Report.⁹² In general, though, the Emigration Committee concluded for England that emigration was more likely to be of service to agricultural parishes than manufacturing ones.⁹³

Wilmot attributed redundancy in England primarily to the poor law, but in Ireland, where there was no poor law, the situation was even worse. Wilmot had two main explanations: the system of landlord and tenant, and the 'culture of the potato'. His analysis of the defective system of land tenure in Ireland was a familiar one. Irish landlords chose to let their land for relatively long periods, without taking responsibility for capital improvements. Their tenants, with a limited time-interest in the land, were unwilling to make capital improvements either, and sought the greatest possible return for the duration of the lease, by subdividing tenancies into smaller holdings, operated in a labour-intensive rather than capital-intensive way. Smallholders, relying on family labour rather than waged labour, were able, for a time, to pay higher

⁸⁸ P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.13.

⁸⁹ Wilmot quoted extensively from the Society's essay, *Results of Machinery*, in *Lectures*, Lecture VI, pp.5-12.

⁹⁰ [D. Robinson], 'The Poor Laws', *Blackwood's*, 140 (Jun 1828), p.926.

⁹¹ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 21, c.1720, 4 Jun 1829; *Lectures*, Lecture VI, p.9.

⁹² P.P. 1826-27 (237).

⁹³ P.P. 1826-27 (550), pp.13-14.

rents. The system gave a huge stimulus to population which had proved disastrous in the long run.⁹⁴ There was nothing strikingly original in Wilmot's analysis: English commentators across the political spectrum tended to blame Ireland's ills squarely on her uncaring absentee landlords.⁹⁵ Wilmot was less strident than most. He denied that the poverty of Irish tenants was due to any deliberate system of oppression: instead it was the result of natural and logical choices made by individual actors caught up in a defective system.⁹⁶

The 'culture of the potato' was another trap for the Irish poor. The crop was uncertain, compared with wheat; potatoes could not be stored for long enough to enable one year's surplus to meet the deficiency of another; there was no cheaper alternative to turn to, if the potato crop failed.⁹⁷ It was well understood that failure of the crop could be disastrous. John Bodkin from Galway told the Emigration Committee that a quarter of the population could perish if the crop failed completely,⁹⁸ while in 1826 Wilmot had been told that 'actual starvation both in town and country at present exists,' and that the consequences of a failure of the crop would be 'beyond comprehension'.⁹⁹ The potato did however allow a larger number of people to subsist on a patch of ground than any other crop. Irish custom had had the same effect as the English poor law, Wilmot thought, in encouraging an excessive population, reckless as to the future and oblivious of the prudential 'moral sentiment' which ought to guide them.¹⁰⁰

Wilmot believed that redundancy was endemic throughout Ireland and in certain regions of England and Scotland, but this was not easy to prove. No statistics on redundancy were available, so opinion rested on report and perception as to the level of the English poor rate and the condition of the

⁹⁴ *Inquiry*, Third Series, pp.10-15.

⁹⁵ See for instance: [D. Robinson] 'Ireland', *Blackwood's*, 86 (Mar 1824), pp.269-95; [Edward Edwards] 'Irish Absentees', *QR* 66 (Mar 1826), pp.455-73; *Chronicle*, 21 Sep 1826; [W. Eyton Tooke], 'Third Emigration Report', *Westminster Review*, 9 (Jan 1828), pp.131-5; Sadler, *Ireland*, pp.45-78; [G.J.P. Scrope], 'Poor-Law for Ireland', *QR* 88 (Feb 1831), pp.539-45.

⁹⁶ *Inquiry*, Third Series, pp.7, 13.

⁹⁷ *Inquiry*, Third Series, pp.26-7.

⁹⁸ P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.272.

⁹⁹ CO 384/17, f. 369, Uniacke to Horton, 1 Aug 1826.

¹⁰⁰ *Causes*, pp.90-91.

English and Irish peasant. There was abundant anecdotal evidence, but no aggregated data. Wilmot was obliged to admit in 1825 that he did not know the proportions of employed, partially employed, and unemployed in any single district of Ireland.¹⁰¹ The difficulty of arriving at an accurate figure was compounded by the problem of under-employment. How to estimate redundancy, Wilmot wondered, in a country 'where all may be employed, though all at too low a rate of wages to secure their independence?' He once described this as the most important question he faced.¹⁰²

The Emigration Committees collected a mass of evidence which impressed many commentators. Sir Francis Burdett's reaction was typical: the fact of redundancy of population in Britain and Ireland, 'was to be deduced as plainly from the Reports of the Emigration Committee, as the simplest proposition in Euclid from its undeniable premises.'¹⁰³ Others were impressed by the spirit of the enquiry as well as by the results. The *Morning Chronicle* discerned 'a bold and manly spirit of inquiry, worthy of statesmen' and welcomed this symptom of 'a better spirit in our men of rank', as 'one of the best features of the times in which we live.'¹⁰⁴ The *Westminster Review* hailed the First Report as 'a marked epoch in the inquiries having for their object the amelioration of the condition of the great mass of the people'. Its 'bold and uncompromising' statement that distress was due to 'an excess of numbers' contrasted with 'the timid and indecisive style of most official reports,' and marked 'a decided era in the progress of the present ministry in the career of true political wisdom and political courage.'¹⁰⁵ Wilmot's colleagues cannot have much liked that.

Despite these opinions, the Emigration Reports settled little, and this reflects some indeterminacy in their focus. The evidence of redundancy and

¹⁰¹ P.P. 1825 (129), pp.16-20.

¹⁰² WH2856, Horton to Palmerston, 12 Dec 1829.

¹⁰³ *Inquiry*, Third Series, p.2. See also, for instance: [J.R. McCulloch], 'Emigration', *ER* 89 (Dec 1826), p.50; *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 23, c.51, 9 Mar 1830 (Alexander Baring); *Inquiry*, Fourth Series (second version), p.19 (Nassau Senior).

¹⁰⁴ *Chronicle*, 5 Oct 1827.

¹⁰⁵ [W. Eyton Tooke] 'Emigration Report', *Westminster Review*, 6 (Oct 1826), pp.342-3, 372-3.

destitution was almost irresistible in the case of Ireland, and compelling with respect to parts of England and Scotland; but the separate question of how this redundancy had arisen was less surely handled. The view that it was caused by a feckless pauper population reproducing and extending itself was neither closely examined nor even consistently asserted: it was simply assumed by certain witnesses and by Wilmot as author of the reports. In the Third Report, for instance:

the evils of a population furnishing an excess of labour above the demand for it, contain within themselves a self-producing and self-aggravating principle; and ... so long as no measures are taken to restrain them, they must ... continue to exist and increase.¹⁰⁶

Those who attributed pauperism to other causes were not confounded. There were also many who took no account of Wilmot's relative definition of 'redundancy' and insisted on seeing the issue in absolute, Malthusian, terms. George Croly, for instance, asserted that there was land enough in the British Isles to feed, clothe, and employ five times their present population.¹⁰⁷ This was a characteristic response of Tory advocates of 'home colonization'.¹⁰⁸ Wilmot struggled to counter such misunderstandings, insisting that the Emigration Committee had never argued that the country could not produce enough food: 'It was one thing for a country to produce food enough for its population, and another for the population to have money to purchase it.'¹⁰⁹

Some commentators, while acknowledging the existence of redundancy in Britain, maintained that it would not be noticed in England or Scotland, 'were it not for the hordes of Irish who flock to either country for employment.'¹¹⁰ The Emigration Reports made much of this:

it is vain to hope for any permanent and extensive advantage from any system of emigration which does not primarily apply to *Ireland*; whose population, unless some other outlet be opened to them, must shortly fill up every vacuum

¹⁰⁶ P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.6.

¹⁰⁷ [Croly], 'Wilmot Horton', pp.191-2.

¹⁰⁸ See below pp.178-82.

¹⁰⁹ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 21, c.1135, 13 Apr 1829.

¹¹⁰ [G.J.P. Scrope?] 'Causes and Remedies of Pauperism', *QR* 85 (May 1830), p.243.

created in England or in Scotland, and reduce the labouring classes to a uniform state of degradation and misery.’¹¹¹

The Third Report argued that the Irish had already decided to emigrate; it remained for the legislature to decide only where they should go. They would inevitably ‘deluge Great Britain with poverty and wretchedness’, unless redirected to the North American colonies.¹¹² One solution proposed after publication of the Emigration Reports was in effect to sever the union between Britain and Ireland, as far as the free movement of labour was concerned, by preventing Irish labourers from entering Britain. This illiberal measure was supported by McCulloch,¹¹³ by W. Eyton Tooke, who called for ‘the coercive repression of the Irish immigration’,¹¹⁴ and by some members of parliament.¹¹⁵ Wilmot resisted the idea: ‘he was the last man who could consider it a part of our policy to resist the free migration of Irishmen to this country.’¹¹⁶

Even with the Emigration Reports, there was still a lack of data on redundancy. The practice of collecting data systematically for purposes of social inquiry and reform had hardly begun. Wilmot recognised the problem and proposed that returns should be obtained from every parish in Britain.¹¹⁷ In 1830 he suggested that separate accounts should be kept for expenditure on the ‘helpless poor’ (the ‘poor-rate account’) and expenditure on ‘paupers’ (the ‘labour-rate account’), so that a correct account could be made of the cost of redundancy to the country.¹¹⁸

¹¹¹ P.P. 1826-27 (237), p.7.

¹¹² P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.7.

¹¹³ [J.R. McCulloch], ‘Poor laws’, *ER* 94 (May 1828), p.328.

¹¹⁴ [Tooke], ‘Third Report’, pp.127-8.

¹¹⁵ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 18, c.955 (Colonel T.H.H. Davies, 4 Mar 1828).

¹¹⁶ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 18, c.1549, 17 Apr 1828.

¹¹⁷ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 21, c.1723, 4 Jun 1829.

¹¹⁸ *Inquiry*, Fourth Series (first version), p.12. See below, p.112, for Wilmot’s categorisation of the poor.

IV

As was noted above,¹¹⁹ the ‘orthodox’ remedies for distress were, firstly, retrenchment in government expenditure and reductions in taxation, secondly, relaxation of the corn laws. Both measures aimed to increase aggregate demand and thus to increase opportunities for employment.

Wilmot believed that redundancy in both England and Ireland was so great that these ‘demand-side’ remedies could do no good until the supply of labour had been reduced. This forms a part of his overall chain of reasoning in relation to the question of pauperism. However, Wilmot’s thinking on taxation and expenditure also embraced such wider issues as ‘economical reform’, the proper role of government, and the limits of *laissez faire*, while his approach to the corn laws reflected his views on ‘free trade’, and on the balances to be struck between agriculture and manufacturing, and between domestic and foreign markets. Discussion of these issues therefore moves beyond a close focus on pauperism *per se*, and for this reason is deferred to Chapter 5.¹²⁰ For the present, it may be observed that Wilmot did not reject ‘demand-side’ remedies for pauperism in all circumstances, but he did insist that they would not work when there was a significant oversupply of labour.

Wilmot always advocated emigration as the best means to reduce the supply of labour, but his understanding of the role of emigration became more sophisticated over time. It is possible to discern three phases in his thinking: first, emigration as a ‘safety valve’; second, emigration to facilitate ‘collateral measures’ to prevent a recurrence of excessive population; third, emigration to enable ‘prudential feelings’ to revive.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ See p.86.

¹²⁰ Below, pp.162-75.

¹²¹ Emigration was not the only way to reduce the supply of labour. Bentham and James Mill had both alluded, circumspectly, to birth control, but Francis Place (the father of fifteen) was the first author openly to advocate contraception within marriage. It was not a respectable subject in the 1820s: Poynter, *Pauperism*, pp.123-5, 267; Winch, *Riches*, pp.282-5; Francis Place, *Illustrations and Proofs of the Principle of Population* (1822). For Wilmot’s attitude, see above, p.63.

In the 'Outline of a Plan', Wilmot conceived emigration simply as 'a safety valve by which the inconvenient excess of population could always be carried off'. He saw emigration as a permanent and self-regulating mechanism, not as a one-off response to temporary pressure. Addressing the old fear that emigration entailed a loss of national strength, he observed that his measure had a 'suspensive power within itself', in that whenever there was an adequate demand for labour at home there would be no temptation to emigrate.¹²²

Wilmot's schemes were always intended to be voluntary, but he felt little doubt that labourers on parish relief would eagerly seize the chance of prosperous independence offered to them. Whether they did or not, the offer would justify a harsher administration of the poor law at home, and would weaken the 'presumed claim of the able-bodied pauper upon parish relief', which was 'universally admitted' to be the chief weakness of the poor laws as currently administered.¹²³

Wilmot clearly aimed, as Sturges Bourne's committee had done, at the abolition of relief for able-bodied paupers, but he did not say how this was to be achieved if, contrary to his expectation, labourers preferred to stay at home. Chalmers told him that few would go – English labourers would not willingly give up the right which they thought they had in English soil.¹²⁴ Other respondents pointed out that emigrants could come back and could not be refused relief *in extremis*.¹²⁵ The most frequent objection to Wilmot's Plan was however the Malthusian one that emigration would merely stimulate fresh population growth; in the phrase commonly used, 'the vacuum would soon be filled up.' As Chalmers put it, unless emigration were accompanied by gradual abolition of the poor rate, it would 'just bring England into the state of a patient with a running sore.'¹²⁶

¹²² P.P. 1823 (561), p.173.

¹²³ P.P. 1823 (561), p.172.

¹²⁴ WH2763, Thomas Chalmers to Sir Robert Inglis, 11 Feb 1823.

¹²⁵ WH2868, Précis.

¹²⁶ WH2763, Chalmers to Inglis, 11 Feb 1823. Malthus also raised this Malthusian objection, but more hesitantly, noting that his former opinion against emigration had been 'yielding to the peculiar circumstances of the times': WH2841, Malthus to Wilmot, 21 Feb [1823].

Wilmot seems to have more than half agreed with this. He acknowledged that there was ‘some ground’ for T.G. Estcourt’s objection that ‘the same difficulties would occur in succeeding years’, while John Galt’s comment, that means must be found to protect parishes ‘from a succession of paupers after they have sent off one race’, prompted Wilmot to observe, ‘I know of no means but a repeal of the poor laws.’¹²⁷

This notion that ‘the vacuum would soon be filled up’, and that it was therefore futile to expend public money on emigration, became a staple objection to Wilmot’s schemes. *The Scotsman* wrote, ‘The pauper population ... realizes the fable of the Hydra. The greater number we carry off, the faster those behind multiply.’¹²⁸ Palmerston, a dogged Malthusian, told Wilmot that emigration carried ‘the certainty of perhaps more than defeating its own object’, in that:

the subtraction annually of 40,000 mouths to be fed ... would afford a further encouragement ... to the increase of population; ... and the annual subtraction of 10,000 labourers must ... as it is meant it should, increase the price of labour, and consequently afford a spur to population.¹²⁹

To counter such objections, Wilmot accepted the need for what he called ‘collateral measures’ to inhibit any such recurrence of population. These measures were different in England and Ireland.

In the case of Ireland, Wilmot was one of many to see a symbiotic link between emigration and the consolidation of smallholdings into large, well-capitalized farms, tenanted by substantial farmers on the English model. Widely seen as a necessary restructuring of Irish agrarian society, this policy was difficult to implement, as it involved clearing the land of much of its existing population. There were legal difficulties, but even greater social difficulties. ‘Humanity prevented some landlords from attempting clearances,

¹²⁷ WH2868, Précis.

¹²⁸ Reprinted in *Chronicle*, 29 Aug 1826.

¹²⁹ WH2855, Palmerston to Horton, 13 Sep 1826.

and fear of the consequences probably more.’¹³⁰ Dispossessed tenants might – and often did – turn violent: their reprisals went under the general name of the ‘Captain Rock’ system.

Several commentators suggested that dispossessed tenants might be assisted to emigrate. David Robinson argued that one or two million pounds per annum could be usefully spent in resettling the surplus population of Ireland in the colonies, *provided* that it were done in conjunction with the consolidation of farms.¹³¹ J.R. McCulloch recommended reforms to Irish landlord and tenant law to facilitate consolidation, an end to subletting, the removal of political incentives to landlords to multiply their tenants, and the establishment of schools, with a system of emigration coming ‘in aid of those measures’ as a means to ‘dispose’ of ejected tenantry.¹³² The Bishop of Limerick, John Jebb, thought it indispensably necessary to get rid of the cottier system, and opined that ‘public money could not be more usefully expended’ than in helping the ‘multitudes of poor wretches’ set adrift to emigrate. Jebb was confident that the Irish themselves were ‘fully sensible that they are too many’, and would be strongly in favour of emigration.¹³³

This was part of Wilmot’s thinking from as early as 1823, since Peel is then found resisting the idea of giving a guarantee of relocation to ejected tenants.¹³⁴ Perhaps constrained by government policy, Wilmot did not press the idea, and was for some years rather vague as to how precisely emigration would help Ireland. He argued that emigration, by taking off part of the redundant population, could ‘partially tranquillize’ disturbed districts of Ireland. This would encourage an inflow of capital, currently deterred from entering by the disturbed state of the country; this new capital would then ‘absorb the whole redundant population’ in new employment.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Black, *Economic Thought*, pp.18-21.

¹³¹ [D. Robinson], ‘Ireland’, p.272.

¹³² P.P. 1825 (129), pp.817-35.

¹³³ WH2822, Jebb to Inglis, 11 Feb 1824.

¹³⁴ WH2858, Peel to Horton, 6 Aug 1823.

¹³⁵ P.P. 1825 (129), pp.16-18.

If Wilmot seemed slow to latch onto consolidation, his own explanation was that the necessary reforms to Irish landlord and tenant law had not been made.¹³⁶ He therefore attached great importance to Parnell's Act of 1826 which enabled landlords to resist subdivision of their land in future and to begin the process of consolidation.¹³⁷ Thereafter Wilmot fully embraced the link between emigration to take away surplus population, and consolidation of farms to prevent a recurrence.

Doubts remained as to how well consolidation of farms could check population growth in practice. The Emigration Committees found that Irish landlords and agents universally appreciated the need to consolidate farms, but faced difficulties in implementing the policy.¹³⁸ The Subletting Act applied only when leases fell in;¹³⁹ even then, landlords might be deterred by 'Captain Rock', and new tenants were wary of embarking capital 'in situations where property can have no protection.'¹⁴⁰ There were further problems: it was of no use to clear *some* tenantry – landlords could not use the land in patches – and so *all* had to be cleared, a near impossibility; the Act did not apply where there was no lease; it did not provide adequate remedies against certain depredations by tenants; even where it did provide remedies, enforcement was prohibitively expensive.¹⁴¹

The Emigration Committees remained sceptical that Irish landlords intended to pursue consolidation energetically. They set much store by the principle that landlords should contribute to the cost of emigration for tenants cleared from their lands, for reasons best expressed by Spring Rice: 'by the very pecuniary sacrifice which he makes, we obtain a pledge of his sense of the evil from which he wishes to disengage himself, and thereby of the disposition which he feels to prevent the recurrence of it.'¹⁴² Legislation could always be evaded, and true security was to be found in the growing consensus of opinion

¹³⁶ *Burdett*, pp.41-7.

¹³⁷ The Assignment and Sub-letting of Land (Ireland) Act 1826, 7 Geo. IV c. 29.

¹³⁸ P.P. 1826 (404), pp.129-30, 146, 192, 200.

¹³⁹ P.P. 1826-27 (550), pp.273, 449.

¹⁴⁰ P.P. 1826-27 (550), pp.256-65; *Chronicle*, 26 Jun 1828.

¹⁴¹ *Causes*, pp.117-35.

¹⁴² P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.448.

among the Irish gentry.¹⁴³ Even Malthus conceded that, if Irish landlords changed the way they managed their estates, it was ‘possible that the vacuum might not be filled up.’¹⁴⁴

Unfortunately, the evidence that Irish landlords would contribute was patchy.¹⁴⁵ Thomas Odell from Limerick thought that ‘the description of gentry alluded to there would shake their heads most woefully before they assented to that’; Jebb expected ‘difficulties in the first instance’;¹⁴⁶ Maria Edgeworth, having gathered opinion in Ireland, told Wilmot firmly, ‘believe me they could not if they would, and they would not if they could.’¹⁴⁷ Lord Westmeath turned Spring Rice’s argument upside down: first give him legislation which would *really* enable him to protect his interests, then he would contribute.¹⁴⁸ The *Morning Chronicle* was convinced that Irish landlords would never contribute,¹⁴⁹ and *The Times* thought the idea a ‘pure vision’: the landlords were ‘themselves but an order of more gentlemanly paupers’.¹⁵⁰

The collateral measures proposed for Ireland were therefore not entirely convincing. The same was true for England, where the main suggestions were to abolish relief to able-bodied labourers, to pull down cottages after tenants had left, or to place a tax on cottages. Several witnesses told the Emigration Committee of their achievements or intentions regarding the destruction of cottages.¹⁵¹ Malthus thought that extinguishing relief to able-bodied men, combined with pulling down the houses of those who emigrated, ‘might be something like an effectual remedy.’¹⁵² Others thought that landlords in their

¹⁴³ P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.9.

¹⁴⁴ P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.313.

¹⁴⁵ The same was true of Scottish lairds: P.P. 1826 (404), pp.74-5, 80.

¹⁴⁶ P.P. 1826 (404), pp.143, 208.

¹⁴⁷ WH2785, Edgeworth to Horton, 9 Nov 1826.

¹⁴⁸ *Causes*, p.137.

¹⁴⁹ *Chronicle*, 21 Sep 1826.

¹⁵⁰ *Times*, 22 Aug 1826.

¹⁵¹ P.P. 1826 (404), p.136; P.P. 1826-27 (550), pp.140-41, 217. See also WH2922, Kirkman Finlay to Horton, 11 Sep 1826.

¹⁵² P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.315.

area would not agree to it, and the idea was evidently more applicable to agricultural parishes than to manufacturing ones.¹⁵³

Southey commented that it was 'idle, or worse than idle' to dream of checking population by pulling down cottages.¹⁵⁴ Wilmot probably agreed with him. The nearest he came to endorsing the idea was a suggestion that, if a district was once cleared of pauperism, 'its recurrence might be prevented by the adoption of means which had prevented its existence in other places.'¹⁵⁵ Nor did he approve of a general tax on cottages, which he feared would impede growth of population where population was wanted.¹⁵⁶ He did however suggest that regulations might be framed to restrict the erection of new cottages, or to place a tax on new cottages, 'in parishes where it was shown that a great redundancy of labour existed.'¹⁵⁷

Apart from the abolition of relief to able-bodied labourers, Wilmot was never the most enthusiastic advocate of any of the 'collateral measures' suggested either for England or Ireland. Many commentators complained that the Emigration Reports failed to suggest adequate 'securities' against 'the vacuum being filled up'. The *Caledonian Mercury* thought it 'incredible' that the Reports devoted space to proving 'truisms which no sensible person could doubt', while failing to address this crucial point.¹⁵⁸ Thomas Tooke complained that 'neither the Report nor the Evidence point to any security which would quite satisfy my mind.'¹⁵⁹ Wilmot finally attempted to resolve these doubts with his proposed poor law reforms in 1830.¹⁶⁰

By 1827 Wilmot was moving into the third and most satisfactory phase of his thinking as to the link between emigration and pauperism. He came to believe

¹⁵³ P.P. 1826 (404), pp.116, 124; P.P. 1826-27 (550), pp.13-14, 79.

¹⁵⁴ [Southey], 'Emigration Report', p.569.

¹⁵⁵ WH2860, Horton to Place, Sep 1830. Wilmot did support pulling down cottages in Ireland to facilitate consolidation: *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 18, c.1550, 17 Apr 1828.

¹⁵⁶ *Inquiry*, Fourth Series (first version), p.16.

¹⁵⁷ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 23, c.31, 9 Mar 1830.

¹⁵⁸ 8 Oct 1827.

¹⁵⁹ WH2888, Tooke to Horton, 3 Sep 1826; see also WH2836, McCulloch to Horton, 20 Jun 1828.

¹⁶⁰ See pp.111-15 below.

that the ‘security’ he and others were looking for was to be found in the prudential feelings of the labourers themselves. In fact, he argued in 1830, such feelings were the *only* worthwhile check on population. First, large-scale emigration would lead to higher wages being paid at home, and then:

under such a *changed state of things*, that pride of self-preservation from pauperism, which is now deadened, if not destroyed, must and would, by the condition of the human mind itself, be re-awakened and revived. ... I know of no preventive checks worth resorting to, except those prudential habits and feelings.¹⁶¹

This reflected a refinement of Wilmot’s analysis of the causes of redundancy which allowed much more to the ‘prudential check’. His arguments are similar to those of Nassau Senior in his nearly contemporary *Two Lectures on Population* (1829).¹⁶² Wilmot identified ‘three states of society’. In the first, there was plentiful land in relation to population, and every incentive for people to spread out rather than to labour for hire. In such a case population would grow rapidly. In the second, ‘the proportions between labour and capital’ were ‘pretty correctly adjusted’, and labour was adequately though not handsomely rewarded:

It is in that state of society, that the prudential check has the greatest tendency to operate, inasmuch as it is a state in which, although children may not prove a source of positive benefit, they may become a source of private comfort and satisfaction, without having poverty and misery entailed upon them and their parents as the consequence of their birth.

In the third state, labour was in serious oversupply, and the condition of the labouring classes was ‘universally deteriorated’, with many reduced to ‘a state of absolute pauperism’:

In this condition of society, equally hopeless and reckless, marriages are contracted under the natural impulse of human feeling, without any prudential

¹⁶¹ WH2843, Horton to Malthus, 24 Jul 1830.

¹⁶² Senior argued that it was not actual want which restrained population, but the fear of want, and that this fear was felt most strongly by those who already enjoyed some of the decencies of life. These ideas had been part of population theory since the second edition of Malthus’s *Essay*, but Senior gave them more weight, concluding that fear of want, on the part of those who already enjoyed some comfort, was an adequate check to population.

considerations, inasmuch as no exercise of prudential considerations appears to the parties sufficient (and they are perfectly correct in their logic in that opinion) to remedy the extent of the evil as applicable to themselves.¹⁶³

Conditions of reasonable comfort were therefore more conducive to prudential restraint than a state of wretched pauperism. In principle, this should have been common ground, but Malthus had often appeared to suggest that anything which improved the material circumstances of labourers was likely only to give a further stimulus to population, unless they had previously been educated into the prudential virtues: this was why he thought of emigration as at best a temporary palliative. Wilmot turned this on its head: the labourer could not be educated in the virtues of thrift and industry, so long as his circumstances were such that no amount of thrift and industry could do him much good.¹⁶⁴ What was needed was a ‘great national effort’ to shift society from the third to the second state by large-scale emigration; thereafter the revived prudential feelings of the lower classes would ensure that the rate of growth of population, far from accelerating, would decrease.¹⁶⁵

Wilmot’s belief that prudential feelings would revive naturally, given better circumstances, was the obverse of Chalmers’ conviction that the moral condition of the people had to be attended to first. Wilmot had in fact become thoroughly impatient with those who enjoined the ‘virtues of economy, industry, patience, and perseverance’ on labourers who could find no work.¹⁶⁶ Redundant labourers were ‘perfectly correct’ in thinking that such virtues could not help them, as long as redundancy was widespread. This is in contrast to the argument of Malthus, endorsed by Sumner, that:

each individual has the power of avoiding the evil consequence to himself and society resulting from the principle of population by the practice of a virtue

¹⁶³ *Inquiry*, Second Series, pp.35-6.

¹⁶⁴ WH2843, Horton to Malthus, n.d. [1827].

¹⁶⁵ *Inquiry*, Second Series, p.37.

¹⁶⁶ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 21, cc.1132, 7 May 1829. On this occasion Wilmot was alluding to a speech by William Lamb when Chief Secretary of Ireland (1827-28); see also *Inquiry*, Third Series, p.22.

clearly dictated to him by the light of nature, and sanctioned by revealed religion.¹⁶⁷

Wilmot now accepted that emigration was suitable only for societies currently in his 'third state'. Emigration from a society in the second state *would* stimulate population growth, by raising the wages of the remaining labourers to an 'inconvenient' extent.¹⁶⁸ Wilmot's conception of the role of emigration in relation to pauperism had therefore changed. It was no longer a safety-valve, operating automatically: what was required was a once-for-all 'great national effort' to shift society from one 'state' to another.

V

Senior's and Wilmot's conclusions regarding the 'prudential check' reflected a change in attitudes towards the poor law in the late 1820s, in which Wilmot also partook. Opinion was tending to coalesce around the view that it was not the existence of a right to relief, but the way it had been administered, which had brought about the demoralisation and degradation of the agricultural labourer. Criticism had long focused on the practice, originating in Berkshire in 1795, of giving a supplement to labourers' wages, calculated according to the price of corn and the size of the labourers' families. By the late 1820s, condemnation of this system had become routine. It had destroyed 'every motive of sobriety, steadiness, honesty';¹⁶⁹ it gave 'a premium on idleness and profligacy'; wherever the system was in operation, wages fell drastically, labourers became slovenly in their work, married early, and saved nothing for the future.¹⁷⁰ Many witnesses before the Emigration Committees gave evidence to this effect.¹⁷¹ Wilmot condemned the allowance system as heartily as anyone: this 'pernicious custom' was 'fatal to the interests of the

¹⁶⁷ [Sumner], 'Malthus on Population', p.399.

¹⁶⁸ *Inquiry*, Second Series, p.39.

¹⁶⁹ [F. Palgrave], 'The Poor Laws', *QR* 66 (Mar 1826), pp.447-51; see also [R. Southey?], 'Ireland: its Evils and their Remedies', *QR* 75 (Jul 1828), pp.65-6. Under the influence of the statistician Rickman, Southey had long since been forced to recognise problems in the administration of the poor laws: Poynter, *Pauperism*, pp.252-3; Winch, *Riches*, pp.311-14.

¹⁷⁰ [McCulloch], 'Poor laws', pp.318-21; see also [McCulloch], 'Causes and Cure', pp.43-9.

¹⁷¹ For instance P.P. 1826 (404), p.185 (evidence of T.L. Hodges).

labouring classes in general', because the superior able-bodied labourer was prejudiced by competition from the subsidised pauper; both were reduced to 'one common level of dependent pauperism.'¹⁷² Throughout the 1820s, Wilmot had aimed at the discontinuance of relief for able-bodied labourers; in 1830 he supported R.A. Slaney's bill to prevent any part of labourers' wages being paid from the poor rates.¹⁷³

A corollary to these arguments, not accepted quite so widely, was that a 'properly administered' poor law, shorn of relief in aid of wages, might be a restraint on population rather than an encouragement to it. The unavoidable legal obligation to provide support had, in McCulloch's words, 'united the landlords, farmers and parish-officers in a league to oppose the multiplication of the poor.' They had been active and alert in their common interest to keep the poor rates down. Up until 1795, as McCulloch recounted with evident approval, 'every possible obstacle' had been thrown in the way of the poor marrying or obtaining cottages. This had been oppressive, but justified, because it had prevented the population from increasing beyond the means of subsistence.¹⁷⁴ Credit for this insight was given to Black, editor of the *Morning Chronicle*,¹⁷⁵ but Malthus had begun to grasp these arguments as early as 1822,¹⁷⁶ and by 1826 they had percolated through to the *Quarterly*, which observed that 'the erection of a cottage ... has been nearly as much dreaded by the English farmer as the introduction of a murrain amongst his cattle.'¹⁷⁷

Wilmot also began to accept that poor laws, properly administered, could help to prevent pauperism. Most of his comments on this point related to the possible introduction of poor laws into Ireland. The Emigration Committee observed that, with free movement of labour between Britain and Ireland, the

¹⁷² *Causes*, p.91; *Inquiry*, Fourth Series (first version), pp.8-9.

¹⁷³ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 23, c.31, 9 Mar 1830.

¹⁷⁴ [McCulloch], 'Poor laws', pp.311-15.

¹⁷⁵ WH2888, Tooke to Horton, 18 Nov 1829. See for instance, *Chronicle*, 5 Mar 1828.

¹⁷⁶ Winch, *Riches*, p.321. Malthus told the Emigration Committee in 1827 that, by disposing landlords not to build on their estates, the poor laws did 'counteract, in some degree, their first obvious tendency': P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.323.

¹⁷⁷ [Palgrave], 'Poor laws', pp.442-3.

poor laws of the two countries would have to be assimilated sooner or later, without saying whether this should be by introducing a poor law into Ireland or abolishing that of England.¹⁷⁸ Later in 1827, Wilmot remarked that the knowledge of the state of the poor, which the poor laws produced, had a ‘tendency to repress any redundancy of population.’¹⁷⁹ By 1829, he thought that the English system of poor laws, if ‘judiciously modified’, would be beneficial in Ireland.¹⁸⁰ By ‘judicious modification’, he meant, of course, not giving relief to able-bodied paupers. A poor law in Ireland would have deterred landlords from the ‘long leases and consequent abandonment of property’ to which Wilmot attributed the growth of population in Ireland.¹⁸¹ This view came to be widely held in the late 1820s, not just by Tory commentators but also by leading political economists.¹⁸² Wilmot argued that England should have insisted on the introduction of poor laws into Ireland at the time of the union, as it would have diminished the unfair competition from Irish corn ‘raised by cheap and potato-fed labour.’¹⁸³

While many Tory commentators favoured the *immediate* introduction of a poor law into Ireland, for Wilmot it was a long-term goal, achievable only *after* the redundant population of Ireland had been thinned by emigration; as Ireland was actually placed, a poor law would soon ‘monopolise all the rental of the land.’ He was therefore able, ‘in the present state of Ireland’, to profess ‘entire concurrence’ with Peel, who vigorously opposed introducing poor laws there, but this disguised growing differences between them. Peel adopted a standard Malthusian line – poor laws would encourage population – which Wilmot was by now coming to question.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁸ P.P. 1826-27 (550), pp.6-10.

¹⁷⁹ WH2843, Horton to Malthus, n.d. [1827]; *Causes*, p.91.

¹⁸⁰ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 18, cc.1419-20, 1 Apr 1828.

¹⁸¹ *Inquiry*, Third Series, pp.24-5.

¹⁸² See for instance: *Chronicle*, 5 Mar 1828; [J.R. McCulloch], ‘Sadler on Ireland’, *ER* 98 (Jun 1829), pp.314-6; [D. Robinson], ‘The condition of the empire’, *Blackwood’s*, 154 (Jul 1829), p.113; WH2888, Tooke to Horton, 18 Nov 1829; [Scrope?], ‘Causes and Remedies’, pp. 244-7.

¹⁸³ *Inquiry*, Third Series, p.28. This point was echoed in [Scrope], ‘Poor-Law for Ireland’, pp.540-43.

¹⁸⁴ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 18, cc.1417-20, 1 Apr 1828; 2nd ser., 21, c.1133, 7 May 1829.

Peel's views were representative of a swathe of liberal opinion in parliament, which continued to oppose poor laws in principle into the late 1820s at least. Spring Rice thought them 'vicious in system, indefensible in practice ... calculated to aggravate all the evils of pauperism instead of diminishing them'; Lord Milton, echoing Copleston, maintained that 'charity ceased to be charity, and humanity to be humanity, when made compulsory by the legislature'; while for Palmerston 'poor-laws under any system were a tax on industry, on production ... in favour of the idle and improvident', and tended 'to diminish the wages of labour, by the stimulus they gave to population.'¹⁸⁵ On the practical tendency of the poor laws, Wilmot was moving somewhat ahead of many parliamentary colleagues in his own part of the political spectrum.

The *right* to relief, even for the able-bodied, was being insisted upon with increasing confidence by Tory commentators. Southey thought the poor laws 'humane, just, necessary, befitting a Christian state, and honourable to the English nation.'¹⁸⁶ Sadler cited natural law, positive law and revelation to defend the principle of poor relief.¹⁸⁷ Some Whigs had come to the same view. Scrope pointed out that laws defending property, though generally useful, must have limits. In a 'state of nature', a hungry man could fend for himself, but when land was all appropriated, the law forbade him. If denied relief, he was 'in effect commanded to starve without any effort to save himself.' Society had no right so to punish someone who had committed no offence. Therefore, in extremity, 'the right to landed property is justly made to give way before the paramount right of every individual ... to be saved from starving in the midst of abundance.'¹⁸⁸ Writing in 1831, Scrope thought that this had become the 'common opinion', although 'until very lately' most political economists had opposed the principle of legal provision for the poor. However, it was possible to support legal provision for the poor without basing it on grounds of right. That had been Copleston's position in 1819, and for much of the 1820s Malthus had acknowledged the potential practical

¹⁸⁵ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 21, cc.1142, 1159, 7 May 1829.

¹⁸⁶ [Southey], 'Emigration Report', p.540.

¹⁸⁷ Sadler, *Ireland*, pp.207-20.

¹⁸⁸ [G.J.P. Scrope], 'The Political Economists', *QR* 87 (Jan 1831), p.48.

utility of the poor law, without admitting a legal right to relief and without formally abandoning his ultimate goal of abolition.¹⁸⁹

Wilmot's final position on the poor law is complex. Like Malthus, he never admitted a legal right to relief for able-bodied labourers, and he also continued to believe that any law which encouraged 'improvidence on the part of the poor' was 'intrinsically objectionable.'¹⁹⁰ As late as 1829 he maintained that the able-bodied poor should never be given relief, except 'under special circumstances of casualty.'¹⁹¹ He thought it intolerable that able-bodied labourers should be permanently maintained in a state of dependence; means had to be found of rendering them 'independent of either public or private charity.'¹⁹² This was again a pointer towards emigration.

Whether the poor had a right to relief or not, Wilmot was quite sure that the rich had an obligation to provide it, and equally sure that the obligation was not being fulfilled. He was increasingly impatient with parliament's failure, not just to adopt his own remedy of emigration, but to adopt *any* efficient remedy to relieve distress. In particular, he was fiercely critical of the failure to provide for the dispossessed tenantry of Ireland: while strongly supporting the Subletting Act in principle, he declared that 'unless provision be made for those parties who may be ejected under the operation of those bills, they will become the most disgraceful and barbarous acts that ever stained the legislation of a free country.'¹⁹³ It was useless, he insisted, to preach prudential virtues to the poor, without doing anything to help them.¹⁹⁴ In a rare appeal to religion, he observed that 'the rich man was not punished because he was rich, but because, being rich, he hugged his wealth in

¹⁸⁹ Winch, *Riches*, pp.318-22; P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.323.

¹⁹⁰ *Inquiry*, Third Series, p.25.

¹⁹¹ *Causes*, p.91. Nassau Senior upbraided him for these opinions, maintaining that the right of the unemployed able-bodied pauper to relief was 'the essence of the poor laws' and 'precisely what has occasioned them to be restrictive of population by forcing landlords to keep down the numbers of the poor': WH2872, Senior to Horton, 4 Feb 1830.

¹⁹² *Lectures*, Lecture IX, pp.29-30.

¹⁹³ *Inquiry*, Third Series, p.21. Wilmot repeated these words in a public letter to O'Connell published in *The Times*, 2 Nov 1830.

¹⁹⁴ *Inquiry*, Third Series, p.22.

selfishness, and steeled his heart to the sufferings of the poor.’¹⁹⁵ He told Malthus in 1830 that he had given up trying to enforce these messages in Parliament, ‘not from indifference, but from despair.’¹⁹⁶

Wilmot concluded that poor relief could not be left to charity. Some form of compulsory provision was necessary:

Are any laws desirable which enforce a compulsory contribution for *any* class or classes of the poor? Dr. Chalmers answers *No*. He is for leaving the poor exclusively in the hands of private charity. Dr. Doyle, on the other hand, insists that, unless provision by law be made for the helpless poor in Ireland, no improvement can take place in their situation. I entirely concur with Dr. Doyle.¹⁹⁷

That still left the able-bodied labourers. Wilmot set out his plans for them in 1830, in proposals for the reform of the poor law to which we now turn.

VI

For the most part, in his approach to the poor, Wilmot appears as a benign and generous figure by the standards of his day. There was no doubt some insensitivity in his conviction that emigration was the best option for many of the poor: he was accused of it often enough by Cobbett.¹⁹⁸ Against this, Wilmot had the reasonable answer that his schemes were voluntary: no one had to emigrate who did not want to, and many did want to. Wilmot’s plans for the resettlement of emigrants were remarkably generous, and he refused to dilute them despite the intense resistance generated by the cost of his schemes. He did not propose to discontinue any existing relief until *after* emigration had restored the domestic labour market to proper balance. Like most of his contemporaries, he imputed imprudence and fecklessness to paupers, but

¹⁹⁵ *Lectures*, Lecture V, p.12.

¹⁹⁶ WH2843, Malthus to Horton, 9 Jun 1830; Horton to Malthus, 24 Jul 1830.

¹⁹⁷ WH2843, Horton to Malthus, 3 Sep 1830.

¹⁹⁸ See for instance Cobbett’s *Weekly Political Register*, 3 Mar 1827.

unlike many he did not blame them for it, and he believed that they would respond to better circumstances with better behaviour.

Wilmot's proposed reforms of the poor law were, by contrast, strikingly harsh. There were two key elements: first, to create a clear division between labourers in work and redundant labourers, so that the wages of working labourers could be more easily protected; second, to subject redundant labourers to a regime so repellent as to deter anyone from submitting to it who could possibly avoid it.

Wilmot divided 'the genus *Poor*' into four categories: the 'labouring poor' (poor persons in work), the 'helpless poor' (poor persons who could not work), 'paupers' (poor persons who were able and wanted to work, but could not find work), and 'beggars' (poor persons who were able to work, but did not want to).¹⁹⁹ Paupers and beggars combined made up the 'redundant'.

The first priority was to 'abstract' the redundant portion of the labour force, and Wilmot now maintained that 'abstraction' was the key element in his thinking, while emigration was merely 'the best and cheapest mode of disposing' of the labourers thus abstracted. The distinction is analytically just but it hardly reflects Wilmot's emphases prior to 1830. Now, however, Wilmot maintained that it was the 'positive duty of the state' to effect this abstraction; as to emigration, if the 'superfluous population' could be 'disposed of more economically and more advantageously' in another way, then so be it.²⁰⁰

Wilmot proposed that labourers 'should either be wholly maintained by their employers, or be wholly maintained out of the poor-rate fund.' The key point was to separate the 'real' from the 'redundant' labour of the country, and it was 'of less importance *how* pauper labourers are employed, than *by whom* they are employed.' Paupers should be 'considered entirely and exclusively *as the servant of the parish*'. Separate accounts should be kept for

¹⁹⁹ *Inquiry*, Fourth Series (first version), pp.3-5.

²⁰⁰ *Inquiry*, First Series, pp.22-4.

expenditure on the ‘helpless poor’ and on ‘paupers’, so that the true cost of redundant labour could be known. No labourer should be allowed to be employed, unless the employer agreed ‘to pay him wages sufficient to make him independent of parochial assistance.’²⁰¹ Just how this was to be achieved, Wilmot did not say, and it contrasts sharply with the Emigration Committee’s conviction of ‘the impossibility of regulating by law either the maximum or the minimum of wages.’²⁰²

Wilmot proposed that parishes might ‘concentrate their redundant labourers for county or district works,’ or that they might be ‘collected in district workhouses.’ He supposed that ‘some common work’, not competing with the ‘natural employment’ of employed labourers, could easily be found for them. This process of concentration would facilitate the separation of ‘forced or artificial labour’ from ‘unforced and natural labour’; it would also reinforce prudential habits by exciting a ‘dread of falling into the pauper class’,²⁰³ from the repellent nature of the regime to be imposed:

they should receive as low a rate of remuneration as would be consistent with the conservation of their health. Such a status should be one which presented so little attraction to the party compelled to enter into it, that he should have every moral influence operating upon his mind, to avoid the necessity of belonging to it.

To become a pauper would be to enter a ‘national pauper status’: to be separated, obliged to work, and ‘fed, clothed, and lodged at the lowest rate compatible with humanity.’²⁰⁴ This would on the one hand prevent ‘the disgrace of allowing any able-bodied man to starve in the United Kingdom’, while on the other it would ‘afford the strongest moral check to improvident marriages’; the whole would operate ‘as a bonus upon good conduct’, because employers would keep their best labourers.²⁰⁵

²⁰¹ *Inquiry*, Fourth Series (first version), pp.11-13.

²⁰² P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.15.

²⁰³ *Inquiry*, Fourth Series (first version), pp.13-16.

²⁰⁴ WH2843, Horton to Malthus, 3 Sep 1830.

²⁰⁵ *Inquiry*, Fourth Series (first version), pp.48-50.

Wilmot was not alone in airing proposals of this kind at this time. Palmerston wondered whether large county or district workhouses would encourage pauperism by holding out a certainty of support, or discourage it by ‘strictness of discipline, scantiness of allowance, and hardness of labour.’²⁰⁶ The *Quarterly* proposed that parishes be allowed to send gangs of surplus labourers ‘to execute contract works at a distance’. Those who refused to work should be refused relief. Thus ‘the labour of those who are now demoralized and maintained in idleness would be rendered highly productive.’²⁰⁷

Wilmot’s two main principles, the separation of the employed labourer from the pauper, and the harsh and deterrent regime to be imposed on the latter, anticipate key principles behind the new Poor Law of 1834. Nassau Senior, one of the architects of that law, ‘much approved’ of Wilmot’s ideas.²⁰⁸ In 1834, Senior wrote to Wilmot that ‘the views of the Commissioners of the Bill are all, or nearly all, your views.’²⁰⁹ The practical details of the 1834 law were of course very different, but psychologically the aims were similar. There was however one crucial difference: Wilmot did not think that these changes could or should be made, in England, until ‘the actual restoration of the supply of labour to the demand’ had been effected by a ‘vigorous effort of abstraction of superfluous labour’.²¹⁰ His reforms were to apply only after the labour market had been restored to health by substantial state-aided emigration. If, after that, substantial redundancy recurred, it would mean that the labouring classes had not responded to their improved conditions with the prudence and restraint which Wilmot expected. In that event, Wilmot believed that a punitive regime would be justified.

In the case of Ireland, Wilmot proposed that his reforms could take effect straight away, but as there was no poor law in Ireland he could reasonably believe that his proposals, however harsh, were an improvement on the

²⁰⁶ WH2856, Palmerston to Horton, 5 Dec 1829.

²⁰⁷ [Scrope?] ‘Causes and Remedies’, p.254.

²⁰⁸ *Inquiry*, Fourth Series (first version), p.48.

²⁰⁹ Hatherton Papers, D260/M/F/5/27/11, Horton to Littleton, 24 Sep 1834.

²¹⁰ *Inquiry*, Fourth Series (first version), p.47; WH2856, Horton to Palmerston, 12 Dec 1829.

existing situation: no-one had to claim relief who preferred to do, as the Irish poor had previously done, without it. Again he proposed that paupers be separated and employed in public works until they could be 'drafted off' by colonization. This initial 'national effort' was to be funded by the state generally, and Wilmot expected it to produce a different society in which there need not be any serious pauper problem. Any recurrence of pauperism should be dealt with by the same methods, but funded by a tax raised in Ireland alone. Should that tax ever amount to much, 'it would be entirely the fault of society, who would deserve to suffer for it.'²¹¹

To prevent the ultimate colonization of the paupers making the whole system too attractive, Wilmot insisted that there should be 'no escape until after certain years of probation.' The 'mendicant population', as Wilmot now called them, would be required to go through 'a sufficient ordeal of good conduct', in order 'to prevent the ultimate contingency of emigration' from 'operating as a bonus.' In a striking limitation of the principle that assisted emigration should be voluntary, Wilmot now proposed that it should be available only to paupers who had conducted themselves well while at the public expense. This would provide 'another incentive to good conduct ... of a very forcible and stringent nature.'²¹²

VII

Wilmot's complete theoretical system therefore comprised (i) a significant state-assisted emigration to remove a substantial part of the redundant population of Britain and Ireland, (ii) the natural revival of prudential feelings among the labouring population that remained behind, in the improved material circumstances which would ensue, (iii) a harsh and deterrent poor law, to be introduced only *after* substantial emigration, to reinforce those prudential feelings. This theory was not fully articulated until 1830, and it cannot be divorced from the practical details as to the mode of emigration

²¹¹ WH2856, Horton to Palmerston, 12 Dec 1829, appendix 'A'.

²¹² WH2856, Horton to Palmerston, 12 Dec 1829, & appendix 'B'. The political reception of Wilmot's schemes is considered below, pp.167-9.

which are considered in the next chapter. At the abstract level, though, Wilmot secured a good degree of assent from leading political economists, at least from those who shared his optimism about the 'prudential check'.

Senior agreed with Wilmot that 'the increase of wages would occasion more improvement in the habits, than increase of the number of the labourers';²¹³ his own published correspondence with Malthus had been devoted to establishing the same point.²¹⁴ In respect of Ireland, Senior agreed that an expenditure of £25 million would be justified, to remove a pauper population of one million, if it cost £3 million per annum to maintain at home.²¹⁵ Robert Torrens, always an enthusiastic advocate of emigration, agreed that Wilmot's 'extended and regulated system of colonization' was 'the appropriate remedy for pauperism', and that, if persevered in, it would relieve the 'almost intolerable pressure' of the poor rates.²¹⁶ Torrens was undaunted by the prospect of spending £20 million to remove one million paupers from Ireland. He agreed that prudential checks would keep the growth of population behind that of capital, except where poor laws gave an artificial 'bounty to overpopulation'. Emigration provided the means to get over the difficulty of eliminating that bounty. That done, 'the objection, that the vacuum created would be speedily replaced' was 'of no weight or validity whatever.' Far from costing money, emigration would be 'a measure of economy and retrenchment', which 'would cost less than is now expended on the maintenance of the able-bodied poor', as well as opening 'permanent sources of increased revenue to the State' from the accelerated development of the colonies.²¹⁷

Thomas Tooke was initially highly sceptical of Wilmot's plans. By 1830, he had summoned the enthusiasm to judge Wilmot's plan 'sound in principle, and expedient as a measure of public policy in the actual circumstances of the

²¹³ *Inquiry*, Fourth Series (first version), pp.53-4.

²¹⁴ WH2872, Senior to Horton, 4 Feb 1830.

²¹⁵ *Inquiry*, Fourth Series (first version), pp.67-8.

²¹⁶ WH2889, Torrens to Horton, 16 Jun 1830.

²¹⁷ R. Torrens, *Substance of a Speech delivered ... in the House of Commons, 15th February 1827 ...* (1828), pp.37-52.

country.²¹⁸ McCulloch was conditionally in favour of large-scale emigration, but thought that Wilmot was still insufficiently clear as to the collateral measures which would be required.²¹⁹ He thought that a million Irish emigrants could be ‘disposed of’ in America (not necessarily in Canada), at a cost of £14 million, and that even twice that sum ‘would be well and advantageously laid out.’²²⁰ Again, McCulloch agreed that emigration should be considered as a saving:

To talk ... of emigration diminishing the capital of the country to the same extent that it diminished population, is a good deal worse than absurd. About a *sixth*, or, at the very outside, a *fifth* part of the capital will suffice to establish a pauper family in Canada that is required for its support at home.²²¹

Even James Mill, a long-standing critic of Wilmot’s plan on just these grounds, was at least temporarily persuaded: ‘if the expense of removal is less than that of maintenance at home, I know no sound objection to which your scheme is liable.’²²² Francis Place thought that Wilmot’s ideas were conclusive in principle, but feared (as did Wilmot) that emigration on an inadequate scale would be worse than useless. Wilmot’s answer to this was that the remedy was intended to apply chiefly to agricultural districts and that it could be applied district by district with good effect.²²³

Malthus was less convinced that effective measures could be devised to prevent the vacuum being filled up. Could Wilmot accomplish this, he would be, in Malthus’s opinion, ‘the greatest benefactor to the human race that has yet appeared. It would be the securing at once, and permanently, good wages to all who were able and willing to work.’ However, it was too much, Malthus wrote, ‘to suppose that a particular plan of any individual’ could bring about the ‘specific degree of prudence’ which was needed. Despite these reservations, Malthus too approved Wilmot’s plan. It would at least

²¹⁸ WH2888, Tooke to Horton, 30 May 1830.

²¹⁹ WH2836, McCulloch to Horton, 3 Jun 1830.

²²⁰ [McCulloch] ‘Emigration’, p.66.

²²¹ [McCulloch], ‘Causes and Cure’, p.55. The same point is made in [W. Empson], ‘Emigration’, *ER* 93 (Jan 1828), p.242.

²²² WH2847, Mill to Horton, 15 Feb 1830.

²²³ WH2860, Place to Horton, 6 Jul, 1 Aug 1830, Horton to Place, Sep 1830.

bring temporary relief, and it was the only remedy available which presented ‘any fair prospect’ of improving the condition of the labouring classes, ‘consistently with humanity and good policy.’ And, if poor laws were introduced into Ireland, then ‘a large previous emigration would be absolutely necessary as a preliminary step.’²²⁴ Malthus was not just being polite, for a few months later he told Senior: ‘Wilmot Horton’s remedy seems to me to be the only one that can be resorted to with effect.’²²⁵ Chalmers, characteristically, was less flexible, being unable to believe that ‘the people can be transformed by any educational process ... to prevent the filling up ... in a very few years of the vacancy that has been created.’²²⁶

If the leading economists were, with the exceptions of Torrens and McCulloch, passive rather than active in their support for Wilmot’s ideas, it was not because of any fundamental intellectual disagreement, but because most of them favoured the more orthodox remedies for distress already mentioned.²²⁷

Wilmot’s emigration plans were justly described by David Robinson as ‘a scheme for raising wages.’²²⁸ As such, Robinson thought them inconsistent with the ‘tenets of the Ricardo school’; after all the calls for repeal of the corn laws and for lower taxation were based on the presumed need of manufacturers for cheaper labour. Robinson did less than justice to the economists in this respect. They were always more concerned that Wilmot’s schemes might fail, than that they might succeed: no economist criticised Wilmot’s plans on the grounds that a general increase in wages would be detrimental. As Malthus told the Emigration Committee, even if an oversupply of labour was beneficial to manufactures and commerce (which he did not believe), ‘no persons could possibly bring themselves to encourage such a system with that view.’ Wilmot agreed that ‘the general prosperity of the country is incompatible with the degradation of any class of the

²²⁴ WH2843, Malthus to Horton, 23 Aug 1830.

²²⁵ WH2900, Malthus to Senior, 2 Dec 1830.

²²⁶ WH2763, Chalmers to Horton, 20 Feb 1830.

²²⁷ Above, p.86.

²²⁸ [D. Robinson] ‘The Surplus Population of the United Kingdom’, *Blackwood’s*, 124 (Apr 1827), pp.379-80.

community.’²²⁹ In any case, as Wilmot’s plans were directed towards agricultural parishes rather than manufacturing areas, it was agricultural labourers who stood most to gain from any resulting increase in wages. He admitted that this would to some extent reduce the benefit of emigration to ratepayers and farmers, but argued that a reduction in ‘the incidental expenses of pauperism, with all its litigation and inaction’ would more than compensate.²³⁰

J.R. Poynter thought that the advocates of emigration were ‘a little unorthodox in being more Malthusian than Malthus in their emphasis on over-population as a cause of distress.’²³¹ Wilmot was indeed ‘Malthusian’ in treating the inducement to population held out by the poor law as the main cause of redundancy, though he did not see redundancy in terms of population against subsistence. His remedy, though, with its strong dependence on the prudential check, was distinctly less Malthusian than Malthus. His emphasis on the prudential check did not reflect an evangelical concern for moral and spiritual well-being, but a practical one for material well-being, and it was shared by other secular economists. In these respects, he was more closely aligned with Senior than with any other prominent economist, and, in his confidence in the benefits to be derived from assisted emigration, with Torrens. Wilmot’s reluctance to admit the *right* of the poor to relief distances him from the more thoroughly paternalist approach of the Tory right, but there was nonetheless a paternalistic streak in his strong sense of the obligations of the rich and his growing hostility to the prevailing norms of economy and retrenchment, *laissez faire* and minimal government. This distinguished him not so much from the main political economists themselves, most of whom accepted social obligations to the poor to a fair extent, as from those liberals in parliament, including many of his liberal Tory colleagues, whose Malthusianism took a less modulated form. These aspects of Wilmot’s approach will appear more clearly in Chapter 5.

²²⁹ P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.17.

²³⁰ WH2843, Horton to Malthus, 24 Jul 1830.

²³¹ Poynter, *Pauperism*, p.300.

In essence, Wilmot saw emigration as the best means to achieve a transition from his third state of society to the second. To bring about such a transformation seemed to require emigration on a large scale, conducted reasonably swiftly, and so Wilmot maintained that minor measures were ‘unworthy of the serious attention of Parliament and of the country.’²³² This insistence on scale, when combined with colonial considerations, determined many of the details regarding the mode of emigration to be adopted, which are considered in the next chapter.

²³² *Inquiry*, Fourth Series (second version), p.100.

4

‘A Careful Hand’:

Emigration and Colonization

Wilmot Horton proposed to alleviate poverty in Britain by the large-scale state-aided resettlement of volunteering pauper families in Britain’s North American colonies. The state was to organise their passage, and assist them, by grants of land and the supply of tools and provisions, to establish themselves as independent peasant farmers. Smaller numbers would be provided a free passage only, to enable them to enter the labour market whether in North America, the Cape, or Australia.

Every part of this plan involved a choice of some kind – as to the type of emigrant, the destination, the mode of settlement, and the role of government. These choices were greatly influenced by Wilmot’s views on larger colonial or imperial questions which were the subject of much contemporary debate: questions as to the utility of colonies, the mode of colonial development, and the means of securing Britain’s future prosperity as an industrial nation. They were also influenced by economic analysis – wage-fund theory and the question of the relations between capital, labour, and land; and by questions of political philosophy, as to the limits of *laissez-faire* and the nature of colonial society. Wilmot’s firm opinions on these questions explain his reluctance to compromise any essential point of his emigration plan or to support plans other than his own. This chapter considers Wilmot’s scheme of colonization in the light of these questions. Section I looks briefly at the relevant historiography and considers contemporary attitudes towards colonies and colonization. Section II considers Wilmot’s defence of colonization in general, and his choice of Canada in particular. Section III looks at his specific model of settlement in the context of economic factors, and also at his view of the role of government. Section IV considers certain problems of colonial development – economic and social – thrown up by Wilmot’s model.

I

Wilmot's ideas have previously been considered mainly in the context of the development of a 'theory of colonization' within the free-trade paradigm of classical economics. He has been cast as an unsuccessful precursor of E.G. Wakefield – his ideas too unsophisticated, and too rooted in Ricardian thinking, to have had any profound effect. A key tenet of orthodox economic thinking was that capital could not be idle for any length of time, because savings represented a demand for labour which was never long withheld. This was an aspect of 'Say's Law' asserting the equivalence of supply and demand. The implication for 'wage-fund theory' was that if labour was in excess supply then by definition capital must be fully utilised. Wilmot – so the argument has gone – did not challenge any of this. Specific schemes of emigration might be justified if they *improved* the relative proportions of capital and labour at home, and at this empirical level it was recognised that, as has been shown, Wilmot had some success in convincing leading economists of the merits of his schemes.¹ However, there could be little enthusiasm in theory for schemes which required the export of capital as well as labour, if capital was fully employed at home. Wakefield, on the other hand, rejected Say's Law, arguing instead that both capital and labour were in chronic oversupply in Britain in relation to land, and that they required an enlarged 'field of employment' which could be found in the colonies. Colonization therefore became the solution to overcapitalisation and diminishing profits at home, as well as to overpopulation. J.S. Mill incorporated these ideas into his *Principles of Political Economy* in 1848.²

This neat contrast between a primitive Wilmot, trapped by his own adherence to Ricardian theory, and a more advanced Wakefield, able to transcend that theory, has served to explain Wilmot's relative lack of success in recommending colonization to informed minds. It has been accepted in more recent surveys of migration from Britain, if indeed Wilmot is mentioned at

¹ Above, pp.116-8.

² Winch, *Colonies*; Ghosh, *Classical Macroeconomics*; Kittrell, 'Colonization'; Brynn, 'Emigration Theories'; Johnston, *Emigration*; B. Semmel, 'The Philosophic Radicals and Colonialism', *Journal of Economic History*, 21 (1961), pp.513-25.

all.³ It implies that there was little sustained intellectual support for colonization before Wakefield's time, and it operates within a 'Whiggish' narrative of nineteenth-century British history in which free-trade ideas gradually supplanted older mercantilist ones – a process in which the liberal Tories of the 1820s have been accorded an honourable if intermediate role. This free-trade narrative has dominated accounts of British history for the mid-nineteenth century at least; and has been able to accommodate divergent accounts of the triumph of free-trade principles, either as being antithetical to imperial ones, as in the case of Cobden, or as being complementary or even subservient to imperial aims. In the latter view, a system of free trade might serve the purposes of British manufacturers wishing to find markets abroad, or of British 'gentlemanly capitalists' seeking to exploit resources abroad, at least as effectively as formal control.⁴ The idea of informal free trade imperialism has been central to the study of European and American global dominance, whether the results are seen as broadly benign or near catastrophic.⁵

A convincing account of the ideas underpinning Britain's 'second empire', covering the period approximately 1780 to 1830, has been slower to emerge. It used to be supposed that British policy-makers, chastened by the loss of the American colonies, and at least half-educated by Adam Smith, attached little value to empire.⁶ What was needed was to build up strength at home. When Britain did acquire territory, it did so in a 'fit of absence of mind.'⁷ The case against colonial possessions, as articulated by Smith, Bentham, Ricardo, James Mill and McCulloch, is well known.⁸ This account struggled to explain the continuing rapid expansion of British territorial control and economic

³ For instance: James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth* (Oxford, 2009), pp.146-7; Marjory Harper and Stephen Constantine, *Migration and Empire* (Oxford, 2010), pp.290-91.

⁴ Gallagher and Robinson, 'Imperialism of Free Trade'; Semmel, *Free Trade Imperialism*; P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914* (1993); cf. MacDonagh, 'Anti-Imperialism'.

⁵ Niall Ferguson, *Empire* (2003); James Tully, 'Lineages of Contemporary Imperialism', in Duncan Kelly (ed.), *Lineages of Empire* (Oxford, 2009), pp.3-29.

⁶ R.L. Schuyler, *The Fall of the Old Colonial System* (Oxford, 1945); K.E. Knorr, *British Colonial Theories, 1750-1850* (Toronto, 1944).

⁷ J.R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (1883), p.8.

⁸ See, for instance, Winch, *Colonies*; Ghosh, *Classical Macroeconomics*.

influence, both during and after the Napoleonic Wars.⁹ Some of the elements of a different interpretation had already been unearthed, but not yet combined. Huskisson's system of imperial preference was initially characterised as an 'unsatisfactory half-way house' on the journey towards commercial liberty.¹⁰ Vincent Harlow discerned, without emphasising, elements of 'neo-mercantilism', as well as a 'swing to the east', in the expansion of empire in the decades after 1783.¹¹

C.A. Bayly re-interpreted this expansion as a determined and vigorous effort by the British state to revive British power in the world, fuelled by a 'constructive conservatism' which combined aristocratic self-confidence, religious commitment, notions of 'agrarian patriotism', and fear of 'revolutionary principles'.¹² Building on this, Anna Gambles showed how an 'alternative imperial political economy' was developed in conservative circles, treating colonies, naval power and mercantilist policies as elements of a coherent and supple imperial strategy. This 'Tory imperialist economics' was argued from 'history and experience' rather than from 'theoretical or abstract reasoning': empire – and instruments such as navigation laws, protection and preferential tariffs – were simply 'a necessary feature of international relations and international trade.' Strategic considerations of autarky and naval power were however accompanied by an 'underconsumptionist' analysis of the British economy in which colonies were valued as providing secure and growing markets for British manufacturing surpluses.¹³

These economic and strategic arguments in favour of colonies were supported by a more romantic vision of a Britain destined by 'Providence' to spread the benign and civilizing influence of British language, laws, and Protestant

⁹ A.G.L. Shaw, 'Introduction', in A.G.L. Shaw (ed.), *Great Britain and the Colonies 1815-1865* (1970), p.2.

¹⁰ A. Brady, *William Huskisson and Liberal Reform* (2nd edn., 1967), pp.132-49; see also C.R. Fay, *Great Britain from Adam Smith to the Present Day* (5th edn., 1950), pp.52-8.

¹¹ V.T. Harlow, *The Founding of the Second British Empire* (2 vols., 1952, 1964), i, pp.159-62.

¹² C.A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian* (Harlow, 1989).

¹³ Gambles, *Protection*, pp.147-75.

religion, around the world by means of emigration and colonization. Southey famously articulated this *mission civilatrice* in the *Quarterly Review*:

It is time that Britain should become the hive of nations, and cast her swarms; and here are lands to receive them. ... to every part of the uninhabited or uncivilized world our laws, our language, our institutions and our Bible may be communicated.’¹⁴

This vision evoked some of the purplest prose of the period from Robert Torrens and G.J.P. Scrope.¹⁵ It was generally accepted that these new nations need not, indeed should not, remain under British control indefinitely. It was enough that they were British in law, taste, and religion. As Huskisson observed:

we have carried thither our language, our laws, and our free institutions, and they cannot fail, in the fullness of time, to be free countries like our own. ... we should be well paid for all the sacrifices we may yet be called upon to make, if we are to add to the rich harvest of glory we have already reaped, by being the parent of countries in which the same happiness and prosperity that have distinguished this country will ... for ages to come, be enjoyed. ... What can be a prouder feeling for Englishmen than that England has done its duty to the world, by attempting, and successfully, to improve it?’¹⁶

While this vision was articulated most frequently on the political right, its appeal was not limited to the right. Bentham, of all people, had anticipated Southey, looking forward to ‘men spreading in distant climes, through distant ages, from the best stock, the earth covered with British population, rich with British wealth, tranquil with British security, the fruit of British law.’¹⁷ Even J.R. McCulloch, normally highly sceptical towards colonies, recognised that emigration carried ‘the languages, arts, and sciences of those who have made

¹⁴ [Southey], ‘Poor Laws’, pp.355-6. Southey’s views on emigration and colonization are explored in David Craig, *Robert Southey and Romantic Apostasy* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp.142-65. Wordsworth repeated the ‘hive’ metaphor in *The Excursion*, ix, ll.369-82.

¹⁵ Torrens, *Substance*, pp.70-71. Torrens was speaking in support of Wilmot’s motion for a renewal of the Emigration Committee. [Scrope], ‘Malthus and Sadler’, pp.144-5.

¹⁶ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 19, cc.315-6, 2 May 1828.

¹⁷ Quoted in Winch, *Colonies*, p.34. Winch also found much ‘cultural imperialism’ in the writings of classical economists such as Malthus, McCulloch, and the Mills: pp.165-8.

the farthest advances in civilisation to those who are comparatively barbarous.’¹⁸

Tory Romantics also saw in colonization a cure for a psychological malaise in British society. The Lake Poets attached much value to the ‘psychic wholeness and civic autonomy conferred by a close (preferably propertied) relationship between man and the land.’ The opportunity to achieve such rootedness in the colonies was seen as a remedy for the ills of industrialised labour and rural displacement at home. While the occupation and cultivation of land brought psychic well-being, ownership of it conferred an equally valuable independence: qualities which Wordsworth admired in the dalesmen of the Lakes, who made up ‘a perfect republic of shepherds and agriculturalists.’¹⁹ There is an overlap here with elements of the ‘agrarian patriotism’ identified by Bayly as a product of the Scottish Enlightenment, in particular with Lord Kames’s influential view that ‘the best order of society was that of a prosperous yeoman farmer class.’ Bayly found that this idea spread to the colonies: the ‘yeoman solution’ – of land held in freehold, its ownership dispersed into many hands rather than tightly concentrated – was widely adopted in the second British empire, especially ‘where the Scottish school of moral independency held sway.’²⁰

While all these trends of thought were broadly supportive of colonial possession and colonization, they were not necessarily supportive of Wilmot’s model of pauper emigration as a means of relieving pauperism at home. Tories recognised the problem of pauperism as clearly as anyone, but they did not on the whole accept the Malthusian view that it was a consequence of overpopulation brought about by improvident over-breeding on the part of the poor. For some of them, different analyses of the causes of pauperism led them to reject the remedy of emigration altogether.²¹ For other Tories, such as Southey, who did see an important role for emigration, their analysis of

¹⁸ [Walter Coulson], ‘McCulloch’s Principles of Political Economy’, *ER* 104 (Jan 1831), pp.344-5.

¹⁹ Karen O’Brien, ‘Colonial Emigration’, pp.161-79

²⁰ Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, pp.85, 196.

²¹ See below, pp.175-8.

domestic problems led them to favour colonization on a specific model. They rejected Say's Law and argued that over-investment in manufacturing led to over-production, which could result in a 'general glut' of goods, and in capital being left idle for want of a productive outlet.²² As John Galt argued, slightly idiosyncratically, the problem was not an excess of population but an excess of machinery, which constituted 'an ever-increasing adversary to the employment of man.' 'Too much of the intelligence and capital of the community' had been 'directed to trade and manufacture.' The implication for emigration was that people with capital and initiative should emigrate alongside 'mere labourers':

By thinning the number of this class of persons, from whom the manufacturing and commercial classes are principally ... recruited, you would diminish the number of those who foster mechanical ingenuity to excess ... and you would create a new class, who ... would draw from the mother country, as plantation servants, thousands of those who are at present subjected to the valetudinarian fortunes of artisans.²³

Tories were concerned also that the right kind of society – one which reproduced the ranks and hierarchy of British society – should be created in the colonies. For this reason too, many called for pauper emigration to be leavened by the emigration of small farmers and capitalists along with some of the younger sons of the gentry. For Southey, it was 'a matter of prospective policy, not less important in its consequences, to provide also for the overflow of the educated classes, and open a sure path to competence and comfort for those who are worthy to partake the blessings of life.'²⁴ He was not one to believe that the spread of British values and institutions around the world would be best accomplished by destitute Catholic peasants from southern Ireland. Peel, too, confessed that 'if men possessed of capital would emigrate voluntarily ... he should prefer such a state of society in the colonies to one composed entirely of paupers.'²⁵

²² Gambles, *Protection*, pp.165-74. This underconsumptionism paralleled that of Wakefield, who argued from a free-trade rather than protectionist standpoint.

²³ [Galt] 'Bandana', pp.470-74.

²⁴ Taylor Papers, 40693, f.94, Southey to Taylor, 11 Oct 1826. See also Craig, *Southey*, pp.156-8.

²⁵ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 18, cc.1556-7, 17 Apr 1828; see also 2nd ser., 25, c.369, 15 Jun 1830.

Wilmot therefore framed his plan of emigration in the face of opposing pressures, from orthodox economists who feared that emigration would take away too much capital, and from Tories who feared that pauper emigration would take too little.

II

Before entering parliament, it seems that Wilmot at one stage shared the scepticism towards colonies of the orthodox economists. In 1816, according to Heber, he entertained a 'favourite scheme of abandoning our more expensive colonies', from the 'necessity of retrenchment'. Heber dissuaded Wilmot from publishing a pamphlet which advocated 'ceding, or rendering independent our more expensive foreign possessions' – good advice to a future Undersecretary of State for the Colonies.²⁶ By the time he entered the Colonial Office, Wilmot had fully embraced the positive case for colonies based on the connections between 'colonies, commerce, ships, seamen, wealth, revenue, prosperity and strength.'²⁷ When McCulloch proclaimed the utter inutility of colonies in the *Edinburgh Review*,²⁸ Wilmot countered that his doctrine might be fit for a Utopian world 'in which there was no war, and consequently where the value of a colonial possession must be measured solely by the commercial advantages which it affords.' In the real world, a colony which was not 'altogether defensible as a commercial station', might justly be retained because of its strategic value in time of war. Secondly, in time of war, foreign trade was liable to dry up, and had to be 'transmuted into a colonial trade'. Merchants might reasonably prefer smaller and more certain profits, arising in a trade governed by British laws, and not liable to interruption by war, to larger profits from a more uncertain foreign trade. Thirdly, the argument that colonies were themselves a cause of war was 'too

²⁶ WH2810, Heber to Wilmot, 16 Apr & 5 Nov 1816.

²⁷ A.G.L. Shaw, 'British Attitudes to the Colonies, ca.1820-1850', *Journal of British Studies*, 9 (1969), p.82.

²⁸ [J.R. McCulloch], 'Colonial Policy – Value of Colonial Possessions', *ER* 84 (Aug 1825), pp.271-303.

wild and theoretical to be listened to for an instant': history showed that 'states which presented no colonial temptations for attack', had not been exempt from war. Fourthly, Wilmot treated colonial trade as if it were an extension of domestic trade, and colonial wealth as equivalent to wealth at home. He argued that in colonial exchanges 'two separate portions of profit on stock are ... created among the subjects of the same nation.' Only if these two portions, combined, were less than the single portion of profit which could be obtained by British subjects in foreign trade, should the foreign trade be preferred.²⁹

Wilmot had a clear vision of an enlarged system of colonial trade in which prosperous agricultural colonies would exchange their surpluses for British manufactures. He reasoned that all the best land in Britain had already been cultivated, while in the colonies a mass of high quality land remained untouched. Capital was therefore best applied at home to manufactures, and abroad to agriculture. The interests of Britain and its colonies were happily complementary, and their trade would be underpinned by 'the general establishment of our colonial relations upon the principle of reciprocity of benefits'.³⁰

On arriving at the Colonial Office, Wilmot said, he had 'perceived the utter inefficiency of our colonies, as to self-support and defence, unless it were possible to give them an addition of population more rapid than their natural rate of increase.'³¹ In other words, when radical economical reformers complained in the Commons that the cost of administration and defence of colonies was a burden to Britain, there was some truth in it. The Emigration Report argued that the colonies would develop rapidly following an increase of population. Thus stimulated, they would soon be able to pay for their own administration and defence, and would cease to be a burden to the British

²⁹ *Burdett*, pp.51-5; *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 14, c.1364, 14 Mar 1826. Wilmot may have taken this last argument from *Blackwood's*: see Gambles, *Protection*, p.153, where it is described as an 'essentially nationalistic conception of trade'.

³⁰ P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.41.

³¹ *Inquiry*, First Series, p.34.

taxpayer, while in the long term Britain would reap the benefits of an enlarged trade.³² Wilmot urged a visionary approach:

The genius of false economy, marring national prosperity, and choking up the springs of future wealth ... would disdain and reject the augmentation of future power and wealth, which any measures calculated to increase the numbers and efficiency of a colonial population would in the issue create ... Public accounts and balance sheets do not exhaust the whole mystery of government ... posterity will feel unmixed contempt for the spurious and shrivelling economy which has of late been suffered to claim so much attention and applause – an economy at once short-sighted and single-eyed, which ... looks to petty savings as the sole secret of political alchemy.³³

In selecting Canada as the preferred destination for his emigrants, Wilmot was not just making a practical choice of the nearest set of colonies to have an adequate supply of land. This is evident from the preference he gave to Upper Canada, the most distant and in some ways the least convenient of all the British colonies in North America. He was also addressing a specific set of imperial concerns about the strength and security of these North American possessions. There were many who did not think it worth Britain's while to hold onto them. For J.R. McCulloch, 'every man of sense' knew that Canada must sooner or later be merged with the United States.³⁴ Even Lord Grenville, who said that he 'almost' thought of Upper Canada as a child of his own, lamented 'the burden of defending such a colony, at so great a distance from our own resources, and against a power, possessing local advantages, so incomparably superior to ours.'³⁵ The high proportion of American-born settlers in Upper Canada was sometimes seen as a military liability.³⁶

Those who valued the possession of Canada feared that such defeatism would be self-fulfilling. As Richard Whately argued, 'if our government were unfortunately to act with respect to Canada, under the conviction that it must

³² P.P. 1826-27 (550), pp.38-41.

³³ 'Taxation', pp.304-5.

³⁴ [McCulloch], 'Colonial Policy', p.292.

³⁵ WH2802, Grenville to Horton, 31 Jan 1826. Grenville had framed the Canada Act, 1791, which divided Canada into Upper and Lower provinces: Peter Jupp, *Lord Grenville, 1759-1834* (Oxford, 1985), pp.93-7.

³⁶ CO 42/377, ff. 9-11, Maitland to Bathurst, 7 Mar 1826.

inevitably in a few years be wrested from us, the event would probably confirm their expectations.’ He pointed out that Canada had defended herself during the 1812-14 war, and, with an active policy, it could become ‘a barrier to the boundless increase of that power which threatens to prove the most formidable rival that Great Britain has ever encountered.’ Canada could be ‘the bridle of the United States.’³⁷ Huskisson added a set of moral and political considerations: Canadians were loyal subjects, entitled to the protection of the Crown: ‘we cannot part with our dominions there without doing an injustice to their fidelity, and tried attachment, and tarnishing the national honour.’³⁸

Anxiety about the United States ran all the deeper, because its continuing rapid growth was seen to come partly at British expense. The States had always been the main destination for voluntary emigrants from Britain. This was unsettling to conservatives, since emigration to the States suggested a preference for republican government and secularism over the ‘church and king’ constitution of Britain. As Henry Taylor observed, ‘the disposition to emigrate is not consistent with the *amor patriae*.’³⁹ Denigration of the United States and those who went there was a repeated *motif* of the *Quarterly* and of *Blackwood’s*. It was admitted that America was probably the best place for those with a ‘rooted aversion to our constitution in church and state’,⁴⁰ but, those apart, it was ‘the obvious policy of a government, to use all proper means to direct the stream of emigration towards its own colonies’; and it was felt that the majority of emigrants would wish ‘to remain with the laws and usages that they know.’⁴¹

³⁷ [Whately], ‘Emigration to Canada’, pp.390-2. Whately’s image becomes clear when Canada is conceived, as it was then, as a long strip on the north side of the St. Lawrence and Lakes Erie and Ontario. See also [John Barrow] ‘Political Importance of our American Colonies’, *QR* 66 (Mar 1826), pp.424-9.

³⁸ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 19, cc.314-5, 2 May 1828.

³⁹ Taylor Papers, 40693, f.97, Taylor to Southey, 7 Nov 1826.

⁴⁰ [Whately], ‘Emigration to Canada’, p.399. See also [J. Barrow], ‘Fearon’s Sketches of America’, *QR* 41 (Jan 1819), pp.124-67; [?], ‘Views, Visits and Tours in North America’, *QR* 53 (Apr 1822), pp.71-3; [J. Barrow & W. Gifford], ‘Faux – Memorable Days in America’, *QR* 58 (Jul 1823), p.369.

⁴¹ ‘Birkbeck’s Letters from Illinois’, *Edinburgh Monthly Review*, 1 (Jan 1819), pp.2-19.

Wilmot was therefore tapping into established veins of feeling and rhetoric in wishing to redirect the ‘stream of emigration’ to Upper Canada or to other British American colonies. He was anxious to discountenance the idea that Britain was disposed to ‘relinquish her colonial superintendence’ of Canada:

such a notion, if permitted to prevail, would work extensive evil; on the contrary, it should be distinctly understood, that there was a determination on the part of this government, to cherish the connexion; and to take every opportunity of assisting the Canadas, and of developing all the resources of that country.⁴²

For Wilmot, ‘the true policy of this country, and the chief merit on the colonial side of the question of a national measure of emigration,’ was ‘the advancement of our North American possessions in wealth and independency so as to form a natural counterpoise to the power of the United States.’⁴³ The lack of a nationally directed policy on emigration had had just the opposite result: emigration poured into the United States ‘to their inestimable advantage and to our incalculable prejudice.’⁴⁴ Britain had simply ‘made a present of so much treasure to the United States’, possibly ‘advantageous to Great Britain in time of peace’, but ‘furnishing the means of attack against her in the possible period of war.’⁴⁵ The greatest weakness of the colonies had been the lack of an adequate working population, and through emigration their independence could be ‘materially encouraged and preserved.’⁴⁶

Though sceptical about emigration as a means of relieving pauperism, Wilmot’s liberal Tory colleagues in government readily understood its value to the colonies and in particular to Canada, and were prepared to contemplate government assistance for the purpose. F.J. Robinson thought that ‘as a measure of good to an infant colony, possessing great resources, and affected by most weighty *political* considerations’, government ‘might safely and

⁴² *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 19, cc.332-4, 2 May 1828.

⁴³ Grey Papers, GRE/B111/7, Horton to Howick, 8 Apr 1831.

⁴⁴ WH2900, Horton to Goulburn, n.d. [spring 1830].

⁴⁵ *Inquiry*, Fourth Series (second version), pp.79-80. Nassau Senior here ‘perfectly concurred’ in Wilmot’s opinions.

⁴⁶ P.P. 1825 (129), p.18; P.P. 1826 (404), p.4; P.P. 1826-27 (550), pp.252-6.

properly pay a large part.’⁴⁷ Peel agreed that emigration would be an ‘excellent thing’ for the North American colonies, ‘for the increase of their strength and ability to resist formidable neighbours.’ He could ‘understand a plan for making an extensive settlement of an English population in Upper Canada, superintended in all its details by the government’, and thought that ‘in carrying such a scheme into effect the government must bear the whole charge.’⁴⁸ Peel also understood the wider benefits of colonization:

if he could introduce into that colony [Canada] a strong and vigorous population, speaking the English language, actuated by English feelings and habits, and creating a demand for English manufactures, he should have conferred a benefit upon the colony itself, and also upon the mother country. He was not insensible to the advantages which we derived from colonial strength and colonial importance.⁴⁹

Palmerston agreed that emigration to North America ‘would certainly be highly advantageous as creating a source of political strength and of domestic (and therefore secure) commerce.’ The First Emigration Report convinced him that ‘it is of great political importance to us to people these countries as fast as we can.’⁵⁰ Huskisson was also broadly supportive, but he did wonder where markets could be found for the huge increase in colonial produce implied by the scale of Wilmot’s ideas. Huskisson feared that with the addition of population contemplated by Wilmot, the colonies would produce surpluses beyond what could be advantageously sold, leading to ‘an equal degree of suffering with that from which it was sought to relieve them by sending them out.’⁵¹

This problem had emerged during the hearings of the Emigration Committee. Implicitly Wilmot expected Britain itself to be the market for surplus Canadian corn; indeed he sometimes made this explicit when he sought to extol the colonial consumer: ‘his habits will be your habits – his tastes, your

⁴⁷ WH2796, Robinson to Horton, 25 Mar 1826.

⁴⁸ WH2858, Peel to Horton, 12 Jul 1826.

⁴⁹ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 19, cc.1515-6, 24 Jun 1828.

⁵⁰ WH2855, Palmerston to Horton, 13 & 24 Sep 1826.

⁵¹ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 18, c.1554, 17 Apr 1828; WH2819, Memorandum by Huskisson, 23 Jun 1828.

tastes. He will exchange his surplus corn against your manufactures.’⁵² This was potentially threatening to British agriculture, and, at the time the Emigration Committees sat in 1826-27, it was not what the country gentlemen wished to hear. The government was already suspected, not without reason, of wishing to relax agricultural protection.⁵³ Several witnesses attempted to allay this concern by suggesting markets other than Britain for Canadian agricultural surpluses. One market was incoming immigrants: as long as immigration continued to increase, each year’s new arrivals would consume the surpluses of existing settlers. However, that process could not go on indefinitely, and W.B. Felton, a legislative councillor in Lower Canada, tactlessly pointed out that the time must arrive, when Canada would raise a ‘large surplus produce’ and when, ‘if Great Britain is desirous that the people of the colonies shall clothe themselves with her manufactures, she must receive their produce, or they will be compelled to manufacture for themselves.’⁵⁴ Perhaps ‘got at’ behind the scenes, Felton acknowledged in his final evidence that ‘the landed proprietor of Great Britain cannot be expected to afford encouragement for emigration without some reasonable assurance that he shall not hereafter incur the risk of being injured by the competition of colonial grain.’⁵⁵

Other possible markets for surplus Canadian corn were the West Indian colonies, or the fisheries of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.⁵⁶ Another possibility was to grow produce not directly competing with British agriculture. Felton suggested hemp, a labour-intensive crop which he had previously not thought appropriate for Lower Canada until the province should become more highly populated.⁵⁷ None of these alternatives carried much conviction. There was therefore a fault-line between Wilmot’s conception of trade between Britain and her colonies, and that of many Tory writers, though it related only to some unspecified period in the future. Wilmot evidently looked forward to a time when Canadian corn would enter

⁵² *Lectures*, Lecture IV, p.17.

⁵³ Hilton, *Corn*, pp.272-8.

⁵⁴ P.P. 1826 (404), pp.14, 53, 57, 59.

⁵⁵ P.P. 1826 (404), p.228. See also WH2883, J. Strachan to Horton, 23 Nov 1826.

⁵⁶ P.P. 1826 (404), pp.50-53, 60-70, 81-3; see also P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.132.

⁵⁷ P.P. 1826 (404), pp.31, 228-31.

Britain in quantity, and when colonial demand for British manufactures would enable Britain to forego agricultural protection. Protectionists happily supported preferential tariffs for colonial produce which did not directly compete with British agriculture, such as Canadian timber or West Indian sugar,⁵⁸ but did not want to admit colonial corn on a regular basis.

III

While there was much support in principle for bringing an addition of population to Canada, it mattered greatly how it was done. Hitherto, most emigration had fallen into one of two categories, and Wilmot disapproved of both:

Colonies have been established, either by the emigration of persons with a small capital of their own, or by the emigration of labourers who have, by a comparatively painful and circuitous process, succeeded in ultimately transforming themselves into capitalists and colonists; but in this latter case, the process has been slow, and the numbers few.⁵⁹

Unlike Southey and Peel, Wilmot did not approve the emigration of small capitalists, though he admitted that government had no business to stop or impede them if they wished to go. The emigration of people of enterprise with some capital of their own, leaving behind ‘the destitute and unemployed, or uselessly employed paupers’ was, in Wilmot’s ‘wage-fund’ inspired view, ‘the most deservedly unpopular circumstance’ connected with the subject.⁶⁰ He believed that these small proprietors were driven from the country by the pressure of pauperism below them. It was the paupers who should be encouraged to go; the small farmers and capitalists might then ‘remain at home and employ their capital to the advantage of themselves and their country.’⁶¹

⁵⁸ Gambles, *Protection*, p.155.

⁵⁹ P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.36.

⁶⁰ WH2858, Horton to Peel, 25 Sep 1830.

⁶¹ P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.36; see also *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 19, cc.1511-2, (Maurice Fitzgerald, 24 Jun 1828).

However if ‘wage-fund’ theory applied at home, it applied in the colonies also, and Canada too was short of capital.⁶² To send out large numbers of labourers, unsupported by capital, would merely transfer the problem of pauperism from Britain to Canada, and by doing so impede rather than accelerate its development. As Colonial Undersecretary, Wilmot was acutely aware that Canada struggled to accommodate the existing level of voluntary emigration. Colonial officials frequently complained of the burdens imposed, especially at Quebec, by the arrival of destitute emigrants.⁶³ Witnesses to the Emigration Committee concurred that voluntary emigration at the level of about 10,000 a year into Quebec was just about manageable, with the majority of new arrivals going on to the United States. However there were always some who could not find work, and these were relieved at a cost of about £3000 per annum, met partly by the government and partly by voluntary subscription. Unregulated emigration on a larger scale would cause disproportionate problems: another four or five thousand voluntary emigrants would be an unacceptable ‘burthen to the colony.’⁶⁴ Colonial opinion was deeply hostile to any idea of sending pauper emigrants to Canada unless the process were properly regulated by government, with adequate provision for them at the receiving end, and it was only too likely that colonial assemblies (and the United States) would legislate to check any indiscriminate shipment of paupers.⁶⁵

For all these reasons, Wilmot was throughout his career a fierce opponent of what he called ‘desultory’ emigration – unregulated emigration by those who had little more than the price of their passage, and who on arrival in the colonies would merely swell an already glutted labour market. Such emigration had been ‘uniformly ruinous and destructive’; in his more

⁶² P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.131.

⁶³ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 1, c.42, (Nicholas Vansittart, 28 Apr 1820); CO 42/196, f.399, Dalhousie to Bathurst, 20 Dec 1823.

⁶⁴ P.P. 1826-27 (550), pp.120-4, 351-2, 388.

⁶⁵ P.P. 1826-27 (550), pp.36-7; *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 18, cc.1215-6, 18 Mar 1828; *Inquiry*, Fourth Series (second version), pp.108-9; WH2756, Buchanan to Horton, 1 Sep 1830; P.P. 1831-32 (334), pp.23-4; CO 384/27, ff.11-14, Emigration Commissioners to Goderich, 20 Jul 1831.

authoritarian moods Wilmot wondered whether it ought even to be permitted.⁶⁶

It was on similar grounds that he opposed Howick's bill in 1831 to permit parishes to mortgage their rates to finance pauper emigration. Howick 'claimed the merit' of having adopted Wilmot's ideas,⁶⁷ and in many respects he did,⁶⁸ but his bill made no provision for assisted emigrants after they had arrived in Canada, beyond providing them 'in the first instance with the means of obtaining their own subsistence.' Wilmot believed that the government must have formed 'an exaggerated estimate of the demand for labour' in the colonies.' He complained that a labourer, once found employment, would have no further claim to government assistance, should he lose that employment at the end of the season. He would 'become a pauper in his new country, as he was in his old one, but without the legal right of maintenance which he possessed at home.'⁶⁹ Howick's tenure at the Colonial Office in fact marked a distinct break from the paternalistic principles that Wilmot espoused. In accordance with the new policy towards poor relief being adopted at home, Howick tried to phase out assistance to able-bodied immigrants to the colonies.⁷⁰ As we have seen, Wilmot approved the basic principles behind the new poor law:⁷¹ the difference was that he always sought to provide a generous substitute for the English pauper's right to parish relief.

What was needed, Wilmot argued, was a system to send unemployed paupers with just enough capital to enable them to establish themselves in Canada. Wilmot believed that by limiting emigration to unemployed paupers, but granting them land and equipping them with the tools and supplies they needed to get established, he used capital in the most efficient possible manner, providing an adequate fund in the colony without compromising the

⁶⁶ Add. MS 40392, ff. 138-9, Horton to Peel, 26 Feb 1827; *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 16, c.513, 15 Feb 1827; *Causes*, pp.20-21; WH2802, Horton to Grenville, 7 Feb 1826.

⁶⁷ *Hansard*, 3rd ser., 2, c.880, 22 Feb 1831.

⁶⁸ The bill has generally been regarded as adopting Hortonian rather than Wakefieldian principles: for instance, Cowan, *Emigration*, p.97.

⁶⁹ Grey Papers, GRE/B111/7, 'Observations on Lord Howick's Emigration Bill', n.d. [Feb 1831].

⁷⁰ Cameron and Maude, *Assisted Emigration*, p.22.

⁷¹ Above, pp.112-4.

fund available for employment at home. In theoretical terms, he did not go so far as to say that capital lay ‘idle’ at home, but he made a key distinction between its ‘productive’ and ‘unproductive’ use.⁷² Capital used to maintain paupers in idleness was unproductive. The same money, or some of it, could be converted to productive use in facilitating the cultivation, by those same paupers, of fertile land in the colonies.⁷³ Wilmot was groping towards the position later taken by Wakefield. In a private exchange with Grenville, he observed that Grenville had lumped ‘land’ with ‘capital’:

I, on the contrary, am disposed to make a threefold division – first, land – secondly, capital, such as roads, and drains, and machines, or implements (including horses and cattle) whereby land is worked, and thirdly human industry, to put into action those machines and implements. In the emigration plan, I propose to take human industry from Ireland or Scotland, or wherever it may be redundant, – to take capital from the resources of this country – and to place both on fertile lands in Canada, or elsewhere, where the result of their combination may be wealth ... I contend that land without capital, is useless in Canada – that human industry, without occupation, is useless in Ireland.⁷⁴

The idea of both capital and labour being redundant, in relation to land, was developed more clearly by Torrens in the following year,⁷⁵ and by 1828 Huskisson was making the same point: ‘If individuals were encouraged to emigrate, they should be enabled to employ themselves profitably in the new countries to which they were sent; and the capital at present lying idle in this country might probably be advantageously put in requisition for that purpose.’⁷⁶

The plan suggested by the Emigration Committee was even more efficient, in that emigrants were to have the choice, on arriving at Quebec, either to accept

⁷² The distinction is derived from Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Book II, chapter 3. Capital was used ‘productively’ if the capital would be reproduced, as for instance when a farmer sowed a field, and ‘unproductively’ if the capital was permanently lost, as for instance in paying a violinist to play. Scrope offered a fundamental critique of this distinction, arguing that any expenditure which produced a saleable article (including performance) was productive: ‘Political Economists’, pp.2-12.

⁷³ P.P. 1826-27 (550), pp.39-40.

⁷⁴ WH2802, Horton to Grenville, 7 Feb 1826.

⁷⁵ Torrens, *Substance*, pp.9-15.

⁷⁶ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 18, c.962, 4 Mar 1828.

government assistance to become settlers or to enter the local labour market. The balance between the supply of labour and the demand would thus be regulated by potential entrants to the market. The Committee also recommended that a supply of labour to the Cape, New South Wales, and Van Diemen's Land, carefully proportioned to the demand, would benefit those colonies and bring forward the time when they could finance themselves.⁷⁷ Although Wilmot tended to emphasize the virtues of his own plan of colonization, he was not opposed to the emigration of as much 'labour' as the colonies could properly absorb, with no assistance given beyond the cost of transport.⁷⁸

Wilmot distinguished carefully between 'emigration' and 'colonization'. He defined 'emigration' as 'the mere pouring of an indefinite quantity of labourers ... without capital, into a country where there is a very small proportion of capital previously existing to employ them', and 'colonization' as 'the planting of colonists in a soil prepared to receive them, aided by a small portion of capital, to enable them immediately to take root and flourish'.⁷⁹ 'Colonization' had several advantages beyond those already mentioned. Above all it provided the means of accelerated colonial development, with all the benefits to the empire which followed from that.⁸⁰ It was particularly well-suited to families of emigrants, 'inasmuch as their children, which are a burthen to them in the mother country, constitute the principal source of their riches in the colony.'⁸¹ In the case of English paupers, it offered a fair exchange of a permanent settlement in a colony, for the right to parish relief that they would be giving up, and therefore offered an inducement to English paupers to emigrate which would otherwise be lacking.⁸² It answered the objection that assisted emigrants would simply flit to the United States, with its more ample market for labour. Many 'labourer'

⁷⁷ P.P. 1826-27 (550), pp.36-8, 144-64, 202-9.

⁷⁸ WH2858, Horton to Peel, 25 Sep 1830. In 1838, influenced perhaps by Wakefield's relative success, Wilmot inverted his earlier emphasis, stating that 'colonization should only *commence* when the labour market is redundant': WH2802, Horton to Grenville, 7 Feb 1826 (Wilmot's marginal note, 1838).

⁷⁹ P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.35.

⁸⁰ P.P. 1826 (404), p.24.

⁸¹ WH2858, Horton to Peel, 25 Sep 1830.

⁸² WH2843, Horton to Malthus, 24 Jul 1830.

emigrants did just that: settlers, however, developed an attachment to land that they had cultivated themselves.⁸³ Finally, to settle emigrants on their own land as peasant proprietors, had, as Karen O'Brien observed, 'a decidedly Tory Romantic tinge' to it.⁸⁴ Wilmot drew a lyrical picture of the emigrant assisted to settle according to his principle. The settler:

would be firmly fixed in the soil, instead of taking his chance of obtaining subsistence: instead of being like a plant thrown down upon the earth, either to take root, or to be withered by the sun, he would be like a young and vigorous tree set by a careful hand, with all advantages of soil and climate.⁸⁵

The future 'independence' of his settlers, and their children, was just as appealing a prospect to Wilmot as their comfort and prosperity.⁸⁶ It was not a pipe-dream, as Wilmot had the example of the Talbot settlement on Lake Erie. Its founder, Colonel Talbot, admittedly a partial witness, reported that 'a population of twelve thousand souls at the least' had grown up in the space of ten years. Most settlers had been 'persons of the very poorest description' on their arrival in the province, but they had become 'as independent, as contented, and as happy a body of yeomanry as any in the world.'⁸⁷

Wilmot envisaged an active role for government in managing colonization, bringing method and regularity where emigration had too often been haphazard and injurious. 'Regular' and 'well-regulated' were among his favourite words. This was already a 'principal object' in his 'Outline of a Plan'.⁸⁸ Instead of the 'desultory departures of straggling individuals', those emigrating 'under the authority of government' could be 'better superintended, better supported, and better localized.'⁸⁹ Wilmot welcomed the involvement of capitalists, and had assisted in the formation of the Canada

⁸³ P.P. 1826 (404), pp.18, 48, 150; Grey Papers, GRE/B111/7, Horton to Howick, 8 Apr 1831; P.P. 1828 (109), 11.

⁸⁴ O'Brien, 'Colonial Emigration', pp.169-70.

⁸⁵ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 16, c.481, 15 Feb 1827.

⁸⁶ P.P. 1823 (561), p.173 ; WH2802, Horton to Grenville, 7 Feb 1826; WH2900, Horton to P. Robinson, 17 Nov 1827; WH2856, Horton to Palmerston, 12 Dec 1829, paper 'B'; *Lectures*, Lecture IX, p.22.

⁸⁷ P.P. 1823 (561), p.178.

⁸⁸ P.P. 1823 (561), p.169.

⁸⁹ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 14, c.1364, 14 Mar 1826.

Company and other colonial land companies, as Galt acknowledged,⁹⁰ but he did not accept Galt's view that the management of emigration should be left to them, any more than that it should be left to private individuals to manage for themselves:

Emigration upon an extended scale, carried into effect by societies or individuals, acting upon no common principle ... might be found to end in failure; and at all events, could not inspire equal confidence among the emigrants ... or in the colonies.⁹¹

This was also a difference between Wilmot and the Wakefieldians. While Wilmot emphasised the principle that 'the government should direct and conduct the emigration and colonization of pauper labourers anxious to emigrate',⁹² they envisaged their 'National Colonization Society' taking the co-ordinating role.⁹³

Wilmot's belief in an active role for government is most evident in relation to the Passenger Acts which regulated, to some extent, conditions for the Atlantic crossing.⁹⁴ These acts attracted fierce criticism from *laissez faire* ideologues and others who complained that they increased the cost of the passage and prevented many who wished to emigrate from doing so. A.C. Buchanan, the English agent in New York, complained that the effect of the 1823 Act would be to turn emigration to American shipping and to the United States; John Astle, an Irish ship-owner, thought the Act 'totally unfit for the wants and manners of the Irish emigrants', and 'very injurious to the trade.'⁹⁵ Several witnesses to the Emigration Committee complained that the regulations were over-generous, prescribing a level of comfort that emigrants were not used to and did not need. Richard Uniacke, the attorney-general of Nova Scotia, argued that, though humanitarian in intent, their effect was to

⁹⁰ [Galt] 'Bandana', p.474. Galt was closely involved in the promotion of the Canada Land Company.

⁹¹ *Inquiry*, Fourth Series (second version), p.91.

⁹² WH2886, Horton to Charles Tennant, 22 Jun 1830.

⁹³ *Chronicle*, 18 Jun 1830.

⁹⁴ MacDonagh, *Government Growth*, pp.66-73, discusses the repeal of these acts in 1827 and partial reinstatement in 1828.

⁹⁵ P.P. 1825 (129), pp.26-7, 133-4.

prevent destitute people from leaving a country where they were starving.⁹⁶ In the same vein W.E. Tooke criticised this:

‘pretty specimen of legislation! which, lest the Irish peasant should not find the best lodging, the best feeding, and the best surgical attendance on ship-board, keeps him on land at the imminent risk of getting no lodging, medicine, nor food at all.’⁹⁷

Wilmot was well aware that the Passenger Acts increased the cost of passage and inhibited voluntary emigration, but he defended them staunchly all the same. To relax or repeal them would permit just the sort of emigration that he was anxious to prevent.⁹⁸ His priority was that emigrants should arrive at Quebec well-nourished and in good health: too often this had not been the case and government regulation was evidently necessary.⁹⁹ On this point Wilmot was outnumbered in his own Emigration Committee: while the Committee was generally supportive of his plans for state-aided emigration, they applied *laissez faire* principles to voluntary emigration: ‘to allow it to *take its own course*, to remove all the impediments limiting its extent, and not to interfere with or assist it in any shape.’¹⁰⁰ It is ironic that the one legislative result of the Committee’s work was the repeal, in 1827, of all the Passenger Acts. This went quickly through both Houses without incident. Although Wilmot had to introduce the bill, it was clearly against his own wishes.¹⁰¹

MacDonagh described the consequences:

A stream of protests flowed in at once to the Colonial Office from the North American provinces and the more reputable shipowners of the United Kingdom. The fears expressed in these complaints were all too well justified by events, for the year produced unprecedented shipwreck, sickness and even starvation at sea.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ P.P. 1826 (404), pp.38, 71-2, 80, 172-3; P.P. 1826-27 (550), pp.90-98.

⁹⁷ [Tooke] ‘Emigration Report’, p.360.

⁹⁸ Add. MS 40392, ff.138-9, Horton to Peel, 26 Feb 1827.

⁹⁹ P.P. 1825 (129), pp.10-15.

¹⁰⁰ P.P. 1826-27 (550), 36.

¹⁰¹ *Chronicle*, 27 Mar 1827; *Times*, 29 Dec 1827, letter from ‘An Irishman’.

¹⁰² MacDonagh, *Government Growth*, pp.66-7; see also Cowan, *Emigration*, pp.147-8.

In fact, as MacDonagh recognised, the repeal probably did not give rise to the specific problems which occurred. Nevertheless, the fact that serious problems did occur gave Wilmot the opportunity to reintroduce a modified Passenger Act in 1828. Peter Dunkley has demonstrated the key role played by Wilmot in gathering evidence and preparing new legislation, and has argued that the ‘unexacting requirements of the 1828 Passenger Act’ are explained by the need to strike a balance between colonial concerns and the strong political pressure at home to give encouragement to voluntary emigration.¹⁰³

The Commons debate over the 1828 bill represented a significant clash between *laissez-faire* doctrinaires and ‘practical men’, and Huskisson’s comment, that he was ‘unable to understand the nature of those pure abstract principles which were to prevent them from interfering where the interests of humanity were at stake’, is a well-known expression of liberal Tory pragmatism.¹⁰⁴ Wilmot’s comments on the same legislation suggest an even more paternalistic attitude: ‘no one ... who looked at the subject without prejudice would leave the ignorant persons who crowded to the coasts of Ireland, either at the mercy of the captains with whom they sailed, or to their own unassisted discretion in providing for the voyage.’¹⁰⁵ The new regulations proposed little more than that the master of a ship, taking out emigrant passengers, should provide adequate water and food for the voyage – this was only the ‘common dictate of humanity.’ Wilmot professed astonishment that members could ‘object to regulations such as those proposed by the bill, on the ground that they were in violation of the principles of free trade.’ And, he told them, they did so to no purpose, for the colonies ‘had no disposition to receive all who went from this country as emigrants’, in particular those who arrived wretched and destitute.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Dunkley, ‘Emigration and the State’, pp.358-9.

¹⁰⁴ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 18, c.962, 4 Mar 1828.

¹⁰⁵ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 18, c.952, 4 Mar 1828.

¹⁰⁶ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 18, cc.1214-7, 18 Mar 1828.

If the successive Passenger Acts marked, as MacDonagh suggested, a ‘pattern of government growth’, then government did not grow quickly enough for Wilmot’s liking.

IV

Wilmot’s plan of colonization naturally appealed to colonial witnesses to the Emigration Committee, who saw in the proposed accession of population and capital a valuable means of accelerating colonial development without flooding labour markets. The 1826 Committee in particular took a great deal of evidence as to the availability of land, the rate at which the various provinces could absorb new population, and the means by which new land was brought into cultivation.¹⁰⁷ This was supplemented by the reports of Colonel Cockburn and of John Richards, both sent out by the government to identify land suitable for settlement and to assess what difficulties might lie in the way of colonization on a significant scale.¹⁰⁸ But for all the careful attention that he paid to these relatively straightforward factors, Wilmot seems to have given surprisingly little thought to the kind of society which would be created in the colonies, if his model of emigration was implemented on a large scale, or to the social and economic problems which might emerge along the way.

Wilmot’s ‘yeoman’ solution was attractive on many levels, as we have seen, but, to many commentators, settlement on this model could not produce a healthy society on its own. Among the respondents to Wilmot’s ‘Outline of a Plan’, Thomas Babington feared for the moral condition of a colony composed of emigrant paupers who might have been pressured to go. ‘Persons of a little substance and of superior intelligence’ should also be encouraged to emigrate, so that the colony might enjoy the ‘advantages of intermixture of ranks’. He emphasised the need for religious provision, and also argued that a grant of 100 acres per emigrant family might be too much, and that the population

¹⁰⁷ P.P. 1826 (404), *passim*.

¹⁰⁸ P.P. 1828 (109) ; P.P. 1831-32 (334).

should be settled more densely in villages. Many of these points were also made by Southey and by Michael Nolan, MP. John Galt argued that the emigrants should be made ‘in some measure dependent upon landlords and proprietors of townships rather than making them all individual and independent proprietors – as tending to make them less democratical.’¹⁰⁹ The ‘intermixture of ranks’ remained an important consideration for Southey, who urged Britain to follow the example of the Greek colonies. These ‘contained a mixture of all classes of society. Regularity and subordination were thus encouraged and preserved in all stages of their progress, and they rose to wealth and eminence much earlier than they would otherwise have done.’¹¹⁰

The benefits of concentration of population, and the problems arising from mismanagement of land policy in Upper Canada, had already been highlighted by Robert Gourlay, a Scottish farmer who had emigrated to the province in 1817, and who had enjoyed a brief and turbulent career there as the province’s pocket equivalent of Cobbett and Hunt. Paranoid, egotistical, and verbose, Gourlay was largely ignored, but there were nuggets of strong insight hidden in the dross. He argued that land had been granted far too freely in Upper Canada, and too much of it left uncultivated:

A single family planted down on a square mile, as is the case in Upper Canada, can have no convenience – no sufficient strength to make head against obstacles to improvement; and while the settler is held in misery, little value is added to the land he occupies. Plant down two families, twelve, twenty, or more, on the same extent of ground, and each addition, up to a certain proportion, insures greater and greater comfort and convenience to the whole, while an instant and great value is given to the soil.

The consequences of such thin dispersal of the population were social as well as economic: the people had ‘retrograded in civilization and moral worth.’ Gourlay’s solution was to impose a tax on all land, cultivated or not. This would force settlement and cultivation, give land an artificial value, encourage concentration of population, and provide a fund to make emigration self-

¹⁰⁹ WH2868, Précis [1823].

¹¹⁰ [R. Southey], ‘State and Prospects of the Country’, *QR* 78 (Apr 1829), pp.511-2.

supporting. Gourlay thus anticipated the Wakefield system in all essential respects.¹¹¹

Land had been used in Upper Canada ‘to accomplish nearly every imaginable purpose except that of encouraging compact and effective settlement.’¹¹² Generous grants had been made to ex-servicemen and loyalists and government officials; of the large grants made to senior officers and higher officials, Wilmot learned in 1823, ‘by far the greater proportion’ remained uncultivated and unproductive.¹¹³ Millions of acres had been held back, as Crown and Clergy Reserves, to meet future costs of administration and of an established Church. The result, by the early 1820s, was:

a small population of some one hundred thousand ... sprinkled over an extensive area stretching for five hundred miles along the St. Lawrence and Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. These people lacked adequate means of keeping in touch with one another, religious and educational activity faced almost insuperable obstacles, and it was difficult to get produce to market. It was a primitive society, with few of the amenities of civilization, in which an almost brutalizing amount of work often brought little return. The price of land remained low.¹¹⁴

The problem was understood within government. In 1815 Bathurst reduced the standard grant from 200 to 100 acres. Sir Peregrine Maitland, the Lieutenant Governor, began to enforce the duty to cultivate granted land, adjusted the scale of fees for non-gratuitous grants – though these remained relatively few in number – and imposed a modest tax on land.¹¹⁵ New regulations for the sale of vacant land, originally introduced by the Colonial Office in New South Wales, were adopted with modifications in Upper Canada, though loyalists and servicemen continued to receive free grants and

¹¹¹ Gourlay, *General Introduction to Statistical Account of Upper Canada ...* (1822), cccxl, cccl, cccxiv; Ghosh, *Classical Macroeconomics*, pp.222-7.

¹¹² Gerald M. Craig, *Upper Canada: the Formative Years, 1784-1841* (Toronto, 1963), p.131.

¹¹³ CO 42/197, ff.462-6, J.B. Robinson to Wilmot, 10 Apr 1823.

¹¹⁴ Craig, *Upper Canada*, pp.131-2; CO 42/377 ff.218-21, Précis of the General State of the Granted and Ungranted Lands in the Province of Upper Canada, 14 Jan 1826.

¹¹⁵ CO 42/372, ff.210-19, Maitland to Bathurst, 15 May 1824; CO 42/375 ff.139-41, Reply to Address, 5 Apr 1825.

there was continuing provision for poor settlers.¹¹⁶ The overall scale of new land grants was sharply reduced in the mid-1820s.¹¹⁷ The Canada Company was formed with the intention of purchasing and developing the Crown and Clergy Reserves. By 1826, Maitland reported that ‘land is in general considered throughout the province of much greater value and is actually sold at much higher prices than before the war’, though the legacy of past policies continued to hold the province back.¹¹⁸ Wilmot enquired how lands left uncultivated might be compulsorily recovered by the Crown, commenting that ‘the interest of the industrious part of the community’ was so much involved that ‘any reasonable measure of escheat could hardly fail to be popular throughout the colonies.’ He had in mind that a proportion, for instance one-fifth, of each uncultivated grant should become forfeit on the adoption of the policy, with provision for the gradual forfeiture of the whole if improvement conditions were not complied with.¹¹⁹ There were evident legal and political difficulties in the way of such a measure, however expedient, and nothing had been done by the time he left office.¹²⁰

Wilmot accepted that ‘large uncultivated grants are the most serious obstacles to the satisfactory colonization of a country.’¹²¹ His plan of emigration was of course designed to bring population to Upper Canada, and his specific proposal – to grant each family 70 acres with a further 30 available if the grant conditions were complied with – was less lavish than preceding norms, while promising to disperse capital through many small grants rather than a few large ones. Nonetheless his plan was evidently not tailored towards producing a highly concentrated population.

Wakefield addressed this issue in his *Sketch of a Proposal for Colonizing Australasia* in 1829. He argued that colonial land should be sold at a

¹¹⁶ CO 43/41, ff.240-1, Bathurst to Maitland, 28 Jul 1825; Craig, *Upper Canada*, p.139.

¹¹⁷ CO 42/372, ff.139-42, Abstract ... of Grants of Land ... [1823]; 42/375, ff.293-6, Abstract ... [1824]; 42/377, ff.93-6, Abstract ... [1825]; P.P. 1831-32 (334), pp.24-5.

¹¹⁸ CO 42/377, ff.9-11, Maitland to Bathurst, 7 Mar 1826; Craig, *Upper Canada*, pp.132-3, 140.

¹¹⁹ WH2900, Horton to Cockburn, 16 Jan 1827.

¹²⁰ CO 42/204, ff.118-21, Dalhousie to Bathurst, 5 Apr 1825.

¹²¹ WH2858, Horton to Peel, 25 Sep 1830.

‘sufficient price’, not granted free. Emigrants arriving without capital would have to work as labourers for a few years before they could afford to buy land of their own: this would provide a labour force, hitherto lacking, to work the land of capitalists. Capital, previously deterred by the want of a steady supply of labour, would be attracted to the colony. To help to give a value to land, settlement should be concentrated rather than dispersed. This would accelerate colonial development, as concentrated settlement would give scope for artisanal trades, retailers, teachers and clergymen, and all the amenities of civilized living. The division of labour would proceed more quickly. Some of the proceeds of sales of land could be used to fund pauper emigration from Britain.

Wilmot Horton’s relations with Wakefield and his supporters in the National Colonization Society have been considered many times.¹²² These accounts have done much to modify the perception, assiduously cultivated by Wakefield himself, that Wakefield’s correct theory of colonization corrected and superseded Wilmot’s faulty one. Evidently Wakefield’s main focus was on colonial development, while Wilmot’s was on the relief of pauperism, but the differences between them on land policy and the principle of ‘concentration’ have been exaggerated. Wilmot maintained that

the true principle of disposing of Crown lands in the colonies is not to be found in the principle of forced diffusion of population too long acted upon by the British government, or in the system of ‘forced concentration’ recommended by the Society, but in a common sense medium between the two extremes.¹²³

Easy access to markets was an obvious factor in the valuation of land which would naturally encourage settlers to choose land which was near to existing settlement. Any attempt to force concentration beyond the level that arose naturally from the free choices of market participants must, Wilmot argued, be counter-productive. The Wakefieldians were never able to say convincingly how they would achieve a level of concentration beyond this, or why they

¹²² Jones, ‘Wilmot Horton’, pp.279-309; D. Pike, ‘Wilmot Horton and the National Colonization Society’, *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand*, 7 (1956), pp.205-10; Ghosh, ‘Colonization Controversy’; Johnston, *Emigration*, pp.163-74.

¹²³ WH2886, Horton to C. Tennant, 22 Jun 1830.

would want to. They were also vague as to what would constitute a ‘sufficient price’ for land, and reluctant to accept that different principles might apply in different colonies. Wilmot suggested that Wakefieldian methods might well be appropriate for new colonies, but pointed out that in Canada the price of land must be largely influenced by the price in the United States; Wakefield however was apt to claim universality for his principles. Wilmot pointed out that colonization on Wakefield’s model could not be done on the scale necessary to relieve pauperism at home. First, he knew from experience that colonial labour markets could not absorb large numbers of immigrants. Secondly, sales of Crown lands at an artificial price would not be possible until existing surpluses of land in private hands had been absorbed by the market: the policy would merely give a windfall profit to existing landholders.¹²⁴

The key difference between Wilmot and Wakefield is in their respective visions of colonial development. Wilmot emphasized peasant proprietorship while Wakefield wanted to reproduce large-scale capitalistic farming on the English model. The distinction was not absolute – Wilmot welcomed the involvement of the Canada Company in Upper Canada, and Wakefield accepted that labourers should be in a position to start up as independent farmers, if they wished, within a period of a few years. Nonetheless it was Wakefield who had the interests of capitalists closer to heart. His model implied that colonial wages should be low so that capitalists would be encouraged to invest. Marx argued that Wakefield inadvertently revealed the antagonism between – and the mutual exclusiveness of – capitalistic production and independent labourers controlling their own means of production. He seized on the remark by Wakefield’s ‘disciple’, Herman Merivale, that there was in the colonies:

an urgent desire for cheaper and more subservient labourers – for a class to whom the capitalist might dictate terms instead of being dictated to by them ...
In the ancient civilized countries, the labourer, though free, is by law of nature

¹²⁴ Grey Papers, GRE/B111/7, Horton to Howick, 17 Feb 1831; [Scrope], ‘Malthus and Sadler’, p.143.

dependent on capitalists; in the colonies this dependence must be created by artificial means.¹²⁵

Wilmot would not have accepted that independent peasant proprietorship was incompatible with capitalist farming: he thought the two could co-exist. His plans were not anti-capitalist: he valued property and inequality highly, and he believed that poverty resulted from the over-supply of labour, not from capitalistic expropriation. Nonetheless his scheme did involve a modest redistribution of capital among his emigrant settlers, and was intended to bring about a larger one in the form of permanently higher wages at home. Believing that a decent level of wages was good for an economy as a whole (because it tended to increase demand) Wilmot also wanted to see wages in the colonies maintained at a good level.¹²⁶ His aim was not to undermine market forces but to adjust supply to demand so as to serve the interests of the many: this entailed some dispersal of capital and a narrowing of extreme levels of inequality.

Alongside these very general considerations regarding land policy and the mode of settlement, Wilmot's ideas generated specific problems of social integration. Lower Canada, predominantly French-speaking and with French laws, was not self-evidently well-suited to receive a large influx of British immigrants, though by 1830 A.C. Buchanan, now the Resident Agent in Quebec 'for the Superintendence of Settlers and Emigrants in the Canadas', thought that prejudices against British immigration had been largely overcome.¹²⁷ In Upper Canada, many doubted whether it would be possible to integrate thousands of Catholic peasants from southern Ireland into a province hitherto populated mostly by loyalist Americans and by Presbyterians from Scotland and northern Ireland. This was one of the issues at stake in the 'experimental' emigrations led by Peter Robinson in 1823 and 1825, and many prejudices were entertained against Robinson's parties both by previous settlers and by officials, starting with Earl Dalhousie, the Governor General,

¹²⁵ Extract from Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol 1 (1867), in George Yarrow and Piotr Jasinski (eds.), *Privatization* (1996), p.112. See also Brinley Thomas, *Migration and Economic Growth* (Cambridge, 1954), pp.7-10.

¹²⁶ P.P. 1826-27 (550), pp.17, 35; Grey Papers, GRE/B111/7, Horton to Howick, 17 Feb 1831.

¹²⁷ WH2756, Buchanan to Horton, Quebec, 30 Apr 1830.

who protested against the arrival of ‘the most poor and the most needy classes from districts of Ireland where the people has set all law at defiance.’¹²⁸ In the spring of 1824 Dalhousie believed his fears to have been realised when he received reports of an affray involving Robinson’s settlers. Dalhousie’s despatch, based on reports from local magistrates, described the Irish settlers as ‘a sort of lawless banditti ... threatening destruction to ... lives and property’; it caused much consternation in the Colonial Office.¹²⁹ It was in time contradicted by a comprehensive report from Maitland. He found that the trouble originated in ill-feeling between Robinson’s party and those already settled in the district, who were jealous of the assistance given to the new arrivals. ‘Religious and party distinctions greatly increased the irritation’; a drunken militia man had fired at the Irish settlers, who, finding that they got no help from the magistrates, had taken matters into their own hands. A posse sent to bring them to order, led by and largely composed of Orangemen, had fired into a house in a ‘wanton and dangerous attack upon the lives of the new settlers’, killing one of them. Maitland found that the local magistrates had utterly failed in their duty to administer the law impartially, and that the settlers might as a result ‘have imbibed an idea that they were all to be held without discrimination the guilty party in any outrage, and that the laws were in force not for their protection but merely for their coercion.’¹³⁰

Although the Irish settlers were clearly more sinned against than sinning, the evident tension between them and the old settlers raised doubts about the wisdom of introducing a substantial Irish Roman Catholic population into Upper Canada. Even the supportive J.B. Robinson observed that he would ‘not like the idea of *very great numbers* of the Catholics coming among us.’ This he described as his only scruple on the subject of emigration from Ireland.¹³¹ Again in 1825, although the settlers were now ‘all situated on their

¹²⁸ CO 42/196, f.399, Dalhousie to Bathurst, 20 Dec 1823.

¹²⁹ CO 42/200, ff.112-9, Dalhousie to Bathurst, 18 May 1824; CO43/41, f.198, Bathurst to Maitland, 29 Oct 1824.

¹³⁰ CO 42/373, ff.66-7, Maitland to Bathurst, 27 Jul 1824; ff.74-7, Major Hillier to J.H. Powell, 13 May 1824; ff.78-83, J. Fitzgibbon to Hillier, 10 Jun 1824. See also CO 384/12: ff.288-9, J.B. Robinson to Horton, 20 May 1824; ff.109-12, Robinson to Horton, n.d.

¹³¹ CO 384/12, ff. 282-3, J.B. Robinson to Horton, 19 Feb 1824.

farms and living on very friendly terms with the old settlers',¹³² still Robinson thought that there remained 'with many a prejudice against emigrants from Ireland, or rather ... a real apprehension of trouble from their neighbourhood that would lead them to deprecate an accession to their numbers.'¹³³

There were more positive indications. Robinson himself reported from the legislature that 'in discussion about Irish emigrants ... an opinion was decidedly expressed in the assembly, and combated by no one, that the alarms which had been spread were idle, and that it would be well if you should send us over 100,000 of them.'¹³⁴ Maitland sent very positive reports of the progress of both Robinson's parties. The 1825 party had been 'kindly received by the Irish Protestants settled in the adjoining Townships.' The affray of 1824 had not 'left any unfriendly feeling behind it', and the magistrates reported that 'these settlers are, equally with the other inhabitants, an industrious, peaceable, and contented population.'¹³⁵ The Irish settlers expressed themselves 'grateful to our gracious good King, and to His Majesty's worthy good and humane government, for all they have, and, we hope, yet intend to do for us', and promised that, in the event of invasion, 'we, when called upon to face and expel the common foe, will, to a man, follow our brave commanders ... and, if we have no better weapons in our hands, mow them down with our Irish shillelagh.'¹³⁶ Such promises were put to the test in the rebellion of 1837-38, and the Irish settlers were not found wanting: a body of them 'self-assembled in line before Government House', and told the Lieutenant Governor, Sir Francis Head, that 'they were doing well in the world, that they felt grateful to the government, and had come to fight for the British constitution.'¹³⁷

¹³² CO 384/13, ff.57-8, J.B. Robinson to P. Robinson, 6 Feb 1825.

¹³³ CO 384/12, ff.292-9, J.B. Robinson to Horton, 14 Jun 1825.

¹³⁴ CO 384/12, ff.292-9, Robinson to Horton, 14 Jun 1825.

¹³⁵ CO 42/377, ff.168-73, Maitland to Bathurst, 31 Mar 1826. Peter Robinson too felt sure that any animosity between Protestant and Catholic in Upper Canada was imported from Ireland, was not serious, was wearing away, and would subside completely: P.P. 1825 (129), pp.24-5.

¹³⁶ CO 42/377 ff. 188-9, Address ... [1826].

¹³⁷ R.W. Horton, *Exposition and Defence of Earl Bathurst's Administration* (1838), pp.35-6. This is in marked contrast to the anti-British sentiment which most Irish emigrants took with them to the New World.

Encouraged by the Robinson brothers and by Thomas Talbot, Wilmot had always taken the view that ‘the bad character of parties previous to emigration is no indication whatever of their subsequent conduct.’¹³⁸ The Irish landlords who assisted Peter Robinson to select the emigrants of 1823 and 1825 were keen ‘that some of the more fiery spirits might be disposed of’, but Robinson was unconcerned, ‘being convinced that a change of circumstances so great as that of becoming proprietors of land themselves ... would effectually cure the discontented.’¹³⁹ J.B. Robinson concurred that ‘employment is a certain cure for the disposition to riot’, and concluded that ‘we cannot think it very unsafe to reckon upon a favourable change in the behaviour of those persons when removed to Canada.’¹⁴⁰ Here again Boyd Hilton’s distinction between ‘material’ and ‘moral’ paternalism is useful.¹⁴¹ It was possible to believe in the influence of circumstances upon character without adopting the radical perspectives of Robert Owen, but it was not the common position in 1823. The successful transformation of destitute Irish paupers into contented and loyal peasant farmers may have helped to establish the point. In 1827 the *Morning Chronicle* commented, reviewing the Third Emigration Report, that ‘it is now admitted that the character of a people varies with the circumstances in which they are placed, and that neither religion nor law will preserve a people in a sound moral state, if they are in necessitous circumstances.’¹⁴²

V

The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that Wilmot Horton and his liberal Tory colleagues had a pragmatic interest in the development of colonies and colonial trade as a means of securing and extending British power and wealth, which was at least as much a guide to commercial policy as any commitment in principle to freer trade. This was perhaps one of the few points of genuine difference between liberal Tories and liberal Whigs.

¹³⁸ P.P. 1823 (561), p.179; see also P.P. 1825 (129), pp.16-19.

¹³⁹ CO 384/12, ff. 67-8, P. Robinson to Horton, 2 Apr 1824.

¹⁴⁰ CO 384/12, ff. 282-3, J.B. Robinson to Horton, 19 Feb 1824.

¹⁴¹ Hilton, *Atonement*, p.87.

¹⁴² *Chronicle*, 5 Oct 1827.

Wilmot's vision of a manufacturing Britain in symbiotic relationship with agricultural colonies was a little ahead of its time, and it did not appeal to the country gentlemen in parliament. His paternalistic instincts emerge very clearly in his determination that emigrants should be properly looked after both during the passage and after their arrival in Canada, in the interests both of the emigrants themselves and of the colony. Given his supposed 'mania' on the subject of emigration, his hostility to the 'wrong' kind of emigration is at least as striking as his enthusiasm for the 'right' kind. His conception of the proper role of government, both in providing finance and in organizing and regulating the whole process, went beyond that of most contemporaries. In all of this he showed a 'careful hand'. The Wakefieldian charge that he wanted merely to 'shovel out paupers' is hardly apt.¹⁴³ Yet his emphasis on pauper emigration – a result of his eagerness to find the most cost-effective use of capital – did leave some gaps in his conception of colonial development which were felt by some Tory commentators and by Wakefield. Above all, though, his commitment to 'colonization' rather than 'emigration'¹⁴⁴ was expensive, and this was critical to the political reception of his ideas.

¹⁴³ Above, p.12.

¹⁴⁴ Above, p.139.

5

Controverted Points:

Emigration and Other Remedies

The previous two chapters have explored Wilmot's theoretical case for emigration, in both its domestic and imperial aspects. As has been shown, his arguments were reasonably satisfying in the abstract to many leading political economists. He was less successful at the level of practical politics, where his ideas had to compete in a crowded and fractious marketplace. Among those who held to the 'liberal' side in politics, Wilmot struggled to make headway against crude but firmly-held Malthusian ideas on population, marching in tandem with a relentless insistence on economy in government. Section I of this chapter will consider the response to Wilmot's emigration proposals from this part of the political spectrum, together with Wilmot's own responses to the crucial contemporary question of 'economical reform'. It will be shown that Wilmot differed sharply on this subject from his 'liberal Tory' colleagues.

Wilmot also encountered strong resistance from Tories, and some Whig agriculturalists, who rejected the orthodox tenets of political economy in their entirety, who tended to identify national strength and prosperity with a protected agricultural sector, and whose instincts were to keep the population at home. Section II considers the reaction to Wilmot's ideas from this standpoint, together with Wilmot's response to protectionist economics. It will be shown that Wilmot was sympathetic to certain elements of the Tory case, while rejecting its more emotional elements.

The practicability of Wilmot's emigration plans is briefly assessed in section III, which concludes by summarising the reasons for Wilmot's inability to secure political support for his schemes.

I

Wilmot's 'optimistic' view of the prudential check was not shared by much of the daily press or by many in parliament. More pessimistic Malthusian notions were deeply ingrained: that the poor bred to the limit of subsistence, that Ireland in particular was already grievously over-populated, and that if anything were done to improve the ratio of population to food, then the 'vacuum' so created would be inevitably and rapidly filled up. The fable of the Hydra, evoked by the *Scotsman*,¹ was only the most vivid expression of a general sentiment. The *Morning Chronicle* was particularly consistent in its Malthusian gloom. Estimating the combined population of Britain and Ireland at 23 million, it insisted that emigration on any affordable scale must be a futile remedy. To attempt to cure pauperism by emigration was like trying to 'catch water in a sieve', while adding millions to the debt in the process.² The *Chronicle's* despair was fuelled by exaggerated notions of the rate of population growth in Ireland, such as that given by Sir Henry Parnell to the Emigration Committee.³ It saw Ireland 'proceeding in a career which famine and contagion could alone impede', and England gradually approaching the same state.⁴ This easy Malthusianism provided a stock response in parliament too. Henry Warburton, for instance, told Wilmot that, even if he spent 'a million and a half' in emigration, still 'the annual increase of the population would far exceed the annual diminution of it.'⁵ James Grattan thought the emigration plan 'radically bad', because 'the vacuum so produced would be very soon again supplied', while Hume thought that the 'void' would be filled in three years.⁶

As Senior complained, Malthusian principles, thus caricatured, had become 'the stalking-horse of negligence and injustice, the favourite objection to every

¹ Above, p.99.

² *Chronicle*, 26 Feb 1827. Watery similes facilitated much wit at Wilmot's expense. His ideas reminded Daniel O'Connell of 'the worthy Frenchman who thought of draining the Lake of Killarney ... with nothing but his hat.' *Dublin Morning Register*, 30 Oct 1827, reprinted in *Chronicle*, 3 Nov 1827.

³ P.P. 1826-27 (550), pp.200-1.

⁴ *Chronicle*, 6 Oct 1827.

⁵ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 19, c.1513, 24 Jun 1828.

⁶ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 16, cc.490, 509, 15 Feb 1827.

project for rendering the resources of the country more productive.’⁷ Wilmot shared his impatience. In 1831, he complained that ‘we have talked long enough on the subject [pauperism]; it is now ample time for us to begin to act.’⁸

The high cost of Wilmot’s particular mode of emigration, and the high level of intervention it implied, offended those who insisted on minimal and economical government. Grenville complained that Wilmot wanted to take people’s money ‘and direct it under official management, never the most economical, to schemes of distant colonization.’ This was not only contrary to ‘the first rules of political economy’, but also ‘a manifest trespass on public justice’, being, in Grenville’s view, an illegitimate extension of the power of taxation.⁹ That taxes were too high, and that distress could be relieved by remission of taxation, were staples of Ricardian – though not Malthusian – economic thinking.¹⁰ Calls for lower taxation had a natural appeal to public opinion and could unite conservatives and radicals. Agriculturalists sought reductions in tithes and in duties on items such as malt and leather, while free traders sought reductions in tariffs on imported goods. These calls were reinforced by the widely-held belief in minimal government, and the view that government in Britain was bloated and corrupt and in need of slimming down. Ministers largely accepted the principle of small-scale government, and they certainly found the pressure for ‘economical reform’ hard to resist.¹¹

Wilmot’s ministerial colleagues tended to share the attitude to emigration which these principles implied. Though they saw the benefit to the colonies,¹² they were pretty much convinced of the futility of emigration as a remedy for pauperism at home. Wilmot perceived ‘the most *rooted* scepticism on the whole of this subject on the part of the government.’¹³ F.J. Robinson argued that a scheme large enough to make a ‘sensible impression’ on Ireland would

⁷ Senior, *Lectures*, p.89.

⁸ *Lectures*, Lecture IV, p.18.

⁹ WH2802, Grenville to Horton, 31 Jan 1826.

¹⁰ Above, p.86.

¹¹ Harling, *Old Corruption*, passim.

¹² Above, pp.132-3.

¹³ WH2858, Horton to Peel, n.d. [May 1826].

be unmanageable in the colonies. He advised Wilmot to ‘give up all notion of making *great holes* in your population, and paying for that process by taxes to a great amount.’¹⁴ Peel was sure that, at £20 per emigrant, ‘it could not be expected that the excess of the population could be sensibly relieved by emigration.’¹⁵ Huskisson was satisfied that population increased more rapidly if a vacuum was created,¹⁶ and told Wilmot that he could not rely ‘upon the efficacy of any check’ to prevent population in Ireland ‘keeping pace, at least, with the degree of relief to be afforded by the remedy.’¹⁷ Canning was ‘so strongly prepossessed with the opinion that no permanent relief to the distressed population could be looked for from any encouragement which could be given to it by government’, that he never took the least interest in emigration.¹⁸ Palmerston’s views have already been quoted.¹⁹ Wilmot’s liberal colleagues were willing to encourage voluntary emigration, but not to support large-scale schemes paid for by government.

Ministers were also concerned to dampen expectations raised by discussion of the subject. In 1826, ‘strong dependence’ had been placed by distressed manufacturing labourers on ‘the intentions of ministers as to the corn laws, the modification of taxes, and emigration.’²⁰ There were many rumours in the press as to the government’s intentions, and many petitions were raised for assistance to emigrate.²¹ The Emigration Committee had to produce a short statement in February 1827 to scotch expectations, apparently entertained by ‘a considerable portion of the labouring population’, that they would be ‘transferred to and located in the British American Colonies exclusively at the

¹⁴ WH2796, Robinson to Horton, 25 Mar 1826. Robinson was temporarily converted by the First Emigration Report, and devised his own plan to finance emigration, to the tune of £600,000 per annum, from duty on imported grain. He rapidly withdrew it when it encountered the obvious objection, from the protectionists in the Cabinet, that a measure which raised revenue from imported grain must undermine agricultural protection. Johnston, *Emigration*, pp.152-3.

¹⁵ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., vol 16, c.300, 7 Dec 1826. See also WH2858, Peel to Horton, 12 Jul 1826.

¹⁶ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., vol 18, c.1554, 17 Apr 1828.

¹⁷ WH2819, Memorandum by W. Huskisson, 23 Jun 1828.

¹⁸ WH2897, Granville to Horton, 20 Nov 1826. Emigration was ‘beneath Canning’s consideration’, according to Johnston, *Emigration*, p.159.

¹⁹ Above, p.99. See also WH2856, Palmerston to Horton, 5 Dec 1829.

²⁰ *Chronicle*, 5 Dec 1826.

²¹ *Times*, 30 May 1826; *Chronicle*, 3 Nov 1826; *Hansard*, 2nd ser., vol 16, c.299, 8 Dec 1826 (Sir James Graham).

public expense'.²² Peel repeatedly warned that the 'utmost caution' was necessary on this point.²³

Reactions to Wilmot's emigration schemes reflected the distaste for 'jobbery' which energised the movement for 'economical reform'. The number of officials required to process thousands of emigrants from initial application to final settlement, and the power they would have, gave scope, as Richards warned, for 'no end' of jobbing.²⁴ There was also profound reluctance, across the political spectrum, to allow English money to be spent on what was perceived to be an Irish problem, the consequence of the greed and negligence of Irish landlords.²⁵ Ministers were naturally sensitive to this, with Peel asking 'how far it was fair to call upon the people of England, who had to pay their own poor-rates, to defray the expenditure for relieving the Irish landlords from theirs.'²⁶ These feelings were combined in Robinson's determination to avoid dealings between the Treasury and Irish landlords:

of all the reasons brought forward in favour of this scheme, the partiality of the Irish landlord for it, is in my mind the most conclusive against it: it smells of job in every part, and Spring Rice, the Knight of Kerry, ... are of all jobbers the worst, because they affect purity.²⁷

Wilmot recognised that public opinion was such that Parliament would never vote the money he required, without, first, being satisfied as to cost, and second, being shown a credible prospect of 'preventing for the future the accumulation of a pauper population.'²⁸ His efforts on the second point have already been considered.²⁹ As to cost, Wilmot relied on two main arguments: first, that settlers would in time be able to repay the cost of their relocation; second, that assisted emigration was cheaper than maintaining paupers at home and should therefore be seen as an economy, not as an expense.

²² P.P. 1826-27 (88); Add. MS 40392, ff.138-9, Horton to Peel, 26 Feb 1827.

²³ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 16, cc.231-2, 5 Dec 1826; WH2858, Peel to Horton, 12 Mar 1827.

²⁴ WH2867, Richards to Horton, 19 Dec 1830; see also *Causes*, pp.16-17.

²⁵ *Chronicle*, 21 Sep 1826; [D. Robinson] 'Ireland', p.272; [Tooke] 'Emigration Report', pp.356-7; [Southey?] 'Ireland', pp.60-61.

²⁶ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., vol 19, c.1517, 24 Jun 1828.

²⁷ WH2796, Robinson to Horton, 25 Mar 1826.

²⁸ WH2900, Horton to P. Robinson, 17 Nov 1827.

²⁹ Above, pp.99-106.

It was an integral part of the recommendations of the Emigration Committee that the cost of resettlement should ultimately be repaid by the settlers themselves – not by direct return to the Treasury, but by contributions to colonial exchequers, which would reduce the cost to Britain of maintaining those colonies. The Committee collected an impressive mass of evidence both from colonial witnesses and from would-be emigrants as to the ability and willingness of settlers so to contribute.³⁰ Colonel Cockburn later reported his complete conviction, based on interviews he conducted in Canada, that repayment could be reasonably expected.³¹ Cockburn had earlier given influential evidence expressing much scepticism on the point.³² Many commentators were persuaded by this accumulation of evidence, but ‘practical men’ remained sceptical, and unfortunately for Wilmot this included his ministerial colleagues. Sir James Kempt, governor of Nova Scotia, advised that settlers would ‘undoubtedly be able to pay’, but would much rather not, and that the money could not be collected without counterproductive unpleasantness.³³ Neither Peel nor Robinson would put any faith in the prospects of repayment,³⁴ and by 1829 Wilmot had abandoned the idea, determining to rely instead on the sufficient argument that emigration was cheaper than the maintenance of paupers at home.³⁵

Wilmot laboured this point endlessly, supporting it with mathematical illustrations, both hypothetical and based on real data from specific parishes, and enlisting an actuary, Finlaison, to endorse his conclusions.³⁶ He was hampered by the lack of reliable data. In England he had figures from a handful of parishes. In Ireland, the true cost of maintaining paupers remained a matter of speculation. Wilmot’s estimate of three million pounds per annum

³⁰ P.P. 1826 (404), pp.7, 14-16,24,32,35,41; P.P. 1826-27 (550), pp.22-9,50-52,91,98,104-5.

³¹ P.P. 1828 (109), pp.10-18.

³² P.P. 1826 (404), p.149; *Chronicle*, 22 Aug 1826; *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 16, c.302, 7 Dec 1826 (Peel).

³³ WH2826, Kempt to Horton, 10 Nov 1826.

³⁴ WH2796, Robinson to Horton, 25 Mar 1826; WH2858, Peel to Horton, 12 Jul 1826.

³⁵ *Inquiry*, First Series, p.8; WH2888, Horton to Tooke, 30 Nov [1829].

³⁶ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., vol 19, c.1505, 24 Jun 1828; *Inquiry*, First Series, p.8; Second Series, pp.23-31; Fourth Series (first version), pp.21-33; Fourth Series (second version), pp.34-50.

was reasonable, but unprovable.³⁷ Despite this, Wilmot was apt to claim that ‘mathematical demonstration’ of the economy of emigration, as compared with maintenance at home, constituted his main original contribution to the subject.³⁸ Also to be taken into account, Wilmot observed, were ‘those collateral expenses, incident to a state of society in which such fearful pauperism exists’; for instance, ‘that army of police and soldiery, which must be embodied for the purpose of protection of property.’³⁹

As has been shown, many political economists agreed with Wilmot as to the economy of emigration.⁴⁰ Despite this, the point appears to have had little resonance with the political class as a whole. Perhaps this reflected a tactical error on Wilmot’s part, in proposing a long repayment period for loans taken out to finance emigration. His initial plan offered parishes large initial savings, but would have burdened them with repayments for 25 years.⁴¹ This left room for anxiety that the ‘vacuum would be filled up’ before the loan had been repaid, and Wilmot eventually concluded that this had hindered acceptance of his plans. Even with repayments over twelve years, he calculated, repayments would be far lower than the annual cost of maintaining the same number of paupers at home.⁴²

More fundamentally, the cost of assisted emigration was certain, while the benefits were speculative. As Copleston observed, Wilmot’s case was good in the abstract:

but when taxation for the most indispensable purposes excites so much clamour, one cannot expect that the ministry will increase taxation for a purpose against which the strongest prejudices are now prevailing. The argument, that much *probable* expense to a *neighbourhood* will be saved by the *public* expenditure

³⁷ *Inquiry*, Fourth Series (second version), pp.62-4.

³⁸ WH2886, Horton to Tennant, 22 Jun 1830.

³⁹ WH2858, Horton to Peel, draft, n.d. [1830?]. Wilmot made surprisingly little of this point. Scrope later referred to the ‘thirty thousand English bayonets’ required to maintain the rule of law in Ireland: [Scrope], ‘Poor-Law for Ireland’, p.544.

⁴⁰ Above, pp.116-8.

⁴¹ Above, pp.77-8.

⁴² WH2843, Horton to Malthus, n.d. [1830].

which this measure will *certainly* require, is not sufficient to recommend it to a people writhing under the immediate pressure of taxation.⁴³

The pressure for 'economical reform' was simply too great. Malthus concurred that Wilmot's larger plans were so controversial, given the 'large call for economy in every department', that ministers could not be expected to support them.⁴⁴ The *Quarterly Review*, observing that cost was the great obstacle to acceptance of Wilmot's ideas, applauded his zeal in a good cause, but blamed him for adopting a scheme which tripled the expense of a mere passage. This was a 'radical' defect.⁴⁵ Wakefield's search for a better mode of emigration started from the same observation.⁴⁶ The Emigration Commissioners, appointed by Goderich in 1831, observed that the state-sponsored colonizations of 1820-21, 1823 and 1825 had been highly 'beneficial to the parties actually removed', but 'as a means of relief to the mother country' they were 'far too costly to be persevered in'.⁴⁷ Evidently Wilmot failed to convince either the official or the public mind of his central contention that emigration should be seen as a measure of economy rather than an expense.

Wilmot for his part was deeply out of sympathy with the movement for 'economical reform'. His resistance was political as well as economic, since he associated the call for tax cuts with radical calls for the reform of parliament. He was always quick to condemn the 'succession of infamous miscreants' who told the 'lower classes' that 'it was to a remission of taxation alone that they were to look for benefit'.⁴⁸ The economic side of his case is considered here.

Wilmot started from the same point as most economists – the assumption that the market could allocate resources more efficiently than the state. He thought

⁴³ WH3152, Copleston to Horton, 10 Mar 1830.

⁴⁴ WH2843, Malthus to Horton, 15 Feb 1830.

⁴⁵ [Scrope?] 'Causes and Remedies', pp.268-9.

⁴⁶ WH2845, [E.G. Wakefield] to Horton, n.d. See also *Chronicle*, 4 Sep 1829, letter of 'C.C.'

⁴⁷ CO 384/27, f.75, Report of the Commissioners for Emigration, 15 Mar 1832.

⁴⁸ WH2865, 'Dialogue on taxation as affecting artisans, &c' (MS), n.d; above, pp.72-3; below, pp.266-7.

it ‘a truism’ that government spent money ‘less productively than the tax-payers would spend it.’ Taxation was therefore ‘an evil’, and unnecessary taxation was ‘robbery.’⁴⁹ Behind this basic assumption lay the distinction between ‘productive’ and ‘unproductive’ expenditure noted above.⁵⁰ In this sense, most government expenditure – predominantly expenditure on the army and navy – was unproductive. Wilmot therefore described himself as a ‘strenuous friend to economy’.⁵¹

These nods to orthodoxy were only a point of departure. In fact, Wilmot was exceptional among his contemporaries in rejecting the idea that tax cuts would relieve distress, and as a determined defender of government and government expenditure. On the first point, his case rested on three grounds: first, the minimal benefit of tax cuts at the individual level; second, the impossibility of preserving that benefit to the labourer, as long as there was a significant redundancy of labour; third, the damaging transitional effects of redirecting existing channels of demand.

Wilmot argued in 1827 that the scope for retrenchment was small, since the government had no control over 5/7ths of its annual outgoings. These included interest on the national debt, payments to the sinking fund, naval and military half-pay, and pensions – a cumulative cost of nearly £40 million, leaving only around £16 million, the cost of the civil and military establishments, as discretionary expenditure.⁵² Secondly, he observed that over £27 million of taxes had been remitted since 1815 (two-thirds of it by repeal of the property tax in 1816). He thought it obvious that no individual could derive much further benefit from cuts in taxation.⁵³ To propose to bring relief by the remission of a further three million from the abolition of beer and leather taxes, as was done in 1830, was in Wilmot’s view a ‘ridiculous

⁴⁹ *Lectures*, Lecture I, pp.19-24.

⁵⁰ See p.138.

⁵¹ *Hansard*, 39, cc.588, 22 Feb 1819.

⁵² Norman Gash arrived at similar figures in ‘After Waterloo: British Society and the Legacy of the Napoleonic Wars’, *TRHS* 28 (1978), pp.155-6.

⁵³ ‘Taxation’, pp.283-91, 307-8. Some Whigs toyed with the idea of unilaterally reducing the interest on the national debt: see, for instance, R. Heron, *Notes, Printed but not Published* (1850), p.135.

absurdity'. After leaving the Commons that year, he added that it was 'no privation to be out of an assembly where prejudice and ignorance reign so triumphantly.'⁵⁴

Secondly, so long as labour was oversupplied, the benefit of tax cuts would not go to labourers, but to their employers in the form of increased profits. Competition for work would simply cause wages to fall 'in proportion to the reduction of taxation.'⁵⁵ This was a minority position: the standard view was that tax cuts would benefit labourers indirectly. 'Reduction of taxation would afford increased means of consumption to the higher and middle classes, and consequently increased opportunity of employment to the labouring-poor.'⁵⁶ As Nassau Senior said, 'the redundancy may be greater or less, and, the smaller it is, the less will be its ill effects.'⁵⁷ Wilmot's heterodox view depended on his judgment that the oversupply of labour was too great, and the potential for tax reduction too small, for the latter to have any significant impact. Senior had to agree, though, that paupers could 'neither suffer from taxation, nor be relieved by its remission', since they received only a bare subsistence anyway.⁵⁸

Thirdly, Wilmot repeatedly warned that public expenditure constituted a significant part of overall demand, and could not be reduced without causing much suffering to working men.⁵⁹ Money currently spent by fundholders, if diverted, could no longer be spent by them, and 'all that *fixed capital* and all that *art*', which their spending sustained, 'would be rendered comparatively useless and unproductive. ... new fixed capital and new art would, *in the end*, be created ... but the operative classes must pass through a state of *great suffering* before this adjustment could take place.'⁶⁰ Reductions in one form of government expenditure could also lead to increased calls elsewhere. When Hume proposed in 1830 to reduce the army by 20,000 men, Wilmot

⁵⁴ WH2915, 'On remission of taxation' (MS), 4 Aug 1830.

⁵⁵ 'Taxation', p.293; *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 23, c.37, 9 Mar 1830; *Lectures*, Lecture V, p.17.

⁵⁶ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 23, c.42, 9 Mar 1830 (John Benett).

⁵⁷ *Inquiry*, Fourth Series (first version), p.38.

⁵⁸ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 23, c.38, 9 Mar 1830; *Inquiry*, Fourth Series (second version), pp.66-7.

⁵⁹ *Lectures*, Lecture X, pp.9-10.

⁶⁰ WH2915, 'On remission of taxation'. See also *Lectures*, Lecture I, p.22.

observed that they ‘must be thrown upon their already overcharged parishes.’ The public would hardly benefit, since the men had to be supported somehow.⁶¹

Transition costs also inhibited a change that Wilmot in principle favoured, from indirect to direct taxation – not because direct taxation was more progressive, but because it was more transparent. Indirect taxation had been resorted to, Wilmot believed, because ‘the tax being mixed up with the price of the article, is paid with less reluctance.’ The result had been that taxation was shrouded in ‘mystery’, and mystery was ‘the parent of mischief, and ought ever to be deprecated and avoided.’ To move from one system to the other would however involve huge disruption. Wilmot’s solution was that no new indirect taxes should be imposed, but that the ‘existing distribution of revenue’ should be preserved as far as possible. Wholesale change was to be avoided, unless accomplished by gradual means.⁶²

Wilmot offered one final reason why it was against the interests of working men for taxation to be cut too severely. About half a million of them, through their collective savings in savings banks and friendly societies, were as interested as any other class in the maintenance of public credit.⁶³

Wilmot was at the same time increasingly staunch in his defence of government expenditure on its own merits. In his early years in parliament, this may have been a form of ingratiation with ministers, as for instance in his maiden speech.⁶⁴ As a minister, it became his job to defend government expenditure against parliamentary attack, and he was diligent in defending army, navy and ordnance estimates as well as the spending of his own department.⁶⁵

⁶¹ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 22, c.763, 19 Feb 1830.

⁶² *Lectures*, Lecture V, pp.14-17.

⁶³ *Lectures*, Lecture VI, pp.13-15.

⁶⁴ Above, p.51.

⁶⁵ For the year 1822, for instance, see *Hansard* for 21 Feb, 4 5 & 27 Mar, & 5 Jul.

Wilmot became increasingly convinced that government spending was already too low. Certainly, ‘all *practicable* reductions of public establishments should be effected’, but equally, ‘all *necessary* increase of them should be allowed’. The offices of state had not grown in line with the growth in their business, and public servants were worn down by overwork.⁶⁶ Wilmot also argued that public servants should be properly paid, in proportion to their responsibilities. Like the servants of a ‘well-regulated private family’, public servants should be ‘as few as possible; they should be efficient; and they should be well paid.’⁶⁷ It was more important that they should be expert, than that they should be cheap; furthermore, ‘if you under-pay office ... you encourage an underhand system of fees, and perquisites, and gratuities’. Wilmot even extended this to the defence of sinecures. He admitted that sinecures were ‘intrinsically absurd’, and that it was right to abolish them for the future; but in practice they had been used as pensions, and it was Utopian ‘to suppose that a great state ... can be carried on without the principle of pension’.⁶⁸ Military establishments were justified on the precautionary principle, as ‘safeguards to a country against the temptation which a foreign nation might have to attack’. To withdraw troops from the North American colonies, for instance, ‘would bear the character of invitation ... to the United States, to take possession of them.’⁶⁹

For all the strength of the campaign for ‘economical reform’ Wilmot was not completely on his own in defending government spending at the limited levels of the 1820s. McCulloch agreed with him in deploring ‘that chuck farthing sort of economy which forms the staple of Hume’s oratory’,⁷⁰ while Torrens flatteringly detected ‘traces of a master’s hand’ in Wilmot’s *Quarterly* article on the subject.⁷¹ Thomas Tooke agreed that tax cuts could do nothing to relieve ‘the present distress of the manufacturing population.’⁷² Going beyond the defence of existing levels of spending, though, was Wilmot’s conviction

⁶⁶ ‘Taxation’, pp.290-97. See also *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 19, c.740, 16 May 1828.

⁶⁷ *Reform*, pp.21-2.

⁶⁸ ‘Taxation’, pp.297-8, 287-8.

⁶⁹ ‘Taxation’, p.304. For Wilmot’s defence of the utility of colonies, see above, pp.128-30.

⁷⁰ WH2836, McCulloch to Horton, 2 Jan 1827.

⁷¹ WH2889, Torrens to Horton, Dec 1826.

⁷² WH2888, Tooke to Horton, 2 Dec 1826.

that government should be doing much more, both to develop the imperial economy and to relieve pauperism at home. By the summer of 1830, he had come to see his proposals for emigration, poor law reform, and the employment of paupers on public works, as a complete alternative programme of government. He inveighed against 'that cry for economy, which sacrifices everything most deeply connected with the interests and happiness of the lower classes, that its petty and miserable claims may be satisfied.'⁷³ He was convinced that the policy of retrenchment and remission of taxation had outlived any public or political usefulness it might have had. A much more active policy was required, both to relieve distress by the active application of public money,⁷⁴ and, by seizing hold of public opinion, to avert the growing threat of revolution in England.⁷⁵

Wilmot offered his ideas both to Peel, directly, and to the Whigs, through Grey's brother-in-law Viscount Ponsonby. The first step was to show, by public inquiry, that retrenchment was no solution to distress. The second was for government to give work to every able-bodied man who could find none, in a version of his scheme for paupers to be employed on public works.⁷⁶ Thirdly, once the redundant labour had thus been separated from the 'natural labour' of the country, government should provide permanently for them 'either at home or abroad', resting its case upon this being a 'measure of economy.' This programme was to be financed by 'Peace Loans, for which any existing surplus revenue ... should be pledged'. Instead of using any surplus to pay off debt or remit taxes, the government should raise new debt, to be applied 'specifically to the relief of the most suffering part of the population.'

Wilmot envisaged the 'abstraction' of one million paupers from the labouring population of Ireland. Ten million pounds would be needed to settle them abroad over six years, and twenty million to employ them at home in the meantime. Thirty millions could be borrowed, at 5%, for one and a half

⁷³ WH2858, Horton to Peel, n.d. [1830]

⁷⁴ Hatherton Papers, D260/M/F/5/27/6, Horton to Littleton, 17 Aug 1830.

⁷⁵ WH2900, Horton to Ponsonby, 15 Aug 1830. See also below, pp.259-60.

⁷⁶ Above, pp.112-5.

million per annum, including a sinking fund for the eventual repayment of the debt; this was only half the cost of maintaining one million unemployed at the modest estimated rate of 2*d.* per day each.⁷⁷

Wilmot's ideas show clearly how far he had moved from ideas of minimal government and *laissez faire*. His proposals were uncharacteristically autocratic, and, furthermore, completely impracticable. Wilmot had been out of office for three years by 1830, and had evidently ceased to be a practical politician in that time. Peel's response was devastating. No such plan could succeed unless public opinion was in its favour, and there was little chance of that, 'unless the project be very simple, be easily intelligible, and unless it avoids prejudicing any leading interest of the country at its outset.' A scheme to borrow thirty million pounds for these purposes would prompt an immediate fall in the funds. Public opinion was already hostile to spending on public works, especially in Ireland; no public enquiry could possibly produce a general conviction that every available penny should be devoted to this purpose. Furthermore, Wilmot had not considered the practical difficulties of finding worthwhile work for so many, and of lodging and feeding them and their families, while his plan of disposing of the labourers by colonization ignored the possibility that they might refuse to go.⁷⁸

Grey was no more encouraging than Peel had been. He thought that, despite much 'ingenuity', Wilmot tended to overlook important circumstances such as the effect of the return to the gold standard. Grey believed that remission of taxation was the more important remedy; though not hostile to the idea of emigration, he was certainly not enthusiastic enough to suit Wilmot.⁷⁹

There were other criticisms. Thomas Tooke thought that 'the restrictions which you propose on the employment of the poor ... might be found very inconvenient in practice.'⁸⁰ Wilmot himself inadvertently provided evidence

⁷⁷ *Observations*.

⁷⁸ Add. MS 40,401, ff.171-78, Peel to Horton, 21 Sep 1830. There were equally trenchant criticisms from Bishop Doyle: WH2778, Doyle to Horton, 5 Sep 1830.

⁷⁹ Grey Papers, GRE/B48/1/68, Grey to Ponsonby, 11 Nov 1830.

⁸⁰ WH2888, Tooke to Horton, 6 Mar 1830.

against his proposed system, in printing a petition from the hundred of Redbornstoke, in Bedfordshire, where the overseers sometimes had as many as 600 men on their hands, employed in road maintenance. The cost was enormous, but the moral effects had been worse – aversion to work, insubordination, crime, and hostility towards the farmers and overseers.⁸¹ Malthus feared that Wilmot's system might have similar consequences.⁸²

II

The second 'orthodox' remedy for Britain's economic ills was to introduce a free or freer trade in corn. It was argued that the corn laws prevented British manufacturers from competing in overseas markets as effectively as they might if corn – and hence labour – were cheaper, and if their overseas customers were able to sell corn in return for British manufactures. If British manufacturers were more competitive in overseas markets, they would be able to take on more labour.⁸³

Against these ideas, most Tories (and not only Tories) defended the principle of agricultural protection. They argued that home agriculture, as the only secure source of food supplies, should be protected for strategic reasons. Furthermore, a prosperous agricultural sector provided the most secure market for British manufactures. Without this healthy domestic market, British manufacturers could never hope to compete effectively abroad; foreign demand was in any case notoriously unstable, and a manufacturing sector, unhealthily dependent on fickle foreign markets, offered no sure basis for economic growth or social stability. Protectionism was therefore not purely sectional: a strong domestic agricultural sector was seen to provide the foundation for a balanced and stable economy and society. The landed interest was further entitled to protection, because land bore specific social costs, notably the poor rates and the tithe, which were not borne by

⁸¹ *Inquiry*, Fourth Series (first version), pp.81-4.

⁸² WH2843, Malthus to Horton, 9 Jun 1830.

⁸³ See, for instance: [McCulloch], 'Taxation and Corn Laws'; [T.P. Thompson] 'Machine breaking', *Westminster Review*, 14 (Jan 1831), pp.190-210.

manufacturing and commerce. That tax base had to be preserved. Through these payments, and through the paternalistic oversight of their localities by resident landlords, the landed gentry sustained a social fabric in which everyone enjoyed a measure of security, and thus helped to maintain social tranquillity and stability.⁸⁴

Protectionists were deeply hostile towards those political economists who appeared to them to depreciate domestic agriculture. The policy of free trade threatened agriculture directly, while the resumption of cash payments had appeared to subordinate the interests of landowners and borrowers to those of fundholders and savers. The ‘law of diminishing returns’ to agriculture propounded by Ricardo and Malthus set limits to the prospects for expansion in agriculture, which did not apply to manufacturing, and validated calls for the decultivation of marginal land, in which liberal Tory ministers sometimes joined.⁸⁵ Edward Edwards complained that, for the economists, ‘the land last taken into cultivation’ was ‘an object of utter loathing’; they welcomed the return of land to waste ‘as a public benefit.’⁸⁶ David Robinson argued that the ideological pursuit of free trade threw British workers out of employment and British land out of use,⁸⁷ and he accused liberal ministers of acting on the ‘erroneous and ruinous principles’ of the economists.⁸⁸

In fact, ministers’ first concern was to secure the nation’s food supplies. They attempted a policy of autarky after 1815, and then moved cautiously away from it in the 1820s as it became clear that home production alone could not be relied upon to feed a growing population. The trend was towards relaxation of restrictions on imports, but the practical need to ensure that the people were fed overrode theoretical considerations on either side.⁸⁹ In 1825, the Bonded Corn Bill provided for corn stored in warehouses in Britain to be released onto the market at 10s duty rather than the 17s provided for by statute. Another Bonded Corn Bill followed in 1826, when the government

⁸⁴ Gambles, *Protection*, pp.25-55.

⁸⁵ See, for instance, *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 1, cc.419-20 (Lord Liverpool, 16 May 1820).

⁸⁶ [E. Edwards], ‘Cultivation of waste lands’, *QR* 76 (Oct 1828), pp.435-6.

⁸⁷ [D. Robinson], ‘Free trade’, *Blackwood’s*, 100 (May 1825), pp.560-63.

⁸⁸ [Robinson], ‘Surplus Population’, pp.377-8.

⁸⁹ Hilton, *Corn*, *passim*.

also obtained powers to import up to 500,000 quarters of corn by Order in Council, without limitation of price, if necessary. These measures were designed to avert the risk of shortages, and also possibly to sustain European sources of supply in anticipation of a permanent relaxation of protection.⁹⁰

Wilmot defended government policy in an article for the *Quarterly Review* of January 1827. This demonstrates an explicit and well-worked sense of balance between agricultural and manufacturing interests which is characteristic of the liberal Tory stance. Wilmot strongly defended the government's 'position of neutrality' between what were called, in his opinion erroneously, 'the conflicting interests of agriculturalists and manufacturers'. The government's guiding principle had been to substitute 'free importation, subject to adequate protecting duties', for absolute prohibition. Wilmot was scathing towards those who protested against any change whatever to the corn laws. They failed to realise that it was the growth of manufacturing which had provided an enlarged market for corn, that due to protection this had required the cultivation of inferior land, with a consequent rise in prices and rents, and that if the price of corn was sustained at its current 'preposterous height', manufacturers would not be able to sell their produce abroad. The solution was not to abandon agricultural protection – 'the minister who should act upon such principles would abandon his most sacred duty' – but that 'proportions should be preserved'. The price of corn had to fall sufficiently 'to enable the manufacturer to sustain, at least, if not to increase, his transactions with the civilized world', and enough foreign corn should be admitted to bring this about. 'To endeavour to strike out that mean ... is the duty of the government of the country.'⁹¹

The government's interventions thus far had been necessary in order to avoid the risk of famine and unrest. Had government done nothing, as the 'ultra-agriculturalist' demanded, then sooner or later a crisis of supply must have occurred, 'and in that crisis the agricultural interest, as a separate interest,

⁹⁰ Hilton, *Corn*, pp.272-8.

⁹¹ 'Corn Laws', pp.269-72.

must have been destroyed'. The government had been condemned by the 'ultra-agriculturalists', but had in fact saved them from ruin.⁹²

Wilmot was not entirely on the side of the manufacturers either. He did not think that a freer trade in corn would necessarily bring relief to the unemployed or under-employed labourer. The common assumption, that 'cheapness of production will *perpetually* command an extended market', was false. There was a limit to demand, 'beyond which it cannot be forced without a glut'. If hats were cheap, a gentleman might be prevailed upon to buy eight hats, rather than his normal annual requirement of two, but the consequence must be a slump in his demand for hats over the following three years. This illustrated in microcosm the state of manufactures, which had been brought to a 'spurious excitement of production' by the opening up of the South American market, and which were now suffering the reaction from this 'unnatural' state.⁹³ Wilmot clearly aligned himself with Malthus on the question of 'general glut', and evidently believed in a 'natural' and sustainable level of trade. This was simply what was called for by the unforced demand of market participants. Although clearly concerned about the economic consequences of overtrading, Wilmot did not express any moral disapproval of the traders involved.⁹⁴

Noting that the slump in manufacturing activity had given rise to widespread redundancy among manufacturing workers, Wilmot also observed that, in such circumstances, any fall in the price of corn, just like any reduction in taxation, would inevitably result in a fall in wages; the gains would go to the master manufacturers, not to the workers.⁹⁵ That indeed was the whole point of free trade in corn, but it did not commend itself to Wilmot as a way of improving the condition of the labouring classes.

Wilmot warned that a completely free trade in corn might ruin British agriculturalists and destroy manufacturers' home markets. The damage to

⁹² 'Corn Laws', pp.272-4.

⁹³ 'Corn Laws', pp.274-8.

⁹⁴ Cf. Hilton, *Atonement*, pp.120-25.

⁹⁵ 'Corn Laws', p.278.

home markets would be ‘much more intense and certain’ than any benefit to be gained from ‘a contingent and prospective increase of foreign demand’, while the country would meanwhile have been placed ‘at the mercy of foreign nations for a supply of food’.⁹⁶ Wilmot also emphasised the transitional costs that any removal of agricultural protection would entail:

the dislocation in the distribution of property, and the ruin of particular classes, consequent upon such sweeping measures, would render their execution in the highest degree inexpedient, unless in so slow and cautious a manner as to be productive of little relief, for many years.⁹⁷

Agricultural labourers would be thrown out of work, only intensifying the existing problem of redundancy in the agricultural districts. Nor could they be easily ‘transferred into manufactories at Manchester.’⁹⁸ There was ‘generally such a glut of labour throughout the country, as to leave no hope of such absorption’, and the difficulty of changing from one form of employment to another was not to be underestimated.⁹⁹

Wilmot therefore believed in a moderate level of protection for domestic agriculture. The term ‘free trade’ was, he thought, ‘an unfortunate misnomer’, which had ‘materially prejudiced those who support a protective, as against a prohibitive system.’¹⁰⁰

Wilmot also doubted that low wages were necessary to manufacturing competitiveness. Competitiveness depended on ‘the quantity and excellence of our machinery, as well as on the price of labour’, and Britain would ‘outstrip other countries, in proportion as our fixed capital was greater than

⁹⁶ WH2919, Memorandum by Wilmot Horton, 3 Mar 1827.

⁹⁷ *Inquiry*, Fourth Series (first version), p.56. Ricardian dogmatists could be impatient of arguments about transitional costs. T.P. Thompson, for instance, admitted that ‘there might even be an increase of pain on the commencement of the process’, but insisted that this had to be looked through. The important thing was that ‘the great cause of evil would be removed’: ‘Machine breaking’, p.195.

⁹⁸ *Inquiry*, Fourth Series (second version), pp.7-8.

⁹⁹ P.P. 1826-27 (550), pp.17-18.

¹⁰⁰ *Inquiry*, First Series, p.32.

theirs.’ This explained ‘what some people regarded as paradox; namely, that dear wages were not a source of disadvantage to this country.’¹⁰¹

The ‘orthodox’ answer to such arguments was that a reduction in the price of corn would generate demand, and employment, elsewhere. Huskisson questioned Wilmot’s ‘doctrine’ that cheap corn would not ‘in our present state of redundant labour’, bring relief. Huskisson argued that ‘it might not do so immediately and directly but that it would incidentally and indirectly.’ It would leave everyone with more to spend on manufactured goods, demand would increase, the wages of manufacturing labour would increase, ‘those wages once increased, consumption of agricultural produce is thereby increased’, and thus, if things are ‘left to themselves’, ‘balance’ would be restored. But, he warned, ‘our interference generally retards that restoration.’ Huskisson’s concern for ‘balance’, and his basic commitment to *laissez faire* principles, is patent.¹⁰²

Clearly Wilmot accepted at least in part the protectionist critique of the case for economic progress based on manufactures and free trade. In an appendix to his *Lectures*, he quoted extensively from Robert Hamilton’s recently-published *Progress of Society* (1830), where he found some key themes set out with great clarity. Hamilton recognized the benefits of innovation and improvement in manufactures, but also saw the disruption that could be caused by rapid change, ‘especially when the consumption chiefly depends on a foreign and precarious commerce.’ He agreed with Adam Smith and with Malthus in emphasising the importance of the domestic market and the value of high wages:

Though we admit that low wages, by enabling us to bring wares to market at a cheaper price, are favourable to the trade of exportation, we remain of opinion that this advantage may be gained at too high a price, and that wages considerably high, whether considered as promoting the comfort of the most numerous part of the community, or enlarging the domestic market, by enabling them to purchase more liberally, are conducive to the general welfare.

¹⁰¹ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 21, c.1720, 4 Jun 1829.

¹⁰² WH2818, Huskisson to Wilmot, 25 Nov [1826?].

Though Hamilton defended free trade, some forms of trade were more secure and durable than others. Factors such as ‘diversity of produce in different climates and soils’ provided a permanent and reliable basis for such trade, whereas ‘superiority of mechanical skill’ was ‘a much more precarious source of commerce.’ Altogether, foreign commerce was not ‘the most solid or desirable source of national prosperity.’¹⁰³ Wilmot evidently approved all of this. He also cited with approval evidence given to the Emigration Committee by Malthus, that ‘wages and profits very often rise together’; that the demand from labourers, if they were reasonably paid, formed ‘a very important part of the market for manufactured goods of a cheap kind’; that a country could be no more than ‘partially prosperous’ without such demand; and that the ‘home trade’ was ‘much more important than the foreign’.¹⁰⁴

Mention of Hamilton and Malthus sufficiently shows that the moderate protectionist case, though likely to appeal to Tories, was not confined to them. While Wilmot’s views on this subject demonstrate some bias in favour of the home market and agriculture as the more secure basis for national prosperity, his posture is better characterized as Malthusian than Tory.

The protectionist arguments considered so far were often bolstered by other strands of thought, concerning the causes of pauperism and the remedies for it, which were deeply antipathetic to either the Malthusian or the Ricardian schools of political economy. These ideas were most commonly expressed by Tories, though they were shared by some Whig agriculturalists and by agrarian radicals such as Cobbett. They were strongly influential in determining the reactions of the political right to Wilmot’s emigration ideas.

In the case of England, Tory commentators attributed pauperism to a variety of factors: the enclosure of commons and the loss of common rights; the adoption of free trade; industrialisation – with its vulnerability to fluctuating demand and its tendency towards over-production; the maladministration of

¹⁰³ *Lectures*, Lecture VI, pp.28-31.

¹⁰⁴ P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.17.

the poor law. They denied the existence of long-term redundancy among agricultural labourers: all were needed at busy times of the year and redundancy in this sector was only seasonal. It proved, not systemic redundancy, but that ‘their winter employment had been greatly interfered with’.¹⁰⁵ In Ireland, pauperism was attributed mainly to the neglect of absentee landlords and the absence of any poor law.¹⁰⁶

The Tory right cherished the notion that they were the true defenders of the interests of the British labouring classes, as against unfeeling political economists who regarded them ‘merely as beasts of burden, as animal machinery produced by nature for the purpose of “hewing wood and drawing water” in the service of the non-productive and consuming classes.’ Tories, on the other hand, were determined ‘to uphold in all their useful efficiency the institutions, and social arrangements, which, handed down to them by their ancestors, have been subjected to the test of experience.’¹⁰⁷ Wilmot’s use of the cold terminology of political economy to explain and justify his emigration proposals – as for instance when he wrote or spoke of ‘disposing’ of ‘superfluous labour’ – was therefore liable to provoke revulsion in some quarters. Cobbett complained that the Emigration Report had ‘all the *brain-twist* and all the obduracy of the Scotch philosophy’:

it considers the mass of the people as it views the cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry upon a farm; and it supposes a legitimate power to dispose of these cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry at the pleasure of the Government, whom it regards as their absolute owner.¹⁰⁸

Even Cobbett was outdone in vitriol – no mean feat – by Michael Sadler, whose *Ireland, its Evils and their Remedies* (1829) was one of the most

¹⁰⁵ Wilmot never addressed this point satisfactorily.

¹⁰⁶ *Hansard*, 3rd ser., 2, c.890 (Michael Sadler, 22 Feb 1831); [Gleig and Croker], ‘Poor-Laws’, pp.349-65; [D. Robinson], ‘Free Trade’, pp.551-63; [D. Robinson?], ‘Mr McCulloch’s Irish Evidence’, *Blackwood’s*, 108 (Jan 1826), pp.55-76; [Palgrave], ‘Poor Laws’, pp.429-55; [E. Edwards], ‘Irish Absentees’, pp.455-73; [D. Robinson], ‘Surplus Population’, pp.377-91; [Croly], ‘Wilmot Horton’, pp.191-4; [Southey], ‘Emigration Report’, pp.539-78.

¹⁰⁷ [E. Edwards], ‘The influence of free trade upon the condition of the labouring classes’, *Blackwood’s*, 165 (Apr 1830), pp.559-64.

¹⁰⁸ *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register*, 3 Mar 1827.

popular books of its day.¹⁰⁹ Sadler pounced on words such as ‘superfluous’ and ‘redundant’ in the Emigration Reports, and sanctimoniously assumed that they conflated economic criteria with spiritual ones:

In whose estimation is it, let us ask, that a man is worth less than nothing? In that of his God? No! He values one such at far beyond the worth of the material world! But this sort of valuation is perfectly ridiculous in the ears of the political economist.¹¹⁰

As his subtitle¹¹¹ indicates, the Emigration Reports were Sadler’s immediate target. He condemned the ‘wholesale deportations’ they proposed as ‘unnatural, impolitic, and cruel.’ Cruel, because emigration on any system involved the emigrants in ‘sufferings ... beyond calculation’; impolitic, because those to be sent out of the country were ‘the able-bodied, the young, and the healthful ... the *elite* of the empire.’¹¹²

Sadler’s larger object was to destroy the whole edifice of political economy built upon Malthus’s principle of population. He claimed to have refuted Malthus by discovering the true ‘law of population’, that ‘the fecundity of human beings is, *ceteris paribus*, in the inverse ratio of the condensation of their numbers.’¹¹³ This rather fatuous theory received its own comprehensive refutation soon enough,¹¹⁴ but it was plausible enough to be taken up with delight by the main Tory journals. It was unlucky for Wilmot that Sadler’s short-lived but meteoric blaze across the Tory firmament occurred at just the time that his own ideas, substantiated by the massive Emigration Reports, needed to gain real traction. *Blackwood’s* judged that the Emigration Committee’s conclusions had been ‘shattered to pieces by the battery of Mr Sadler’s erudition.’¹¹⁵ The *Quarterly* concluded, after reading Sadler, that

¹⁰⁹ Jupp, *Eve of Reform*, p.339.

¹¹⁰ Sadler, *Ireland*, p.88.

¹¹¹ ‘*Being a Refutation of the Errors of the Emigration Committee and Others, touching that Country*’.

¹¹² Sadler, *Ireland*, pp.84-101.

¹¹³ *Ireland*, p.xviii.

¹¹⁴ [McCulloch], ‘Sadler’; [T.B. Macaulay], ‘Sadler’s Law of Population and Disproof of Human Superfecundity’, *ER* 102 (Jul 1830), pp.297-321; [Scrope], ‘Malthus and Sadler’.

¹¹⁵ [?], ‘Ireland as it is; in 1828’, *Blackwood’s*, 146 (Dec 1828), pp.752-62.

there were better remedies, even in Ireland, than emigration.¹¹⁶ Southey thought that Sadler had demolished ‘the egregious nonsense’ of Malthus’s principle, and confirmed his own view of political economy as ‘an impudent fallacy which cannot stand against facts, figures and common sense’.¹¹⁷

Not all Tory commentators had always condemned emigration. Southey accepted emigration as a vent for surplus population, however the surplus may have arisen: his anti-Malthusian diatribes depended on this resource.¹¹⁸ David Robinson also supported emigration from Ireland on a large scale, if remedies could not be found at home.¹¹⁹ However, even these relatively sympathetic commentators tended to prefer remedies which could be applied at home. These included the use of allotments and the reclamation of waste land in England, and in Ireland the reclamation of bog – itself the subject of repeated parliamentary inquiry – and schemes of public works.¹²⁰ In the late 1820s, Tory opinion coalesced around the idea of ‘home colonization’ as a preferable alternative to colonization abroad. This seemed to offer the means simultaneously to provide paupers with a livelihood and to bring marginal land into cultivation.

Home colonization spoke to the ‘agrarian patriotism’ identified in the last chapter, which was at root a force for domestic improvement.¹²¹ ‘Patriotic’ tropes were employed both to endorse home colonization, and to stigmatize emigration, which was depicted as the exile, banishment, or even transportation of ‘fellow countrymen’ from their ‘native land’.¹²² Sir Walter Scott observed of Wilmot’s plan that ‘John Bull will think this savours of

¹¹⁶ [Southey?], ‘Ireland’, pp.53-84.

¹¹⁷ Taylor Papers, 40693, Southey to Taylor, 10 May 1828.

¹¹⁸ [Southey], ‘Poor Laws’, pp.355-6; Scrope also relied on emigration in his attack on Malthus: ‘Malthus and Sadler’, pp.114-8, 134-8.

¹¹⁹ [D. Robinson] ‘Ireland’, pp.279-80; idem., ‘English and Irish Land-letting’, *Blackwood’s*, 101 (Jun 1825), p. 699. Robinson commented in 1828 that Wilmot Horton had been ‘shamefully dealt with by his friends, official and unofficial’, in the lack of support his ideas in relation to Ireland had received: ‘Poor laws’, p.935.

¹²⁰ [E. Edwards], ‘Condition of the English Peasantry’, *QR* 81 (Jul 1829), pp.253, 260-65; *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 19, cc.1036-47 (Charles Brownlow, James Grattan, Leslie Foster, 5 Jun 1828); Black, *Economic Thought*, pp.159-202.

¹²¹ Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, pp.121-6.

¹²² *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 16, cc.299, 302, 7 Dec 1826 (Sir James Graham, John Benett).

Botany Bay.’¹²³ For Sadler, emigration ‘required the surrender of the best feelings of the heart’, and would ‘teach the people that the love of their country was not worth cherishing, and that it would be the greatest blessing that could befall them to leave it forever.’¹²⁴ The old idea that emigration represented a loss of national strength was encapsulated in Ralph Leycester’s description of it as a ‘system of statistical suicide’.¹²⁵ Home colonization, Sadler argued, was both cheaper and ‘infinitely more patriotic’. It would, ‘without indeed extending the surface, augment the strength and increase the wealth of the country;’ it would ‘add to its dominion, not the conquests of the sword and spear, but the happier triumphs of the plough-share and the pruning-hook;’ it would invigorate ‘every branch of internal industry’, and give ‘increased activity and stability to the whole.’¹²⁶

The enthusiasm for home colonization reflected an emotional preference rather than a careful calculation of costs and benefits, and it needed rhetorical props, since the economic case for it was weak. For some Tory commentators, indeed, not being much concerned with material calculations was part of what distinguished them from the economists – a rare point on which the economists would have agreed with them. David Robinson, for instance, put forward proposals for the improvement of five million acres of land, under which ‘for the first fourteen years, the state would have to pay annually £2,000,000 more than it would receive’; he airily asserted that to ‘buy profitable employment’, at home, for two million people, ‘at the price of forty, sixty, or eighty millions of pounds’, would be ‘the best and cheapest purchase that ever was made.’¹²⁷ Sadler (according to Wilmot) insisted that paupers could be resettled in Ireland for one-tenth of the cost of settling them in Canada – a statement ‘completely at variance with the voluminous evidence’ so painstakingly acquired by the Emigration Committee – without ever producing any evidence to substantiate the claim.¹²⁸

¹²³ J.G. Lockhart, *Memoirs of Sir Walter Scott* (5 vols., 1900), v, p.49.

¹²⁴ *Hansard*, 3rd ser., 2, c.891, 22 Feb 1831.

¹²⁵ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 18, c.956, 4 Mar 1828.

¹²⁶ *Hansard*, 3rd ser., 2, c.887, 22 Feb 1831.

¹²⁷ [Robinson] ‘Surplus Population’, pp.381-2.

¹²⁸ *Causes*, p.47.

The chief argument against home colonization was that, in a long-occupied country like Britain, any land worth cultivating would have been cultivated already: what remained was inferior, and only an inferior return could be had from it. Wilmot used this argument often. To employ paupers in bringing poor soils in England into cultivation would be ‘utterly unprofitable’, he argued; were it otherwise, ‘capitalists’ would already have done it.¹²⁹ McCulloch argued that the occupiers of such soil would necessarily obtain less return for their labour than the occupiers of the poorest land currently under cultivation. ‘We shall thus reach a lower step in the descending scale, and lay the foundation of a frightful increase of pauperism.’¹³⁰ Advocates of home colonization retorted that land which might not answer to a capitalist farmer, growing for sale, might nevertheless support a subsistence farmer, growing for his own family. It was not spare capital, but spare labour, which was to be put to work, and if it could do no more than feed itself, still it was ‘so much clear gain to the community.’¹³¹ George Croly argued that the great thing was to let men cultivate land as their own property: with this incentive, even the mountains would reward a man who cultivated the potato and the ‘common vegetable tribes’.¹³²

Southey and others were impressed by the example of the ‘agricultural colonies’ which had been established on heath land in Holland since 1818. These colonies had been very closely managed, with an emphasis on rapid improvement of the soil through intensive manuring, and on strict discipline in the supervision of the settlers; settlers who embraced the necessary disciplines had the incentive of achieving self-sufficiency and independence within a few years. About thirty thousand people had so far been resettled in these colonies, and Edwards found that they were able ‘to provide an ample subsistence both for themselves and their families’. To generate a marketable surplus was ‘not an object of the slightest importance.’ Edwards was bewildered that similar attempts had not been made in England, where, he

¹²⁹ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 16, c.303, 7 Dec 1826; 2nd ser., 18, c.1551, 17 Apr 1828.

¹³⁰ [McCulloch], ‘Causes and Cure’, p.52; see also [McCulloch], ‘Sadler’, pp.304-5.

¹³¹ Taylor Papers, 40693, Southey to Taylor, 14 Jan 1829. See also [D. Robinson], ‘Poor laws’, p.935.

¹³² [Croly], ‘Wilmot Horton’, pp.191-2.

complained, every effort had been made to ‘force’ labour into ‘a manufacturing channel’, and ‘no one thought of giving a man a spade’.¹³³

Wilmot was well informed about the Dutch colonies. His Colonial Office colleague, Thomas Moody, visited them in 1828, and in 1829 he provided answers to a series of questions from Wilmot, eliciting a good deal of the basic financial information which was evidently too trivial for the *Quarterly*.¹³⁴ The total cost of settling a family of seven was estimated at £141; Moody expected settlers to be able to repay this within sixteen years, if they could find a market for their surplus produce, but not otherwise. The conditions of life were much harsher than those experienced by new settlers in Canada, and the fare much more basic. The ‘spade husbandry’ practised in these colonies, Moody thought, was the most expensive and least profitable of all. Moody did not think that English paupers ‘could be induced to work and live so hard as the paupers of Holland do’, while to establish a similar system in England would cost more than £160 per family – over double the cost of settling a family of five in Canada. Furthermore, settlers’ children were required to leave the Dutch colonies on reaching adulthood, whereupon they re-entered the domestic labour market. The ease with which home colonists, or their children, could return to the domestic labour market was the second main argument for preferring emigration to home colonization. Again, Wilmot made this point regularly, observing rather clumsily that ‘the ratio of danger as to the filling-up of the vacuum must be double as compared with foreign colonization.’¹³⁵

For all his scepticism, Wilmot’s best answer to the various home-based remedies for pauperism was to agree that they should be tried. He thought that labourers in work should be granted allotments, as a way of helping them to maintain a margin of comfort, and this practice was followed on his own Cheshire estates; however he did not see this as a remedy for existing

¹³³ [E. Edwards], ‘Home Colonies’, *QR* 82 (Nov 1829), pp.529-30,538-9,548.

¹³⁴ Published in the *Chronicle*, 27 Jun 1829.

¹³⁵ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 23, cc.37-8, 9 Mar 1830. See also [McCulloch], ‘Causes and Cure’, p.52.

pauperism.¹³⁶ He thought that the reclamation of bog in Ireland would in all probability prove ‘advantageous’ as a ‘national work’, but not as a means of relieving pauperism there.¹³⁷ He thought it desirable that experiments should be carried out to establish the true cost of home colonization, on the basis of ‘experience’ rather than ‘speculation’, and he was quite willing to abide by the result.¹³⁸ Wilmot was, in fact, considerably more accommodating towards the idea of home colonization than its advocates tended to be towards emigration. In an evident dig at Sadler, he complained about the ‘declamatory generalities’ and the ‘perversions of Scripture texts’ used to denigrate schemes which he did not ‘propose or wish to force upon one single man in the community.’ Wilmot, for his part, did not aim at the ‘defeat’ of home colonization, but he did ‘call upon its advocates to produce accurate estimates, the result of practical experiments on a fair scale ... to show the superior economy of their plan.’ Until they did, he could not ‘give them credit for that devotion to the cause of the poor, which seeks for truth and not for triumph.’¹³⁹

III

Wilmot’s distance from his own liberal Tory colleagues and from ‘orthodox’ economic remedies is seen most clearly in his impatience with ‘economical reform’ and his eagerness to find an expanded role for government in the alleviation of poverty. The paternalism which underlay these positions was obscured, for some of his Tory contemporaries, by his habitual use of the analytical tools and language of political economy. Though Wilmot gave some preference to domestic agriculture and home markets, he did not share

¹³⁶ WH2856, Horton to Palmerston, 12 Dec 1829, paper ‘B’; *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 23, cc.32-3, 9 Mar 1830; WH2845, Matheson to Horton, 30 Jul & 21 Aug 1829.

¹³⁷ Wilmot shared the Malthusian view that the temporary employment given by schemes of public works was damaging in the long run: it gave a stimulus to population which left the poor in a worse condition than before, when the work came to an end. P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.321.

¹³⁸ *Causes*, pp.48-51; *Lectures*, Lecture IX, pp.30-31.

¹³⁹ *Lectures*, Lecture V, pp.5-6. See also *Inquiry, First Series*, p.27. Scrope took the same approach: let those who preferred home colonization try it, but let them not thwart plans of emigration which would ‘co-operate and harmonize with their own’: ‘Malthus and Sadler’, p.142.

the 'patriotic' sentiment of attachment to the land. Nor did he have the rhetorical tools to make headway either against 'economical reform' or against Tory predispositions. By 1830, it seemed that he had failed completely to convince the political class to treat assisted emigration with due seriousness.¹⁴⁰ This changed briefly in early 1831, as Captain Swing concentrated minds on the distresses of the poor, but not sufficiently to encourage ministers to pursue an expensive and controversial policy in the face of a disunited Commons.

The 'Malthusian' view taken by many contemporaries, that assisted emigration could not be an efficient remedy for large-scale pauperism, has on the whole been accepted by historians. Wilmot has often been condemned for pursuing 'impractical visions'.¹⁴¹ Yet there are different levels of impracticability, and three separate questions arise in relation to Wilmot's schemes of emigration: first, were they physically and financially feasible; second, would they have achieved their aim; third, were they politically possible? Wilmot's primary aim was to tackle over-population in Ireland, and these questions are therefore important in the light of the Irish Famine of the late 1840s. However, the answers to the first two at least must be speculative.

In his larger visions, Wilmot contemplated the emigration of 1,000,000 people from Ireland over six years. Twenty years later, around 1,000,000 people did emigrate from Ireland in five years, 1847 to 1851, without government assistance. The highest figure in a single year was 255,000.¹⁴² However, this was emigration conducted in desperate circumstances, with none of the advantages that Wilmot wished to offer, and mostly directed to a United States which by then had a greater capacity to absorb emigrants than would have been the case in the 1820s. While Canada was clearly big enough to accommodate millions, eventually, it could never have absorbed emigration on this scale in the 1820s. It had neither the capital nor the administrative

¹⁴⁰ He may have had more success in softening opinion behind the scenes. G.J.P. Scrope, a country magistrate as well as an economist, found 'the prejudices against it giving way more and more, and the policy in favour of it gaining ground', with every year. Grey Papers, GRE/B124/6J, Scrope to Howick, 14 Dec 1831.

¹⁴¹ Above, p.10.

¹⁴² B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1988), p.85.

capacity to develop land and infrastructure at anything near the pace that would have been required. Wilmot was too prone simply to assume that a plan which worked for two thousand would work equally well for two hundred thousand.¹⁴³ As Huskisson observed, the measure was ‘surrounded by difficulties’ far greater than Wilmot seemed to contemplate.¹⁴⁴ Difficulties of social integration could occur even with small intakes;¹⁴⁵ the difficulty of providing suitable, accessible land would soon have impeded large ones.

However, scale was the most indeterminate factor in Wilmot’s schemes. He admitted that it would be ‘extremely difficult ... to lay down, with any pretension to accuracy, the precise number ... which it might be necessary to remove’, to alleviate pauperism.¹⁴⁶ He often tried to allay concern about the cost of emigration by arguing that the removal of relatively small numbers would ‘tend in a far greater degree than is commonly supposed, to the diminution of general distress.’¹⁴⁷ A ‘comparatively small excess of labour’ was sufficient to bring about a general ‘deterioration of the condition of the labourer’, where such excess existed; and so a comparatively small ‘abstraction’ of labour could bring relief to a whole district.¹⁴⁸ This argument was supported by McCulloch, who pointed out that the object of emigration was not to reduce the population in absolute terms, as the *Morning Chronicle* supposed, but merely to bring the rate of increase of population below the rate of increase of capital. For this purpose, he thought that ‘an emigration of 20,000 or 30,000 a year may be quite sufficient.’¹⁴⁹ This sort of number could certainly have been successfully relocated in British North America in the 1820s, taking all the provinces together, had the will existed in Britain to finance and organise it.¹⁵⁰ This would have required an expenditure of less than half a million pounds per annum, before taking into account any saving

¹⁴³ P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.35; *Inquiry, Fourth Series (first version)*, p.42.

¹⁴⁴ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., vol 21, c.1732, 4 Jun 1829.

¹⁴⁵ Above, pp.150-52.

¹⁴⁶ P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.20.

¹⁴⁷ P.P. 1826-27 (237), p.5. See also WH2858, Horton to Peel, n.d. [May 1826].

¹⁴⁸ P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.16. Malthus gave evidence to this effect, p.315.

¹⁴⁹ [McCulloch], ‘Causes and Cure’, p.57.

¹⁵⁰ Canadian witnesses to the 1826 Committee suggested that Upper and Lower Canada, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick between them could take 60,000 a year, but they were almost certainly being over-optimistic: P.P. 1826 (404), pp.38-9, 48-50; cf. WH2826, Sir J. Kempt to Horton, 10 Nov 1826.

on poor relief or benefit from investment in the colonies. At this more moderate level, Wilmot's ideas cannot be condemned as financially or physically impracticable.

Had Wilmot's ideas been implemented in Ireland, and persisted in, something in the order of half a million Irish paupers could have been assisted to resettle in North America by the mid 1840s, in far kinder circumstances than attended emigrants during the Famine. This number would have been multiplied by the tendency for successful emigrants to call family or friends to join them.¹⁵¹ Jones concluded that, had Wilmot's remedy been fully applied, 'the terrible orgy' of the Famine 'might have been averted',¹⁵² but Joel Mokyr has since called into question the supposed simple connections between population, potatoes, poverty and famine. Mokyr argued that emigration in the pre-famine era had harmed the Irish economy by draining it of human capital: emigrants were likely to be of working age, and, on average, more entrepreneurial, harder-working, better educated, and more skilled than those who remained behind.¹⁵³ Wilmot would have agreed with him: he deplored the emigration of small farmers and capitalists, and his scheme of pauper emigration was intended, among other things, to reduce the pressure on those above them and hence encourage them to stay.¹⁵⁴ Mokyr's objection that emigrants were disproportionately of working age would also have been addressed by Wilmot's model of emigration in family groups.

Mokyr and Cormac Ó Gráda found that the Irish economy was not failing, as a whole, in the decades leading up to the Famine. However, the national averages masked increasing inequality. Part of the Irish economy was performing reasonably well, generating food surpluses which helped to feed Britain, and continued to do so throughout the Famine. The Irish poor,

¹⁵¹ The 'friends and neighbours dynamic', as Cormac Ó Gráda calls it, was a well-understood side-benefit of assisted emigration: P.P. 1826 (404), pp.17, 49-50, 175, 205; P.P. 1826-27 (550), pp.352-3; Ó Gráda, *Ireland's Great Famine*, (Dublin, 2006), p.22. Peter Robinson's emigrants of 1823 and 1825 were responsible for bringing out, on one estimate, five times their original number: Gerard Moran, *Sending out Ireland's Poor: Assisted Emigration to North America in the Nineteenth Century* (Dublin, 2004), p.25.

¹⁵² Jones, 'Wilmot Horton', p.338.

¹⁵³ Joel Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved* (1983), pp.230-60.

¹⁵⁴ Above, p.135.

though, occupied a parallel subsistence-based economy, virtually unconnected to the market economy. They were getting poorer and more numerous, and their dependence on the potato left them without other resources when the potato crop failed.¹⁵⁵ In the Famine itself, Ó Gráda and O'Rourke found that the poorest areas were hardest hit. It was the poorest cottiers who starved, though the more prosperous were not immune from disease. Those who emigrated during the Famine were not those at most immediate risk of starvation, since the very poorest could not afford to emigrate, but their departure did mitigate competition for scarce food resources, while also having long-term consequences. By 'increasing land-labour ratios', the Famine and emigration 'eliminated the poverty trap which had prevented people from the poorer parts of Ireland from emigrating before 1845.' Emigration also generated further emigration, making it less costly, and less risky, and setting up a path dependence which influenced choices for generations. In short, 'emigration played an important role in increasing the living standards of those who stayed behind.'¹⁵⁶

It is tempting to speculate that the severity of the Famine could have been mitigated, had these processes started, in a controlled way, twenty years earlier. Wilmot certainly recognised the dual nature of Ireland's economy. When petitioners from Cork argued that there could be no redundancy of population in Ireland, when the country annually exported large quantities of food, Wilmot answered:

The doctrine of these petitioners is, that the poor of Ireland ought to consume these exports, instead of their being sent elsewhere. Why are these products sent out of Ireland? – because there is a demand for them, and a price is paid for them, and that price enables the producers to reproduce them from year to year; whereas, if they were consumed on the spot by parties who could give no equivalent for them, no such reproduction could or would take place.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Cormac Ó Gráda and Joel Mokyr, 'Poor and getting poorer? Living standards in Ireland before the famine', in Ó Gráda, *Famine*, pp.24-47.

¹⁵⁶ Cormac Ó Gráda and Kevin H. O'Rourke, 'Mass migration as disaster relief', in Ó Gráda, *Famine*, pp.121-42.

¹⁵⁷ Horton, *Inquiry*, Third Series, p.75.

Wilmot was never likely to interfere with property rights or disrupt the operation of the market. Within those limitations, his plans for emigration were well-directed towards the problem. He recognised the dangers of over-dependence on the potato in the subsistence sector, and his plan to resettle ejected tenants was intended to facilitate Ireland's transition from subsistence economy to market economy, through the consolidation of farms.¹⁵⁸ Wilmot's ideas cannot be dismissed as inapposite.

Finally, there is the question of political acceptability. This chapter, and the previous two, have identified many reasons why Wilmot struggled to gain political approval for his ideas. First of all, he had some bad luck. Liverpool's stroke removed a broadly supportive prime minister, and his successors were at best sceptical. Sadler impressed the Tories at a crucial juncture. Furthermore, the Catholic question absorbed Parliament's interest in 1828 and 1829, and emancipation was seen by many as a sufficient remedy for Ireland's ills.

Secondly, Wilmot was in certain respects a poor advocate. His style of speaking and writing was dry and somewhat plodding, with a tendency to labour the obvious. He never developed a rhetoric to appeal to or counter the Tory instincts of affection for place or the liberal demand for economy. He was sometimes guilty of special pleading, and in chairing the Emigration Committees he asked too many leading and loaded questions.¹⁵⁹ His response to indifference or disagreement was that of the proverbial Englishman speaking to foreigners, to repeat himself more loudly. His earnestness and dogged perseverance in pursuing the subject did not appeal to the House, which began to treat it as, at best, an 'amiable weakness' of his.¹⁶⁰ In the eyes of many, he became a bore.

Thirdly, there were weaknesses in Wilmot's case. He could not say on what scale emigration would have to be conducted. His plan did not satisfactorily

¹⁵⁸ Above, pp.92-3, 99-102.

¹⁵⁹ WH2855, Palmerston to Horton, 24 Sep 1826.

¹⁶⁰ 'Whig-Hater', p.193.

address the problem of seasonal unemployment among English agricultural workers. There was no convincing prospect of contribution from Irish or Scottish landlords. Although his pauper model avoided the problem of export of excessive capital, still it seemed likely that the most energetic and enterprising within the pauper class would self-select to go. The model of exclusively pauper emigration did not offer a completely convincing prospect of satisfactory colonial development.

For all this, Wilmot's case was a strong one. But even if he had been the luckiest and most skilful advocate, with a watertight case, still he would have struggled to make political headway, given the entrenched preference for minimal, economical government. His plan offered front-loaded costs, but deferred and speculative benefits, and those benefits were to be reaped in the first instance by the Irish, or in the colonies. The outcome he looked for in Britain was permanently higher wages for the labouring classes – not an automatic *desideratum* for employers.¹⁶¹ For public opinion to coalesce around such a plan called for a high degree of altruism, or at least enlightened self-interest, on the part of the landowners and commercial men who dominated in parliament, and a degree of unanimity which was inherently unlikely to be secured; until public opinion did so coalesce, there was little prospect that any ministry would risk political capital in support of such a plan.¹⁶²

Wilmot's scheme was indeed a political impossibility in his own day, and some of his contemporaries condemned him for persisting in it. His old friend

¹⁶¹ Wilmot feared the influence in manufacturing districts of 'individuals interested in the low wages of labour': P.P. 1826-27 (550), p.14. See also the evidence of C.J. Blomfield, p.242. See also WH2860, Horton to Place, Sep 1830.

¹⁶² Howick's reasons for not reintroducing his Emigration Bill in 1832 are instructive. He feared opposition in the Commons which would, at best, take up valuable parliamentary time. A second failure to carry the bill would make the government appear weak and irresolute. The colonies were wary of plans to export paupers, and might adopt measures to frustrate it (this reflected the nature of Howick's scheme). Whatever went wrong would be attributed to the government. If government once made it clear that it did not intend to legislate, landowners and paupers would work out means of doing what it was in their joint interest to do. Voluntary emigration was already flowing freely. By provoking opposition and abuse, government intervention might be counterproductive, dampening the flow of voluntary emigration rather than increasing it. Grey Papers, GRE/B144, 'Reasons for not again bringing forward the emigration bill. January 1832.'

James Macdonald complained in 1830 that emigration had become Wilmot's 'one engrossing and absorbing topic – the standard by which all your opinions of men and things are to be tried.' He was injuring his reputation, excluding himself from active politics, and boring his friends to death, by his obsessive treatment of the subject:

Never did man make a more gratuitous, I must add, more useless, sacrifice of himself. No practical public man will ever desire to be connected with an enthusiast on some controverted point, on which, even if you should be right to the fullest extent, it is enough that the public are not ripe to act.¹⁶³

Wilmot admitted that the stream of opinion had been running against him, and that he had become politically isolated as a result.¹⁶⁴ His answer was that he knew and accepted the risk to his career of his line of conduct. He believed that he was engaged in the most important question in politics, 'how to prevent the contemporaneous existence of the most squalid and degrading poverty, with the most concentrated and luxurious wealth.' If no answer were found to that question, there would sooner or later be a revolution. Wilmot believed he had an answer, and that it was therefore his duty to continue to advocate it. He was content to let time 'read the best commentary' on the 'policy or impolicy' of his conduct.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ WH2838, Macdonald to Horton, 5 Sep 1830. See also WH2864, Ponsonby to Horton, 8 Jul 1830.

¹⁶⁴ PRO 30/29/9/6, Horton to Granville, 21 Oct 1830.

¹⁶⁵ WH2838, Horton to Macdonald, 4 Sep 1830.

6

The ‘moderate West Indian’: the Amelioration of Slavery, 1823-1830

Of the three great issues which most occupied Wilmot in the 1820s, he took up two voluntarily – poverty and emigration, and Catholic emancipation. The third, slave emancipation, came to him as part of his duties at the Colonial Office. Characteristically, he tried to do much more than his official duty strictly required of him, and involved himself in much controversy as a result.

Section I of this chapter provides, after a brief historiographical introduction to the subject, an account of the context within which Wilmot operated as a junior minister: abolitionist pressure for emancipation, colonial resistance, the government’s cautious policy of ‘amelioration’, and its reluctance to coerce the colonies. This section introduces the key question of the motives and considerations which induced ministers to treat the issue as they did; in particular, whether they shared the ‘evangelical’ anguish of the abolitionists or took a more pragmatic approach. It is by addressing this question that the chapter seeks to contribute to the elucidation of ‘liberal Toryism’. Section II explores Wilmot’s involvement in detail. As will be shown, his work quickly came to revolve around the issue of compensation for the planters, and therefore involved him in contentious questions regarding property rights and the relative efficiency of slave and free labour. The section explores what was distinctive in Wilmot’s approach to these issues, and how far, as a subordinate minister, he was able to influence policy. Section III evaluates Wilmot’s contribution more broadly, and suggests that the response of more senior ministers to his efforts reveals something of their true priorities.

I

The question of slavery in the British empire was one of the most prominent issues in British politics between 1823, when a formal campaign to end slavery was launched, and 1833, when the Slave Emancipation Act brought the campaign to a successful issue. The retrospective satisfaction expressed in early twentieth century accounts of this campaign¹ was rudely challenged in the 1940s by Eric Williams, who argued that the abolition of slavery involved no great economic sacrifice by Britain, but reflected instead a clash of economic interests, in which the declining West India interest was brushed aside by the new forces of industrial capitalism.² This influential interpretation was challenged in turn by Roger Anstey, who pointed out the lack of statistics in Williams' work, and his failure to give a convincing account of the politics of abolition,³ and by Seymour Drescher, who produced compelling evidence of the prosperity of the British sugar colonies in the 1790s and beyond.⁴ Combined with work on the *antebellum* American South,⁵ Drescher's work affirmed the continuing economic viability of slave societies in this period.

Anstey described the deep evangelical and humanitarian impulses behind the earlier campaign for abolition of the slave trade: for abolitionists, slavery was a sin against God, for which the nation stood in urgent need of atonement.⁶ Meanwhile, David Brion Davis sought to explain the conflict of interests identified by Williams, without his economic determinism. Asking why anti-slavery should have been so massively supported by people who had, apparently, little direct concern in the matter, Davis found the answer partly,

¹ F.J. Klingberg, *The Anti-Slavery Movement in England* (1926); R. Coupland, *The British Anti-Slavery Movement* (1933).

² Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944).

³ Roger Anstey, 'Capitalism and Slavery: a Critique', *Economic History Review*, 21 (1968), pp.307-20.

⁴ S. Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Pittsburgh, 1977). See also: S.L. Engerman & D. Eltis, 'Economic Aspects of the Abolition Debate', in C. Bolt & S. Drescher (eds.), *Anti-Slavery, Religion and Reform* (Folkestone, 1980); B.L. Solow & S.L. Engerman (eds.), *British Capitalism and Caribbean Slavery* (Cambridge, 1987).

⁵ For instance: R. McColey, *Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia* (Urbana, Ill., 1964); R.W. Fogel & S.L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: the Economics of American Negro Slavery* (2 vols., Boston, 1974).

⁶ Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810* (1975).

as Anstey did, in terms of religious impulses, but also in the legitimization of the values and perceptions of free-market capitalism, which the condemnation of slavery implied. If the essential distinction with regard to labour was that between slave and 'free', then the actual conditions under which labourers lived and worked in European societies was of secondary importance. This suited the emergent *laissez faire* spirit of the times, though Davis did not argue that the distinction was deliberately taken up in a cynical spirit.⁷ David Turley has shown how, by the 1820s, antislavery campaigners had adopted 'the precepts of economic liberalism'. They saw an 'equation between free labour, higher productivity and colonial prosperity', and argued that emancipation would benefit the planters as well as the slaves.⁸

If, as Boyd Hilton has argued, anti-slavery was 'the supreme example of the politics of atonement',⁹ it might be expected that the evangelical influence on liberal Toryism would be most marked in relation to this issue. That connection has certainly been made in the case of the campaign against the slave trade. 'Probably not humbug', is Hilton's assessment of Canning's plea, in a debate of 1802, that: 'Providence has determined to put to the trial our boasts of speculative benevolence and intended humanity ... This day is a day of tests. I trust we shall all abide the trial.'¹⁰ The responses of liberal Tory ministers to the emancipation campaign of the 1820s have not received the same treatment, no doubt because those responses appear to be marked more by pragmatic caution than by evangelical enthusiasm. Even Canning's strong support for emancipation in principle was so overlain by caution and gradualism that, to more single-minded abolitionists, he came to appear as an

⁷ Davis, D.B. *The problem of slavery in the age of revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca, NY, 1975); idem., 'Capitalism, abolitionism, and hegemony' in Solow & Engerman (eds.), *British Capitalism*, pp.209-27.

⁸ David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860* (1991), pp.18-46; idem., 'British antislavery reassessed' in Arthur Burns & Joanna Innes (eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform* (Cambridge, 2003), pp.182-99. On the mechanics and culture of the anti-slavery campaign see also Bolt & Drescher (eds.), *Anti-Slavery*; James Walvin (ed.), *Slavery and British Society 1776-1846* (1982).

⁹ Hilton, *Atonement*, p.209.

¹⁰ Boyd Hilton, 'St. John's most historical moment? The abolition of the slave trade', *The Eagle* (2007), p.78; idem., *Mad*, p.188.

obstacle. Brougham charitably described him, after his death, as ‘a very incubus’ on the movement.¹¹

The gradualist policies of the 1820s are still occasionally dismissed as the half-hearted prelude to the immediate emancipation finally achieved in the 1830s.¹² There were, however, good reasons for the government’s caution, some accepted by the abolitionists themselves. It had long been axiomatic that slavery debased its victims, and that the slaves could not be given their freedom, with any prospect of benefit to themselves or to colonial societies, until they had been prepared for it by moral and religious education.¹³ For T.F. Buxton, this was the ‘bitterest reproach’ against the system of slavery; abolitionists were ‘foiled by the very wickedness of the system’ and obliged to accept a gradual process. Launching the campaign for emancipation, he called not for ‘sudden emancipation’ but for ‘preparatory steps ... qualifying the slave for the enjoyment of freedom.’ He expected slavery not to be destroyed, but ‘gently to decay’ over a period of 50 to 60 years.¹⁴

The bloody slave revolution in Haiti in 1791 provided a vivid example of what could go wrong. The risk of a slave rebellion was exacerbated by political tensions in the West Indies, a region described by Canning as ‘one great volcano’. France nursed ambitions over Haiti and was suspected of meditating a *de facto* annexation of Cuba, under the pretext of assisting Spain. Some of the emerging states of South America used slave emancipation as a weapon in their struggle against Spain – a factor of particular relevance to the mainland British colonies of Demerara and Berbice. The United States was growing in power and influence in the region.¹⁵ Canning was anxious to avoid anything that might destabilise British West Indian colonies, and the West

¹¹ Dixon, *Canning* (1976), p.261.

¹² Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains* (2005), pp.309-32.

¹³ Wilmot made a useful collection of statements to this effect by abolitionist leaders including Brougham, Wilberforce, Grey, and Grenville: *York Letter*, I, pp.15-27.

¹⁴ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 9, cc.265-71, 15 May 1823; WH2757, Buxton to Horton, 30 Oct 1823. The amelioration already underway in some West Indian colonies is assessed in J.R. Ward, *British West Indian Slavery, 1750-1834: the Process of Amelioration* (Oxford, 1988).

¹⁵ E.J. Stapleton (ed.), *Some Official Correspondence of George Canning* (2 vols., 1887), i, pp.236,266-82.

Indian lobby was quick to assert the link between discussion of slave questions in Britain, and slave unrest.¹⁶

There was also a risk of secession. Following the loss of the American colonies, Britain was wary of interfering in the internal concerns of colonies with legislatures of their own. Colonial legislatures were acutely sensitive to any encroachment on their independence, and the more strident colonial leaders were prepared to hint at secession if they thought essential colonial interests were under threat.¹⁷ This gave pause to statesmen in Britain. While most affirmed parliament's 'transcendent' power to legislate for the colonies as it pleased, they also held that this power should be reserved for dire emergencies.¹⁸ Bathurst's intense reluctance to impose on colonial legislatures was informed also by his fear of war with the United States.¹⁹ The recent example of slave registration, when he had allowed colonial legislatures time to pass bills of their own, rather than have the abolitionists' proposals imposed upon them, satisfied Bathurst of the benefits of working with, rather than against, colonial legislatures. He took this as a model for the future.²⁰

There were further reasons for caution. Britain could not implement legislation for the welfare of the slaves without at least grudging cooperation from the planters: in practice it had to rely on colonial magistrates and juries. Finally, the economic well-being of the slaves as well as the planters was at

¹⁶ There was strong evidence for this from the uprising on Barbados in 1816: WH2939, Sir J. Leith to Bathurst, 30 Apr 1816, with enclosure. Further evidence emerged from the Demerara uprising of 1823: WH2795, Statement of the slave Jack Gladstone. The exploitation by slave leaders of debates over abolition, to pressurise the planters from below, is considered in M. Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca, NY, 1982).

¹⁷ WH2939, Resolutions of the Jamaican House of Assembly, 11 Dec 1823, Resolutions of the Bahamas House of Assembly, 24 Jan 1826; BL Add. MS 38744, f. 202, C. Ellis to Huskisson, 3 Apr 1823.

¹⁸ For this view of the constitutional relationship between Britain and its 'legislative' colonies, and the slow development of a more 'interventionist' approach, see D.J. Murray, *West Indies*. Ministerial caution is apparent from: F. Bickley (ed.), *HMC Report on the Manuscripts of Earl Bathurst* (1923), p.560; Stapleton, *Canning Correspondence*, i, p.134; *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 10, cc.1105-6, (Canning, 16 Mar 1824).

¹⁹ Bathurst Letters, Bathurst to Horton, 16 Aug 1826. Bathurst feared that trying to force colonial legislatures would tend to drive colonies into the arms of the United States, thus provoking a contest that he was anxious to avoid.

²⁰ Murray, *West Indies*, pp.96-9.

stake: too rapid a dismantling of slavery might fatally weaken the sugar colonies before they had been able to diversify into other crops.²¹

For Canning, much as he sympathised with the ultimate aim of abolition, the difficulties were too great to permit any easy solution. If forced to choose between 'immediate abolition' and 'permanent slavery', he almost felt he would have to choose the latter, so great were the risks of sudden change.²² This strong sense of danger, combined with the reluctance to coerce local legislatures, limited the government's approach throughout the 1820s. The colonies were repeatedly threatened with parliament's intervention, if they failed to adopt the ameliorative measures recommended to them,²³ but the threat was never carried out: the government was not prepared to risk an outright breach.²⁴ It followed that the amelioration of slavery and emancipation could only happen, if at all, with the consent of the planters.

Ministers were also determined to maintain control of the agenda at home, and not to allow the issue to be forced by the abolitionists. In response to Buxton's motion, in 1823, for the gradual abolition of slavery, 'with as much expedition as may be found consistent with a due regard to the well-being of the parties concerned,'²⁵ Canning proposed, and the Commons adopted, three 'ameliorative' resolutions:

That it is expedient to adopt effectual and decisive measures for ameliorating the condition of the slave population in his majesty's colonies.

That, through a determined and persevering, but at the same time judicious and temperate, enforcement of such measures, this House looks forward to a progressive improvement in the character of the slave population, such as may prepare them for a participation in those civil rights and privileges which are enjoyed by other classes of his majesty's subjects.

²¹ Hilton, *Mad*, p.299.

²² *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 10, c.1095, 16 Mar 1824.

²³ For instance, by Canning on 19 May 1826: *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 15, c.1365.

²⁴ Wellington's cabinet was equally hesitant: Edward Law, Earl of Ellenborough, *A Political Diary, 1828-1830* (ed. 3rd Baron Colchester, 2 vols., 1881), i, p.189.

²⁵ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 9, cc.274-5, 15 May 1823.

That this House is anxious for the accomplishment of this purpose, at the earliest period that shall be compatible with the well-being of the slaves themselves, with the safety of the colonies, and with a fair and equitable consideration of the interests of private property.²⁶

The reference to private property was evidently intended to reassure the planters that their interests would not be overlooked.

II

The government's cautious approach to amelioration, and Bathurst's consensual style towards the colonies, provided the political context for Wilmot's work on slavery at the Colonial Office. He referred constantly to Canning's Resolutions as the rule for his conduct.

Wilmot's basic attitude to slavery, as disclosed in conversation with Zachary Macaulay, was that it was 'a crime of deep dye'.²⁷ Emancipation of the slaves would be 'the tardy expiation of a general wrong.'²⁸ He described slavery in the United States as a 'stain' on that country.²⁹ However, the intimate knowledge of colonial attitudes which he derived from his official position gave him a caution and sensitivity towards the colonies greater even than most of his colleagues. If legislation was not to be imposed on the colonies, then it was evident that no progress could be made without the consent of the planters, and so the planters' interests had to be given the 'fair and equitable consideration' promised by the Resolutions. As he told the Commons:

depend upon it ... in proportion as we convince the West Indian proprietors ... that we are as anxious to execute that part of the resolutions of 1823, which secures the interest of the master, as we are to execute that other part, which calls upon us to provide for the protection of the slave, in such proportion will be the degree of our success.³⁰

²⁶ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 9, c.285, 15 May 1823.

²⁷ WH2835, Macaulay to Horton, 28 Nov 1827.

²⁸ *York Letter*, I, p.44

²⁹ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 5, c.394, 17 Apr 1821.

³⁰ *Speech*, 1828, p.22.

In Wilmot's understanding, it was not from a 'love of slavery' that the planters resisted emancipation, but from 'dread of the loss of property'. He believed they would accept the abolition of slavery willingly, if it could be done without ruining them.³¹ Property, and compensation for the loss of property, were the key to the whole question, and Wilmot's ingrained respect for property rights made him highly sympathetic to the planters' position. When it was argued that there could be no equitable property in slaves, Wilmot agreed that 'abstractedly speaking, man ought not to be the property of man', but denied that 'in consequence of that abstract truth, the West Indian slaves ought to be emancipated, without compensation to the Planters.'³² Britain had 'directly and indirectly fostered the existence of slavery in the West Indies', and had encouraged investment in sugar plantations and slaves.³³ The nation as a whole had benefited from the 'criminality of slavery', and much property now held innocently in Britain was more or less recently derived from the slave system. Therefore, if slavery were put an end to, the nation as a whole should share the cost, rather than imposing the whole loss on the planters.³⁴ Much of this was accepted in principle by many abolitionists.

The detailed working-out and argument of Wilmot's position involved a range of subsidiary questions. What types of measure regulating or limiting the operation of the slave system might in principle give rise to a claim for compensation? Would emancipation actually involve the planters in loss at all? How might that loss be assessed? Who should bear the loss? What assurances could be given to the planters in advance?

In pursuance of the first of Canning's Resolutions, the government proposed a detailed set of ameliorative measures for adoption by colonial legislatures. They covered such matters as the abolition of Sunday markets, the admission of slave evidence in court, the removal of fees and taxes on the manumission of slaves, the prevention of the sale of slaves apart from the land, abolition of

³¹ *York Letter, I*, pp.34-5.

³² *York Letter, I*, p.50.

³³ *York Letter, II*, p.2.

³⁴ *York Letter, I*, pp.41-3.

the use of the whip for punishment of females and for driving slaves to work, the regulation of all other punishment, and the protection of slave property.³⁵ The London Committee of West India planters recommended that the proposals be implemented, if only to forestall direct legislation by the House of Commons,³⁶ but the response from the colonies was uncompromisingly hostile.³⁷ They insisted that they had already done much to improve the condition of their slaves, that the nature of colonial society was consistently misrepresented in Britain, that the government's measures betrayed its imperfect grasp of the problems, that the government should not interfere in matters of internal regulation, that they knew their own interests best, and that they would be ruined if the measures were implemented.³⁸

Wilmot believed that these objections were at least partly tactical: the planters had got it into their heads that the government's ultimate goal was emancipation, and that their consent to these proposals would weaken their claim for compensation. Accordingly they determined to resist proposals which, objectively, they had little serious objection to.³⁹ He believed that the ameliorative measures were entirely justified, and did not provide grounds for compensation in themselves. There were 'innumerable instances' in domestic legislation of 'interference' in the hours or methods of work: though they might appear at first 'calculated ... to prejudice the pecuniary interests' of employers, the compensation was in 'the improved condition of the labourers themselves.'⁴⁰ Wilmot was sharply critical of the planters' failure to accept and implement these ameliorative measures promptly.⁴¹ The struggle to have

³⁵ V. Harlow & F. Madden (eds.), *British Colonial Developments 1774-1834, Select Documents* (Oxford, 1953), pp.560-4.

³⁶ Harlow & Madden (eds.), *Colonial Developments*, pp.558-9; WH2939, C. Ellis to W. Millar, 11 Jun 1823.

³⁷ Harlow & Madden (eds.), *Colonial Developments*, pp.565-6.

³⁸ These points are staples of West Indian argument in countless pamphlets, articles, and letters. See for instance, WH2939, F. Cort to Sir J. Gladstone, 21 Jul 1823; *ibid.*, Extract from the Proceedings of the House of Assembly in the Bahamas, 24 Jan 1826.

³⁹ WH2940, 'Substance of a conversation with Mr. Palmer on Wednesday 11 February.' Probably a reference to C.N. Pallmer (1772-1848), a moderate 'West Indian' MP. Colonial hostility was probably at least as much a reaction to the slave uprising in Demerara in August 1823.

⁴⁰ *West India Question*, p.62.

⁴¹ *West India Question*, pp.97-101.

these measures adopted by recalcitrant local assemblies took up much of his time over the following few years.⁴²

After this rebuff, the government decided to introduce a model slave code in Trinidad, one of those recently-acquired territories which did not have legislatures of their own but which were ruled directly by the Crown.⁴³ This model would serve, it was hoped, as a guide for adoption by other colonies. Governor Ralph Woodford, being instructed to draft a code for Trinidad reflecting the existing laws and practices of the island, included in it the Spanish practice of manumission *invito domino*,⁴⁴ or, as it came to be termed, ‘compulsory manumission’. This was included in the Order-in-Council sent out to Trinidad in 1824. It provided that a slave, wishing to purchase his own freedom, might do so, at a valuation to be agreed by two appraisers, one appointed by the slave and one by the master, with provision for binding arbitration if necessary by an umpire appointed by the chief judge.⁴⁵

Compulsory manumission changed the whole tenor of the ameliorative programme, and came to dominate Wilmot’s involvement with the slavery question. It appeared to offer a way of moving, however slowly, towards the ultimate goal of abolition: it was, according to Canning, ‘the opening by which slavery itself may escape, gradually ... without the shock of a convulsion.’⁴⁶ It offered hope to the slaves, but it was also thought to contain the in-built safeguard that only hard-working and thrifty slaves – who could be deemed fit to enjoy the benefits of freedom – would be in a position to benefit from it. Furthermore, it cost the state nothing. While most abolitionists rejected the principle that slaves should have to purchase their own freedom,⁴⁷ they were prepared to go along with the policy as, at least, an improvement on the existing state of affairs, and a valuable element in the ameliorative scheme.

⁴² The ameliorative legislation passed in the various colonies is summarised in P.F. Dixon, ‘The Politics of Emancipation’ (D. Phil, Oxford, 1971), pp.264-8.

⁴³ In the West Indies, these ‘Crown Colonies’ were Trinidad (formerly Spanish), St. Lucia (French), and Demerara and Berbice (Dutch).

⁴⁴ i.e. without the consent of the master.

⁴⁵ Harlow & Madden (eds.), *Colonial Developments*, pp.567-73.

⁴⁶ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 15, c.1364 (George Canning, 19 May 1826).

⁴⁷ *Supplement to the Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, June 1828, p.260.

To the West Indians, though, compulsory manumission seemed to threaten them with ruin. It had worked under Spanish rule, they argued, only because the slave trade still existed at that period: money paid by one slave for his freedom could be used to buy another. The slave trade having since been abolished, planters argued that they would not be able to get alternative labour and their estates would become worthless.⁴⁸

Compulsory manumission immediately became the sticking point of the whole ameliorative programme. Wilmot's work came to be dominated by the issue of the compensation, if any, which might be due to the planters on account of it. It is hard to know whether his efforts were genuinely directed, as they ostensibly were, towards making the policy workable, both for masters and slaves, or were instead designed to demonstrate that the policy was not workable. His personal preference would probably have been to jettison compulsory manumission so that the rest of the ameliorative programme could make progress, but, as long as he remained in office, it was his duty to try to make the policy work. After leaving office, he argued that the policy should not be extended to other colonies until the difficulties had been resolved.⁴⁹

The first issue was the likely availability of alternative labour. The abolitionists liked to quote Adam Smith at the planters: 'the experience of all ages and nations ... demonstrates that the work done by slaves, though it appears to cost only their maintenance, is in the end the dearest of any.'⁵⁰ Let the planters use free labour, and they would find, as Wolryche Whitmore told them, that 'humanity and interest' were 'perfectly reconcilable' in the abolition of slavery.⁵¹ Theory was reinforced by examples of the successful replacement of slaves by free labour: by Joshua Steele in Barbados; in Sierra Leone, Guadeloupe and Haiti.⁵² The planters rejoined that, whatever theory

⁴⁸ WH2939, Harries to Sir A. Grant, 5 May 1826; WH2938, N. Nugent to Sir P. Ross, 20 Jan 1829.

⁴⁹ *Speech*, 1828, passim.

⁵⁰ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, p.238. Smith argued that free labourers worked harder than slaves and maintained themselves more efficiently: pp.81-2.

⁵¹ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 9, c.450, 22 May 1823.

⁵² T. Clarkson, *Thoughts on the Necessity of Improving the Condition of the Slaves* (1823); [H. Brougham], 'Negro improvement and emancipation', *ER* 77 (Oct 1823), pp.118-40.

might suggest, freed slaves would not work in sugar plantations, for any remotely affordable wages, and that ample evidence of this could be found in the West Indies.⁵³

On this question, Wilmot sided with the planters. Their case had an influential advocate at the Colonial Office in Major Thomas Moody, formerly of the Royal Engineers, who in 1824 was engaged by Wilmot as an adviser with great experience of the West Indies. Moody argued that sugar cultivation required unremitting heavy labour in a hot climate, currently exacted from slaves by coercion. Take coercion away, the labour might still perhaps be secured under the stimulus of want in small, populous islands such as Barbados or Antigua, where there was no free land and no alternative means of subsistence, but not in large islands or territories with untapped reserves of fertile land, such as Jamaica, Trinidad, or Demerara. There, a man could supply his wants by the labour of a day or two per week: the desire to better his condition would not induce him to do much heavy work in hot sun. In colonies of this type, free labour would not be available to cultivate sugar estates. Moody's arguments were supported by his empirical observations in different West Indian territories.⁵⁴

Moody tried to generalise his argument into a new theory of labour, arguing that necessity was a universal stimulus to labour, while the desire to better one's condition operated only conditionally, depending on local circumstances such as climate.⁵⁵ At this level he was effectively skewered by T.B. Macaulay, who pointed out that idleness and the desire for repose were not unknown in temperate zones. Macaulay did, however, support the view that free labourers would shun the sugar plantations, allowing that 'very few of the free blacks in our West Indian islands, will undergo the drudgery of cultivating the ground.'⁵⁶

⁵³ See for instance, A. M'Donnell, *Considerations on Negro Slavery* (1824).

⁵⁴ WH3050, item 2570, Memorandum by Moody [1824?]. Local labour market conditions after emancipation lent retrospective support to Moody's opinion: wages were low in Barbados, but high in Trinidad and Demerara: S.L. Engerman, 'Pricing Freedom', in Verene A. Shepherd (ed.), *Working Slavery, Pricing Freedom* (Oxford, 2002), pp.279-80.

⁵⁵ See for instance, WH2849, Moody to Horton, 1 Aug 1825.

⁵⁶ 'Major Moody's Reports', *ER* 90 (Mar 1827), pp. 383-423, at p.399.

Wilmot was certainly convinced by Moody's case.⁵⁷ He told Huskisson:

the nature of the African is to be indolent, inasmuch as his wants are few, and those almost spontaneously satisfied in the climate under which he lives. No adage can be more trite in political economy than that which points out the connection of exertion with climate.⁵⁸

A prolonged print battle was joined on this issue.⁵⁹ In an article authored jointly with Charles Ellis, Wilmot reviewed the evidence on free and slave labour,⁶⁰ eliciting fierce responses from the abolitionist camp both in pamphlets,⁶¹ and in a series of letters under the pseudonym 'Anglus' to the *New Times*. This in turn prompted a series of letters to the *Star* under the pseudonym 'Vindex', written variously by Moody, Wilmot and Thomas Hyde Villiers (then a senior clerk at the Colonial Office), which dealt as comprehensively as possible with the question of free labour in Haiti, on Steele's estates in Barbados, in Cayenne, in Guadeloupe, and in the East Indies.⁶² The intent was to support the planters' case for compensation, not to justify slavery. As one contemporary commentator observed:

The saints tell us it would be better for the planters if the slaves were free: the planters tell us the slaves are actually better off than if they were manumitted. Good saints, if what you say be true, you may safely let the planters alone; good planters, if what you say be true, it is no hardship to make you manumit your slaves. But you are both wrong. Slavery *is* a good thing for the planters, and a bad thing for the slave. It is good for the master to get eleven-twelfths of a

⁵⁷ *West India Question*, pp.72-85; *Speech*, 1828, pp.13-17; *York Letter*, II, pp.3-15.

⁵⁸ Add. MS 38745, ff. 188-95, Horton to Huskisson, 26 Jan 1824. It should be added that Wilmot attributed the supposed indolence of the 'African' entirely to climate, not to inherent character. See, for instance, *Speech*, 1828, p.17: 'If the same degree of necessity for which the labourer is *here* compelled to provide, equally existed in the West Indies, we should find that the same effects would be produced.'

⁵⁹ See for instance, 'Letter on St. Domingo', *Blackwood's*, 85 (Feb 1824); *Examiner*, no 873 (24 Oct 1824); *ASR* no 4 (30 Sep 1825); *Gentleman's Magazine*, May 1824, pp.420-21.

⁶⁰ 'West India Colonies', *QR* 60 (Jan 1824), pp.559-87.

⁶¹ Anon., *Review of the Quarterly Review; or an Exposure of the Erroneous Opinions Promulgated in that Work on the Subject of Colonial Slavery ...* (1824).

⁶² 'Vindex', *Considerations submitted in Defence of the Orders in Council for the melioration of slavery in Trinidad* (1825).

slave's labour for nothing; it is bad for the slave to be cart-whipped into working on such terms.⁶³

Moody has been credited with influencing 'Colonial Office officials from Lord Bathurst to James Stephen and Henry Taylor to insist on ... the right of the planter to compensation.'⁶⁴ However, Bathurst's starting 'presupposition' had been similar to that of the abolitionists, that if a slave had been industrious enough to obtain the price of his own freedom, his continuing industry once free could be depended upon.⁶⁵ It was only reluctantly that he gave up this position, and Wilmot was central to this process.

In respect of compulsory manumission, Wilmot thought the claim to compensation was good in principle, if loss occurred in practice: the right to compensation arose 'at the point where regulation of property ends, and where compulsory substitution of property commences.'⁶⁶ In theory the master *was* compensated, by the price paid by the slave, which, it was generally understood, should reflect the market price for an equivalent slave. This was the straightforward view taken by the abolitionists. As Zachary Macaulay argued:

The market value of the slave will be an adequate compensation to the master, whether free labour is procurable or not. The degree in which free labour may be procurable, would, without doubt, tend to raise or lower the market price of a slave.⁶⁷

This simple view did not satisfy the planters, who argued that the market price for an 'equivalent' slave might not adequately reflect the loss suffered from the manumission of a particular slave. Slaves were manumitted as individuals, but their replacement might come with a family, while the family of a manumitted slave might be left at the charge of the master. A slave of

⁶³ *London Magazine*, May 1827, p.90.

⁶⁴ Young, *Colonial Office*, p.74.

⁶⁵ Murray, *West Indies*, p.130.

⁶⁶ *West India Question*, pp.62,65. One West Indian later commented that Wilmot had always based his arguments 'on the best and surest foundation ... the rights of property': WH2769, James Colquhoun to Horton, 17 Sep 1827.

⁶⁷ ASR no 33 (Feb 1828), pp.182-84.

superior abilities or character might have so beneficial an influence over others as to be irreplaceable, and his value incalculable. The loss of a quarter of the effective labourers could render an estate inoperable. Slaves on highly productive estates would be more valuable than those on less productive estates. Sales of slaves had become so rare that it was unlikely that the master could obtain an adequate substitute. Slaves might choose to emancipate their children instead of themselves, undermining the demographics of the slave population.⁶⁸

Planters also argued that compulsory manumission would have adverse moral consequences, damaging relations between planter and slave. Far from learning habits of industry, slaves would have a perverse incentive to reduce their own value. Masters would have an equally perverse incentive to deny to slaves the means to earn money for themselves. Compulsory manumission would therefore destroy the ‘community of interest between master and slave’ which, so the planters argued, had been fostered by existing systems of voluntary manumission. It would depreciate the value of West Indian property and deter capital investment. Finally, compulsory manumission, if carried to any extent, must lead to a substantial increase in the market value of slaves, thus putting the purchase of freedom completely out of the slaves’ reach.⁶⁹

Such arguments fuelled West Indian opposition to compulsory manumission for years. They contained much special pleading, but the planters’ key point – that compulsory manumission on any scale would threaten the viability of sugar estates – had force, and was supported by colonial officials. Colonel Young, Protector of Slaves in Demerara, told Wilmot that compulsory manumission would ‘retard rather than facilitate the object;’ the governor, Benjamin D’Urban, agreed.⁷⁰ Governor Woodford of Trinidad, the only island where compulsory manumission was in force, was a rare dissident. He believed that manumission had always been the ‘great security’ for the

⁶⁸ P.P. 1828 (261), *passim*.

⁶⁹ P.P. 1828 (261), *passim*.

⁷⁰ WH2941, Young to Horton, 10 Sep 1827, endorsed by D’Urban.

good conduct of the slaves, being the only incentive of any value to an 'industrious slave.'⁷¹

Wilmot proposed three principles to make compulsory manumission acceptable to planters, while still useful to the slaves. Concerned as ever to preserve the 'interests of property', he first proposed that compensation should be based on an appraisal of the loss to the master, not on the market value of an equivalent slave. If the slave could not be adequately replaced, the compensation would have to 'extend to a definite proportion of the property of the planter.'⁷² Secondly, he proposed to fix prices, based on historic market prices, at which slaves of different descriptions would be entitled to purchase their freedom.⁷³ Thus manumission would remain a practical possibility for industrious slaves. This necessitated the third proposal – to establish a public fund to meet the difference, if any, between the price payable by the slave and the appraised loss to the master.

Given the huge range of considerations involved in calculating the loss to the master, Wilmot's first proposal encumbered the question of compensation in a morass of speculation and complexity. Wilmot struggled to persuade anyone that appraisal based on this principle was actually possible. West Indian witnesses before the Privy Council in 1828 (including, incidentally, Moody) denied that it could be done,⁷⁴ while the abolitionists came to deplore 'the absurdity and nonsense, the pretended physical facts, and the metaphysical subtleties and abstractions,' which had been employed 'to puzzle and perplex a plain question.'⁷⁵ Bathurst too maintained for some time that appraisal at market price was reasonable, before eventually conceding that, if the master could not get replacement labour:

⁷¹ WH2940, Woodford to Horton, 7 Feb 1826.

⁷² *West India Question*, pp.88-9, 92.

⁷³ This also removed any incentive for slaves to make themselves worth as little as possible.

⁷⁴ P.P. 1828 (261), pp.22, 39, 48, 54, 68.

⁷⁵ *Supplement to the Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, June 1828, p.260.

the price which must then be assigned to the loss of each slave must have a direct reference to that state in which the plantation will be placed by the progressive reduction of the means of cultivating it.⁷⁶

However, Bathurst evidently considered this a distant contingency, and even then applicable only to field slaves.⁷⁷ In the meantime, he expected appraisals to continue to be made by reference to market price.

Wilmot was probably the first minister to argue for a contribution from the British public to facilitate emancipation of the slaves. As early as 1824, he called for a Select Committee, 'as the best means of preparing the public for that pecuniary compensation which, sooner or later, must be given, if we mean to execute our purpose.'⁷⁸ In print, he argued that 'it is for this country, if it be sincere in its anxiety to put an end to slavery, to lend pecuniary assistance to such slaves for the accomplishment of that purpose.'⁷⁹ This was to push at a half-open door, since as stated above,⁸⁰ many abolitionists accepted that any losses suffered by the planters as a result of emancipation should be shared with the British nation. Britain had been a 'partner in crime' in slavery, and had benefited from it at least as much as the planters themselves.⁸¹ Abolitionist petitions had repeatedly professed 'perfect readiness, if called upon to contribute whatever sum might be deemed necessary to the extinction of slavery, cheerfully to obey the call.'⁸²

However, this was not the universal opinion. Lord Grenville, for example, thought that the whole principle of compensation, beyond the price paid by the slave, was 'utterly untenable' and a 'direct and flagrant injustice' to the taxpayer.⁸³ Even admitting a right to compensation in principle, the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* maintained that all that could be given in advance was a

⁷⁶ P.P. 1826 (001), p.122, Bathurst to D'Urban, 25 Feb 1826.

⁷⁷ This is clear from Bathurst's response to the case of the domestic slave Pamela Munro: Engerman, 'Pricing freedom', pp. 282-6. See also WH2941, item 76, Memorandum on Compulsory Manumission [1828?].

⁷⁸ Add. MS 38745, ff. 188-95, Horton to Huskisson, 26 Jan 1824.

⁷⁹ *West India Question*, p.94.

⁸⁰ See pp.197, 203.

⁸¹ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 9, c.272, 15 May 1823 (T.F. Buxton).

⁸² *ASR*, no 72 (1 Dec 1830), p.499.

⁸³ WH2803, Grenville to Horton, 5 & 7 Jan 1826.

‘general assurance’ that losses actually incurred would be ‘fairly and equitably considered and liberally indemnified’; it also doubted that the planters would in practice be able to establish a claim to any material extent.⁸⁴ This was hardly reassuring to the planters. Charles Ellis, leader of the West India Committee in London, rejected Wilmot’s idea of a ‘solemn pledge’ by parliament to compensate planters who suffered loss. As Ellis pointed out, no fund had been provided for the purpose, no standard of proof had been suggested, and parliament would be both judge and party in the cause.⁸⁵ Governor Woodford protested that the planters could not be expected to be content to suffer their losses first and then be required to prove to parliament’s satisfaction that they had suffered loss at all.⁸⁶

Wilmot spent much ink in telling the abolitionists that the nation should compensate the planters,⁸⁷ but it was the responsibility of government, if anyone, to make concrete proposals. Wilmot tried to induce his political superiors to do this,⁸⁸ but they proved most reluctant. Bathurst did eventually accept in principle that ‘the claim for compensation on the emancipation of the slave is irresistible’, and that ‘if the public were in earnest’ in wanting to abolish slavery ‘without injustice to those who have their property involved in sugar plantations’, then they would have to make up the difference between the planter’s loss, and what the slave could ‘fairly’ be expected to pay.⁸⁹ In an official despatch to Demerara, approved in advance by the Cabinet, Bathurst considered the hypothetical case of a planter unable to obtain substitute labour for a manumitted slave at some future time, and acknowledged that, in such case, ‘the state will be called upon to interfere ... by making up the deficiency between what the slave may be enabled to earn by habits of industry, and what the owner will be estimated to lose.’⁹⁰

⁸⁴ ASR no 75 (1 Feb 1831), pp.89-92.

⁸⁵ WH2871, Ellis to Horton, 5 Jan 1826.

⁸⁶ WH2940, Woodford to Horton, 25 Feb 1826.

⁸⁷ *West India Question, York Letters*, passim.

⁸⁸ WH2940, Horton to Bathurst, 13 Jan 1826.

⁸⁹ Bathurst Letters, Bathurst to Horton, 11 Jan 1826. This contradicts the claim that Bathurst ‘denied that owners had any claim to public compensation for a slave purchasing freedom’: N. Thompson, *Earl Bathurst and the British Empire* (Barnsley, 1999), p.177.

⁹⁰ P.P. 1826 (001), Bathurst to D’Urban, 25 Feb 1826. See also WH2940, Memorandum on compulsory manumission, 21 Oct 1826.

It had not suddenly become government policy to facilitate compulsory manumission in this way. Bathurst's despatch 'pledged the public ... to nothing more than what all *profess* to be willing to do';⁹¹ but the need remained speculative, and Bathurst could not see how in practice to calculate what might be due or how it might be paid, or how any pledge of future compensation could be made sufficiently definite to induce the planters to place confidence in it.⁹² Likewise, F.J. Robinson told Wilmot that he did not dissent from his principle of compensation, but could not conceive how it could be calculated in each case.⁹³

Wilmot wanted to try to resolve such issues by open and public enquiry, but his superiors resisted public agitation of the question. In 1824, Wilmot's proposal for a Select Committee, and an alternative plan to send a Commission to the West Indies, had both been decisively rejected,⁹⁴ Huskisson explaining that a Committee was not appropriate when 'such violent prejudices and suspicions exist between the conflicting parties.' The proceedings would be misrepresented, angry discussion would be provoked, 'the breach would be widened, and the difficulties increased.'⁹⁵ Again in 1826, Wilmot proposed that a Commission be sent to the West Indies, to establish standard prices at which slaves could purchase their freedom.⁹⁶ Bathurst objected that this could 'create a great flame' throughout the region; it would be 'much misunderstood by the slaves', it would provoke argument and it could not reach any satisfactory conclusion.⁹⁷

Ministers were also wary of committing the public purse. Bathurst objected that any system to appraise the value of slaves would be abused by colonial assessors, who would 'mulct' the government by making very high

⁹¹ Bathurst Letters, Bathurst to Horton, 25 Oct 1826.

⁹² Bathurst Letters, Bathurst to Horton, 11 & 16 Jan 1826.

⁹³ WH2796, Robinson to Horton, [27 Dec?] 1826.

⁹⁴ WH2940, Bathurst to Horton, 15 Jan 1824.

⁹⁵ WH2818, Huskisson to Horton, n.d. [Jan 1824?]

⁹⁶ WH2940, Memorandum on compulsory manumission, 21 Oct 1826.

⁹⁷ Bathurst Letters, Bathurst to Horton, 31 Oct 1826.

estimates.⁹⁸ Wilmot attempted to counter this by adding a further layer of complexity to his scheme, suggesting that all the details of each appraisal should be sent home and ‘if necessary ... taxed like a lawyer’s bill.’ Characteristically, Wilmot thought that ‘there would be no difficulty in arranging the machinery.’⁹⁹ Bathurst remained unconvinced, noting with some understatement that he expected ‘some difficulty ... in persuading the Cabinet to agree to what may immediately lead to a demand upon the Treasury.’¹⁰⁰ Huskisson was equally dubious, telling Wilmot that parliament could not be ‘induced to create any fund for such a purpose’, and that he should keep that part of his thinking ‘out of sight.’¹⁰¹

Wilmot got the enquiry he wanted, after a fashion, with the Privy Council hearing late in 1827 into an appeal by Berbice planters against the introduction of compulsory manumission into that colony. Wilmot was chiefly responsible for the decision to hear the appeal,¹⁰² and took the lead in determining what course the proceedings should take.¹⁰³ The enquiry was from the start an odd beast – a judicial enquiry into a hypothetical question, in which the only ‘evidence’ could be informed speculation. A Committee of the Privy Council, chaired by Lord Bexley and including Wilmot, heard evidence for six days in November and December 1827. The planters’ evidence suggested the impossibility of making any fair appraisal of the master’s loss.¹⁰⁴ Wilmot proposed that the problems could be overcome by an accumulation of data on actual market prices – an idea accepted by no witness – or that they could be obviated if a ‘fund’ were available to assist slaves to purchase their freedom – a suggestion which met with more enthusiasm.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ Bathurst Letters, Bathurst to Horton, 25 Oct 1826.

⁹⁹ WH2940, Horton to Bathurst, 27 Oct 1826.

¹⁰⁰ Bathurst Letters, Bathurst to Horton, 31 Oct 1826.

¹⁰¹ Add. MS 38752, ff. 26-7, Huskisson to Horton, 7 Nov 1827.

¹⁰² WH2941, Stephen to Horton, 16 Oct 1827.

¹⁰³ Add. MS 38752, ff. 20-25, Horton to Huskisson, 6 Nov 1827.

¹⁰⁴ Above, pp.203-4.

¹⁰⁵ P.P. 1828 (261), pp.21-25, 53. The Minutes do not identify individual members of the Council, but it is often clear from the style and content when Wilmot is speaking.

The referral to the Privy Council contributed to the lack of momentum over amelioration between 1827 and 1830.¹⁰⁶ Some West Indians concluded that compulsory manumission was dead, 'a matter which has passed by' as one said, adding that Wilmot had done himself 'infinite credit as a statesman and member of parliament.'¹⁰⁷ A Mr. Dalzell of St. Vincent wrote that Wilmot had:

rendered very great and very lasting service to the West India colonies ... but, he has ... conferred a much greater benefit on the mother country – he has rescued her from the shame and mortification of taking a thoughtless and improvident step in colonial legislation, which would have left her no alternative but that of retracing it by an immediate repeal, or the loss of her sugar colonies.¹⁰⁸

In fact it was only a respite. In March 1829, the Council finally issued its judgment (without giving reasons) that 'no sufficient cause' had been shown why the Berbice order should be rescinded;¹⁰⁹ and in 1830 a new Order-in-Council was issued, extending the terms of the Trinidad Order to all of the directly-ruled colonies, including Demerara, Berbice, and St. Lucia. This has been taken to mark an increased willingness on the part of the home government to exercise its authority, at least in the Crown Colonies.¹¹⁰ The new order expanded on the Trinidad original by providing that appraisers should take into account 'the qualities of the slave proposed to be manumitted, as well as his or her skill in any domestic service or employment, or other labour whatsoever, with any other facts or circumstances' which in their opinion ought to influence their judgment.¹¹¹ This was at best a partial acknowledgment of the principles Wilmot had advocated, but he appears to have thought it enough: he suggested that the colonists should be satisfied with it and should now incorporate compulsory manumission into their law.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ Other factors were probably more important: the government's instability, the growing dominance of the Catholic Question, Buxton's illness: Dixon, 'Emancipation', p.241.

¹⁰⁷ WH2938, N. Nugent to Major-General Sir P. Ross, 20 Jan 1829.

¹⁰⁸ WH2936, ff. 27-9, Dalzell to ?, 30 Dec 1828.

¹⁰⁹ P.P. 1829 (301).

¹¹⁰ Murray, *West Indies*, p.159.

¹¹¹ P.P. 1830 (013), Clause LXII.

¹¹² *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 25, c.1198, 13 Jul 1830.

III

Wilmot's efforts naturally earned him the condemnation of the abolitionists. His pamphlet *The West India Question Practically Considered*, and a scathing review of it by the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* which Wilmot considered, with good reason, to be a gross misrepresentation of his position,¹¹³ inaugurated a war of words between them which lasted for half a decade. The abolitionists' complaint was that Wilmot 'bestows ... his undivided anxiety, and expends the whole current of his sympathies, on the possible loss of some fraction of property which may accrue to the master', while having nothing to say about the condition of the slave or the injustices done to him.¹¹⁴ Wilmot's response was that he would gladly see the slaves emancipated but that both justice and policy demanded that the masters be compensated.

In fact, Wilmot's attempt to find a middle course between abolitionist demands and West Indian resistance attracted criticism from both sides. At the same time as abolitionists complained that they were shut out from government counsels, West Indians complained that the Colonial Office was in league with the abolitionists against them. As Moody told Wilmot, the planters considered the government to be 'ignorant of the subject on which they have legislated,' and to be 'their enemies rather than their protectors.'¹¹⁵ Wilmot liked to point out to his abolitionist critics that many West Indians distrusted him just as much as they did.¹¹⁶ His sturdy defence of the employment of James Stephen junior, a man raised within the most exalted abolitionist circles, as legal counsel at the Colonial Office, was a constant provocation to the planters, and came at considerable cost to his reputation among West Indians, as Stephen himself acknowledged.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ ASR no 11 (30 Apr 1826), pp.168-70; WH2936, ff.5-10, undated draft.

¹¹⁴ ASR no 72 (1 Dec 1830), p.508.

¹¹⁵ WH2849, Moody to Horton, 16 Jul 1827.

¹¹⁶ WH2941, Horton to W. Smith, 22 Oct 1827.

¹¹⁷ WH2941, Stephen to Horton, 15 Nov 1827. Not the least of Wilmot's contributions was the series of appointments made on his initiative in 1824-25 to strengthen the Colonial Office. Both Stephen and Henry Taylor, who came in as a clerk, were of great importance in the later history of the office, and both were much involved in the latter stages of the abolition campaign. Other appointments included Moody, and Robert Hay, who became second under-

Wilmot did garner praise from ‘moderate’ West Indians such as George Hibbert¹¹⁸ and James Colquhoun. The latter buttered him up royally, observing the planters’ good fortune ‘that there exist in high official situations, persons, connected with them, so perfectly well versed in the subject’, who considered the subject ‘with so unbiased a mind, and with so much zeal and anxiety to discover the truth.’¹¹⁹ When, he asked,

has there ever been found an undersecretary of state who has dared gratuitously and *con amore* to risk the bringing on himself of unpopularity and its consequences, by standing forward, the unavowed but well-known defender of the just claims of the colonies.¹²⁰

Wilmot did not object to that characterization, summarising his own position as follows:

I would yield to no person in the sincerity of the wish that slavery may be put an end to ... at the earliest practicable period. ... But if I am asked whether I lean more to the side of the ultra-abolitionist or to that of the moderate West Indian I do not hesitate to avow – to the latter.

By a ‘moderate West Indian’, Wilmot meant a planter who was ready to support all measures for the amelioration of slavery, but who would expect compensation if deprived of his property.¹²¹

Historians have, on the whole, concurred with the abolitionists’ judgment of Wilmot. The idea that Wilmot was himself a slave-owner – for which there is no evidence – has gained some currency.¹²² Even the sympathetic Jones felt that Wilmot ‘tended to underestimate the sufferings and the irreparable wrong

secretary to ease the burden on Wilmot himself. The combined effect of these appointments was to give the Office the intellectual capacity it needed to cope with challenges such as the abolition campaign. See Young, *Colonial Office*, pp.58-83; Murray, *West Indies*, pp.120-26.

¹¹⁸ WH2936, Hibbert to Horton, 25 Feb 1826.

¹¹⁹ WH2936, Colquhoun to Horton, n.d. [1826].

¹²⁰ WH2939, Colquhoun to Horton, 28 Jan 1827.

¹²¹ WH2940, Horton to Henry Drummond, Sep 1824.

¹²² W.L. Mathieson, *British Slavery and its Abolition, 1823-1838* (1926), p.171; Chester New, *The Life of Henry Brougham to 1830* (Oxford, 1961), p.302. Wilmot is not listed in the on-line Encyclopaedia of British Slave Owners (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbl/>, accessed 3 Jul 2015), and I have found no other evidence to support this idea.

which had been done to the slaves, from his anxiety respecting the loss, which would accrue from relieving them, to the property of the planters.’¹²³ If there was a choice to be made between injustice to the planters, or injustice to the slaves, this judgment cannot be disputed. However, neither Wilmot nor his colleagues in office saw the question in that light.

Given the difficulties which surrounded the question in 1823, the government’s pragmatic and unheroic response to the abolition campaign is understandable. It favoured the cause of emancipation as far as circumstances allowed, and there was little difference in this respect between the ‘high’ and ‘liberal’ Tories in government.¹²⁴ Bathurst was respected by the abolitionists, and was at least as determined to make progress, however slowly, as any of his liberal colleagues. Later, Wellington and Murray pursued essentially the same strategy. Canning and Huskisson were both suspect to the saints on account of their Liverpool connections, and Canning was ambivalent in return: ‘You know the saints. I cannot get on with them or without them.’¹²⁵ Huskisson, on arriving at the Colonial Office, remarked that: ‘These slave questions, I verily believe, will drive me mad.’¹²⁶

Wilmot may have been more insistent than some of his colleagues in his emphasis on the property rights of masters, but there was no significant ideological difference between them. Canning, for instance, thought that compensation was due in principle in the case of compulsory manumission, and that those abolitionists who wished to settle the question summarily on the principle that ‘man cannot be made the property of man’ should be ‘relegated to the schools.’¹²⁷ Within the Colonial Office, Wilmot and Moody eventually

¹²³ Jones, ‘Wilmot Horton’, p.175.

¹²⁴ Outside the ministry, pro-slavery arguments were most likely to emanate from the Tory right. J.J. Sack has described how elements of the right-wing press adopted a frankly pro-slavery position which, though bolstered by economic and even religious arguments, betrayed an underlying ‘extreme negrophobia’. Sack suspected that ‘some money was changing hands to produce such a pronounced pro-slavery sentiment.’ However, this strain within the Tory right had little influence on government policy: Sack, *Jacobite*, pp.161-78.

¹²⁵ Dixon, *Canning*, pp.256-61.

¹²⁶ Add. MS 38752, ff. 26-7, Huskisson to Horton, 7 Nov 1827. It may be said in mitigation that reading Wilmot’s voluminous correspondence on the subject (which Huskisson had just been doing) would tend to have this effect on anyone.

¹²⁷ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 15, cc.1364,1357, 19 May 1826.

carried the point that freed slaves would not work on sugar plantations, overturning a standard assumption of *laissez faire* political economy.¹²⁸ The main practical difference between Wilmot and his superiors was that they showed no disposition to resolve the resulting problem that compulsory manumission was likely to drive the market price for slaves above what any slave could afford to pay. Ministers were simply not willing to allocate public funds to this purpose.

This calls into question the real agenda behind that part of the 1823 resolutions which promised a ‘fair and equitable consideration of the interests of private property.’ It was impossible, in the circumstances of the 1820s, both to emancipate the slaves and to compensate the planters fully for the loss they would incur as a result. A settlement was possible in 1833, because by then West Indian interests had collapsed in value. As P.F. Dixon noted, the compensation then offered ‘satisfied the West Indians ... mainly because of straitened economic circumstances which made £20m an enormous boon. Had the plantation system been then more profitable, their price would have been higher.’¹²⁹

The price would certainly have been higher in the 1820s. Varying estimates of the value of West Indian property in slaves and sugar estates ranged up to £160m.¹³⁰ Behind the policy of ‘amelioration’ of the 1820s lay another agenda, which was never made explicit, and which perhaps ministers hid even from themselves: the steady attrition of West Indian resistance to emancipation, by economic means as well as by persuasion. Ministers knew that abolitionism was irresistible in the long run, and in any case they had no abstract love of slavery. The Demerara rebellion reinforced their caution, but

¹²⁸ And, perhaps, putting in doubt the hegemony claimed for such ideas by D.B. Davis. In general, the ‘problem of slavery’ identified by Davis (above, pp.191-2) does not arise in Wilmot’s case. Evidently, he was at least as much concerned with the condition of the free but destitute Irish peasant or English labourer as he was with the West Indian slave.

¹²⁹ Dixon, ‘Emancipation’, p.340. Many planters in Demerara and Trinidad were still doing well, but the overall picture was one of decline: Nicholas Draper, ‘“Possessing slaves”: ownership, compensation and metropolitan British society at the time of Emancipation’ (PhD, London, 2008), pp.143-7.

¹³⁰ WH2939, item 11.

also taught them that the problem of slavery had to be resolved.¹³¹ For all their caution and hesitation, the trend in policy was all one way. The extended debate on emancipation, and the evident tendency of public opinion, critically weakened the West Indian economies. Merchants and financiers became unwilling to lend against West Indian security or invest directly in West Indian enterprises.¹³² Lushington's Act of 1824, prohibiting the movement of slaves between colonies without the permission of the Privy Council, prevented slaves being taken from old colonies with exhausted soils to newer colonies such as Trinidad and Demerara where they would have been more valuable.¹³³ The narrowing of the duty differential between East and West India sugars was intended to wean the West Indians off their reliance on protection, and on slavery, while giving them time to adjust.¹³⁴ According to Henry Taylor, the Colonial Office, unable to coerce the colonial assemblies, was also quietly active in cultivating public opinion: it was the Colonial Office which gathered and supplied the horror stories which filled the pages of the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*.¹³⁵ However, West Indian interests could not be simply thrown over, even in the 1820s.¹³⁶

The government was guided more by a pragmatic response to circumstances than by evangelical fervour, and it is lack of pragmatism, rather than lack of enthusiasm for abolition, which most distinguishes Wilmot from his colleagues. Wilmot thought he was being pragmatic, in trying to find a way to meet planters' concerns, but he was trying to resolve a problem which was, in the circumstances of the 1820s, insoluble.¹³⁷ His eagerness for public enquiry into the question of compensation struck his superiors as politically naïve, while his advocacy of a fund to compensate the planters showed his readiness to spend public money, contrary to the economising spirit of the times.¹³⁸ His

¹³¹ Dixon, 'Emancipation', p.202.

¹³² See for instance the evidence of the London merchants Andrew Colville and George Hibbert in the Berbice hearing. P.P. 1828 (261), pp.59-65.

¹³³ Dixon, 'Emancipation', p.200.

¹³⁴ Hilton, *Corn*, pp.198-9; P.D. Curtin, 'The British Sugar Duties and West Indian Prosperity', *Journal of Economic History*, 14 (1954), pp.157-64.

¹³⁵ *Autobiography of Henry Taylor, 1800-1875* (2 vols., 1885), i, pp.122-3.

¹³⁶ This is supportive of Drescher's case against that of Eric Williams.

¹³⁷ This was also true of his approach to Catholic emancipation: see Chapter 7.

¹³⁸ As with his approach to emigration: see pp. 157-62 above.

efforts may, however, have been helpful in a way that he did not intend. If part of the government's real agenda was to weaken West Indian slave-owning interests over time, to the point where a settlement became possible, then, in order to avoid a decisive breach between the government and the West Indians at an unripe time, it was best that this agenda be not too obvious. Wilmot's effort to bring the question of compensation to a head was out of keeping with the government's overall approach, but it helped to conciliate moderate West Indian opinion by obscuring, to some extent, the real tendency of policy. By seeking to make government policy towards the planters explicit, Wilmot inadvertently helped to keep it obscure.

The ‘Cautious Protestant Advocate’: Catholic Emancipation, 1825-1830

The ‘Catholic Question’ was perhaps the most intractable issue in British politics in the first thirty years of the nineteenth century. Roman Catholics both in Great Britain and Ireland were subject to a number of legal disabilities – remnants of the penal laws of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries – of which the most significant, at least to the Catholic nobility and gentry and men of talent, was their practical exclusion from parliament by the oaths which members were required to take. ‘Catholic Emancipation’ meant in effect the admission of Catholics into parliament. The issue divided opinion sharply and had caused the fall of governments in 1801 and 1807.¹

The issue was more Irish than English. In England, the Catholics were a small and peaceable minority. In Ireland, a large majority of the population was Catholic, but Protestants owned most of the land and provided Ireland’s governing elite. Catholic 40s freeholders had been given the vote in 1793, but could vote only for Protestant candidates. The political exclusion of the Catholic majority, their economic and legal disabilities, and the extreme poverty of much of the population, combined to create a sense of oppression and injustice and to foster a strong sense of Catholic identity. With the continuing failure to provide satisfactory relief to Catholics, this increasingly became the preponderating Irish national identity. In the 1820s, these feelings

¹ G.I.T. Machin, *The Catholic Question in English Politics, 1820-1830* (Oxford, 1964), remains the only modern full-length treatment of the politics (in England) of the campaign for emancipation in the 1820s. Wendy Hinde, *Catholic emancipation: a shake to men’s minds* (Oxford, 1992), describes the politics surrounding the passage of the Catholic Relief Bill in 1828-29. Gash, *Secretary Peel*, pp.545-98, gives a masterly account of the same period, emphasizing Peel’s role.

were brilliantly harnessed by Daniel O'Connell in a campaign for relief which eventually became irresistible.²

The doubtful loyalty of the Catholic majority made Ireland a weak link in Britain's 'empire'. Catholic France had repeatedly planned or attempted the invasion of Ireland in time of war, but strategically the loss of Ireland was unthinkable. To many British statesmen, there was obvious wisdom in seeking to conciliate Irish Catholics to British rule by removing the disabilities they suffered. Some supporters of emancipation also argued that the Catholic claim to equal civil privileges was intrinsically just. It has generally been argued that 'liberal Tory' supporters of emancipation focused on its political expediency, while the Whigs emphasised the principles of civil and religious liberty for all.³

Catholic emancipation was opposed by a powerful body of Protestant opinion which attached fundamental importance to the 'church and state' constitution of 1688, and which regarded Roman Catholicism with varying degrees of distrust and hostility. Roman Catholicism, with its imputed doctrine of exclusive salvation, was seen as an intolerant and persecuting religion, which, if given scope, would embroil England once again in the religious strife of the seventeenth century. Protestant dissent was regarded as almost equally intolerant, and so only a dominant, Protestant, established church, supported by the state and handsomely endowed, could provide the stable environment within which religious liberty could be safely enjoyed. Protestants who thought thus regarded themselves as the true defenders of the constitutional principles of 1688. Catholics were further suspected of 'divided allegiance': their loyalty to the state might conflict, even in temporal matters, with their

² The role of the Catholic question in the formation of Irish national identity is considered in Thomas Bartlett, *The fall and rise of the Irish nation: the Catholic question 1690-1830* (Dublin, 1992). The Irish side of the emancipation campaign is described in J.A. Reynolds, *The Catholic emancipation crisis in Ireland, 1823-29* (1955), Fergus O'Ferrall, *Catholic Emancipation* (Dublin, 1985), and Oliver MacDonagh, *The Hereditary Bondsman: Daniel O'Connell 1775-1829* (1988).

³ G.F.A. Best, 'The Whigs and the Church Establishment in the Age of Grey and Holland', *History*, 45 (1960), pp.103-18; Machin, *Catholic Question*, p.16; R.W. Davis, 'Toryism to Tamworth: the Triumph of Reform, 1827-1835', *Albion*, 12 (1980), pp.137-8; Lee, *Canning*, p.97.

obligations towards the Pope. Even worse, anti-Catholics maintained that Catholics did not consider themselves bound by their oaths or obliged to keep faith with heretics. Therefore, even the most solemn repudiation by the Catholics of any such beliefs could be discounted.⁴ The search for ‘securities’ which would allay Protestant fears had been a regular motif in the Catholic debate.⁵

Protestants rarely explained clearly what injury they anticipated to the Church of England from the emancipation of the Catholic minority. The danger to the Church of Ireland was more apparent: it was widely believed to hold property far out of proportion to the service it rendered to the Protestant minority, and furthermore it was maintained by a tithe on the whole population, greatly resented by the Catholic majority and by the Presbyterians in the north, which constituted a principal target for Catholic agitators and pamphleteers. For Protestants, however, the right of the Church of Ireland to its own property was an inviolable principle, which could not be conceded or compromised in Ireland without compromising the same principle in relation to the much more valuable property of the established Church of England.⁶

For pro-Catholics, therefore, the consequences of a failure to concede Catholic emancipation were potentially disastrous to the British empire, while for ‘Protestants’ the consequences of concession were potentially disastrous to the established church, and hence to the constitution, in both Ireland and England. Politically, these forces were evenly balanced, and since 1812 it had proved impossible to form a Cabinet which was united on the question either way.

⁴ The ‘Protestant constitution’ is celebrated at length in Clark, *English Society*; see also G.F.A. Best, ‘The Protestant Constitution and its Supporters, 1800-1829’, *TRHS* 8 (1958), pp.105-27. Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (1992), pp.11-54, demonstrates the importance of Protestantism, and anti-Catholicism, in the formation of British national identity in the eighteenth century. The intensification of anti-Catholic feeling, on the right, in the decades prior to emancipation is charted in Sack, *Jacobite*, pp.217-51. Michael Tomko, *British Romanticism and the Catholic Question* (Basingstoke, 2011), explores the strain placed on Romantic conceptions of national identity by the process of emancipation.

⁵ See below, pp.231-2.

⁶ Events after emancipation proved that Protestant fears on this point had been well-founded. ‘Lay appropriation’ of the revenues of the Church of Ireland became a major issue in the 1830s, splitting the Whig government: Richard Brent, *Liberal Anglican Politics* (Oxford, 1987), pp.65-103; Ian Newbould, *Whiggery and Reform, 1830-41* (1990), pp.90-101, 134-47.

Liverpool's administration was officially neutral on the Catholic question, with 'Catholics' and 'Protestants' almost equally balanced in the Cabinet. This became the most obvious and explicit line defining and dividing 'liberal' members of Cabinet, who favoured emancipation, from 'Tory' members, who resisted it.⁷ In practice, the effect of this compromise, presided over by a prime minister who opposed emancipation, was to preserve the *status quo* and to prevent any concessions being made.

Section I of this chapter will examine Wilmot's constitutional opinions, with particular reference to the established church, and his general approach to the Catholic question. Sections II and III will consider his two main interventions into the debate in the 1820s, and section IV concludes by evaluating Wilmot's distinctive approach to the issue. The first question under consideration here is how far Wilmot's support for Catholic emancipation was consistent with the approach of liberal Tories such as Canning: it will be shown that, although he shared the basic 'pragmatic' view that emancipation would strengthen the empire and the constitution, his approach was highly idiosyncratic. The second question is how far Wilmot was in tune with Catholic feelings and demands in England and Ireland: it will be shown that he saw emancipation through an Anglican prism which sometimes made him less pro-Catholic than he thought he was.

I

Wilmot was zealously attached to the constitution of 1688 and to the established church. He believed that 'the principles of civil and religious liberty' were secured by 'the endowment of the Protestant reformed religion.' The state offered 'religious instruction' to all, in what Wilmot confidently believed to be a superior faith, one that had been 'filtered and refined at the period of the Reformation.' Dissenters who chose not to avail themselves of

⁷ As previously observed, the Cabinet did not divide in the same way on all issues, with Peel, otherwise 'liberal', being opposed to Catholic emancipation.

that instruction had 'full liberty to procure for themselves such spiritual assistance' as they might deem necessary. In 1688, 'a great national property' had been 'appropriated to the support of spiritual teachers' of Protestant reformed religion: ultimately this was the property not of individuals, but of the state. These were the principles on which 'the united church of England and Ireland' rested. Wilmot fully accepted that the Protestant clergy had a duty to protect and defend church property, and to secure the institutions which embodied the 'purer faith' which they professed. This duty was owed not only to future generations of clergy, but also to 'the Divine Founder of Christianity'.⁸

Wilmot therefore shared with anti-Catholics a deep concern for the established church and its property. He did not think that Catholic emancipation posed any threat to the church, but he recognised the sincerity of those who did and he thought their concerns were legitimate. The essence of his approach to the Catholic question was to persuade conscientious Protestants that they had nothing to fear from emancipation. He told his Newcastle constituents that, had he perceived 'any danger ... to the Protestant Church or to the State', nothing would have reconciled him to Catholic emancipation. He accepted that penal laws against Catholics might have been justified when they were first framed, when the 'triumph' of Catholicism was 'involved in the restoration of the Stuarts', but insisted that they were now an anachronism: 'the race of the Stuarts is in the grave ... and public opinion has trampled underfoot the doctrines of passive obedience and the divine right of kings.' If the religious principles of Roman Catholics had ever been incompatible with their allegiance to the state, or with civil liberty, that time had long since passed.⁹

Wilmot did not share the widespread suspicion of Roman Catholicism as nine parts superstition and idolatry, and was not among those Tory pro-Catholics who 'leaned over backwards to demonstrate their intolerance of Roman

⁸ *Inquiry*, Third Series, pp.46-7; *Newcastle*, pp.30, 34.

⁹ *Newcastle*, pp.18, 26, 34.

Catholicism.’¹⁰ After ‘much examination of written record’ and ‘much conversation with individuals of that faith’, he concluded that Roman Catholic principles were ‘compatible with the purest exercise of loyalty to their king, and fidelity to the British constitution.’¹¹ Wilmot was pro-Catholic long before he entered parliament,¹² but there is nothing in his early correspondence to show how he came to be so. His college, Christ Church, produced the most prominent Commons advocates both for emancipation (Canning) and against it (Peel). His liberal attitude was shared by others in his family, since in 1816 his half-sister Augusta married the Earl of Kenmare, one of the principal Catholic landowners of Ireland. She was to convert to Roman Catholicism at the end of her life.¹³ Wilmot himself responded warmly to the ‘gorgeous display’ of Catholic worship when he witnessed it on the continent, comparing it to the ‘sober and untheatrical’ forms of Anglicanism.¹⁴

Wilmot supported emancipation on the pragmatic grounds that it would ‘confirm’, rather than undermine, the interests of church and state. It would ‘conciliate the people of Ireland’, for whose loyalty he felt respect. He also supported emancipation on more idealistic grounds, invoking parliament ‘in the spirit of the constitution, to give freedom to those who never forfeited their rights’, and ‘in the spirit of religion, to “do unto others as they would wish others should do unto them.”’¹⁵

Wilmot did not personally require any securities in return for emancipation, ‘beyond the common-sense security of attaching instead of alienating a whole nation.’¹⁶ However, his concept of emancipation ‘without securities’ was not wholly unconditional, since he proposed that any Catholic entering parliament should be required to swear a most comprehensive form of oath. Wilmot’s enhanced form of oath included ‘the most unequivocal assurance’ of loyalty

¹⁰ Machin, *Catholic Question*, p.16.

¹¹ *Newcastle*, pp.23, 21.

¹² D4576/17, Richard Wellesley to Wilmot, 12 Apr 1812.

¹³ Bodleian Library, Lovelace Byron Papers, LB383, Mrs. A. Wilmot to Lady Byron, 4 Jul 1816; http://www.proni.gov.uk/introduction_kenmare_d4151-2.pdf, accessed 3 Jul 2015.

¹⁴ WH2895, Wilmot to Mrs. A. Wilmot, [1] & [6] Aug 1816.

¹⁵ *Newcastle*, p.18; *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 7, cc.499-502, 10 May 1822.

¹⁶ WH2934, Horton to Gallwey, 23 Sep 1827, ‘No. 1’.

and fidelity that he could devise. Catholics would have been required to swear to maintain the Protestant succession to the Crown, to abjure objectionable doctrines sometimes imputed to Catholics,¹⁷ to deny to the Pope any temporal or civil jurisdiction within the realm, to abjure any attempt to subvert the Protestant church establishment, and not to disturb the Protestant religion or Protestant government of the kingdom.¹⁸ To Wilmot, there was nothing in this to which any Catholic could reasonably object.

Wilmot discerned three ‘classes’ of Protestant. The first, his own class, favoured emancipation ‘upon extended views of policy and human nature’, and attached ‘little or no value to detailed securities’. The second class did not have profound theological or religious objections to emancipation, but were ‘alarmed for the safety of the Protestant church, and in consequence for the safety of the state.’ The third class comprised those ‘who, from bigotry and prejudice, are opposed to all concession.’ Wilmot believed that if the second class could be brought to coalesce with the first, then Catholic emancipation would be carried, but, if they were ‘permanently thrown back on the last class’, it would be lost.¹⁹

Wilmot’s efforts were therefore always aimed squarely at conciliating this ‘second class’ of Protestants. With the third class, he confessed himself ‘unable to deal’.²⁰ His first major intervention, in 1825-26, consisted of a speech at Newcastle, his *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*, and his *Letter to the Electors of Newcastle-under-Line*,²¹ and constituted, with the Catholic responses to his letter to the Duke, a sustained attempt to persuade moderate Protestants to place confidence in what he called ‘the honour and integrity of the Roman Catholic body.’²² Only after this approach had failed did Wilmot try a different tack, devising a new ‘security’ to address the specific fears of

¹⁷ In particular, ‘the opinion that princes, excommunicated by the Pope or Council, or any authority of the See of Rome, or by any other authority whatsoever, may be deposed or murdered by their subjects’.

¹⁸ *Newcastle*, p.19.

¹⁹ WH2933, Horton to Pierce Mahony, 13 Aug 1828.

²⁰ *Newcastle*, p.23.

²¹ The speech and first *Letter* were reprinted as appendices in the second *Letter*, which is the source used in this chapter.

²² *Newcastle*, p.24.

this class of Protestant. That was the burden of his later pamphlets on the Catholic Question, namely *Protestant Securities Suggested* (1828), *A Letter to the Bishop of Rochester* (1828), his *Correspondence* with the Rev. P.A. Baines (1829), and *Protestant Safety* (1829). Wilmot thought of himself as a ‘cautious Protestant advocate’ of emancipation.²³ All of his pamphlets display a marked tenderness for Protestant concerns and fears. Their conciliatory tone and good-mannered moderation were a deliberate part of his attempt to appeal to a specific Protestant audience.

II

Wilmot’s first intervention was prompted partly by concern for his seat at Newcastle-under-Lyme, where his pro-Catholicism made him vulnerable in the face of a broadly anti-Catholic electorate.²⁴ His tenure at Newcastle became precarious following the unexpected death of his colleague, W.S. Kinnersley, in July 1823, when much of Kinnersley’s considerable influence at Newcastle was inherited by his brother Thomas, a rigid opponent of emancipation.²⁵ In the heated atmosphere of 1825, when Burdett’s Catholic Relief Bill passed the Commons only to be decisively rejected by the Lords, Wilmot was one of several pro-Catholic members to believe that the issue could fatally damage their chances.²⁶ The election was deferred until 1826 so that the excitement could die down, and Canning deprecated any further discussion of the question in the meantime.²⁷

Wilmot took a different approach, characteristically deciding to tackle the issue head on. At a speech in Newcastle in October 1825, he argued that the Catholic question was poorly understood, and undertook to provide his constituents with the materials they needed to make a proper judgment upon

²³ WH2934, Horton to William Howley, 14 Nov 1827.

²⁴ Barker & Vincent (eds.), *Language*, pp.134, 214, 234, 240.

²⁵ Hatherton Papers, D260/M/F/5/27/2, Horton to Littleton, 7 Nov 1823; Add. MS 40,369, ff. 64-9, Horton to Peel, 15 Oct 1824; ff. 182-4, J. Davenport to Horton, 20 Nov 1824; ff. 293-7, Horton to Davenport, 4 Dec 1824.

²⁶ Aspinall (ed.), *Charles Arbuthnot*, p.78.

²⁷ Denison Papers, Os C 18, Canning to Plunkett, 25 Sep 1825.

it.²⁸ This was the starting point for his *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*. In addition to securing his own seat, Wilmot also hoped to contribute to the settlement of the question.²⁹ With his long-standing concern for Ireland, he saw a clear link between emancipation and his other great enthusiasm, emigration. Emancipation was ‘the most efficient remedy for the moral ills of Ireland,’ while ‘for her physical evils, emigration ... is the *only* remedy.’³⁰

Wilmot’s *Letter* was drafted in consultation with prominent English Catholics such as Edward Blount, secretary of the British Catholic Association, Lord Killeen, A.R. Blake, and Dr. Poynter, Vicar Apostolic of the London District and head of the Roman Catholic clergy in England. Its main purpose was to request, from the ‘Roman Catholic body’,

a distinct Explanatory Statement of the doctrines and opinions of the Roman Catholics of the present day, so far as such doctrines and opinions can be considered, by the most jealous Protestant, as calculated to affect the exercise of their civil duties as subjects.

Wilmot argued that such a statement could go far to conciliate, and to instruct, Protestants who were distrustful and apprehensive of emancipation, but who were open to persuasion. He knew that the Roman Catholics had made many previous such statements of doctrine, but he argued that it would be beneficial to bring them together into a single comprehensive statement, subscribed to by as many of the Catholic clergy and leading laity as possible.³¹ In his original conception, emancipation could be limited to Catholics who solemnly swore their adherence to this ‘Explanatory Statement’. Pro-Catholic members of parliament could then tell their constituents,

that we desired to emancipate no Catholic who was not prepared to give that irrefragable proof of his qualification for admission ... which the terms of such an exposition would afford.³²

²⁸ *Newcastle*, p.17.

²⁹ Hatherton Papers, D260/M/F/5/27/2, Horton to Littleton, ‘Saturday’ [Nov?] 1825.

³⁰ WH2932, Horton to Colonel Shawe, 22 Jul 1827.

³¹ *Newcastle*, pp.21, 25.

³² Arundel, C508, Draft Letter, Horton to 12th Duke of Norfolk [n.d.].

However, there was no reason to suppose that legislation could or would be founded on a statement drawn up by the Roman Catholics themselves, and this aspect of Wilmot's plan was dropped from the published version of his letter.

Anxious to conciliate Protestant opinion, Wilmot demanded that the Catholics should repudiate any claim to the property of the Protestant church. This issue had 'more practical reference' to Ireland, but the principle was the same in both countries. Wilmot contended that Catholics had no right to complain of the payment of tithe, even in Ireland, since tithes were the property of the church and not of the tithe-payer. Wilmot tentatively acknowledged, as a matter of 'peculiar delicacy', the abstract possibility of some future reallocation of Irish church property if that were judged to be in the national interest: what the state had endowed, the state could take away. However, this had to be a 'national' question, quite separate from the Catholic question, and Wilmot asserted that, if the issue were to arise during his own time in politics, he would defend the *status quo*.³³

The British Catholic Association responded positively. A Declaration was prepared by Dr. Poynter and his Coadjutor Dr. Bramston, and approved and signed by all their senior colleagues; this was received by the Association at the beginning of June 1826, together with a short Address to be signed by leading lay Catholics.³⁴ Copies of the Declaration and Address were sent to each of the royal dukes, to every cabinet minister, to the archbishops of Canterbury and York, to the universities, to the British Museum, and to Wilmot Horton. The text was inserted in the *Globe* and *Times* newspapers, and the Address in particular was reproduced in many other national and provincial newspapers. All of this happened just in time for the general election. The thirty Irish Catholic bishops had earlier issued a Declaration very much in the terms Wilmot was asking for,³⁵ and Wilmot professed not to know whether this was made in response to his appeal or not.³⁶ It was in fact

³³ *Newcastle*, pp.27-9.

³⁴ Arundel, MD469, BCA Minute Book, Mar-Jun 1826.

³⁵ *Pastoral Address of the Irish Roman Catholic Bishops*, 25 Jan 1826.

³⁶ *Protestant Safety*, p.4.

in response to Sydney Smith, who had privately sent to J.W. Doyle³⁷ fourteen resolutions constituting ‘a denial of those errors commonly imputed to the Catholics and more and more believed for want of proper contradiction.’ Doyle had agreed to have them signed by the Irish bishops and published.³⁸

The Declaration of the English and Scottish Bishops first offered an authoritative statement of Roman Catholic doctrines which had been widely misrepresented, on matters such as authority, scripture, exclusive salvation, idolatry, penance, confession and indulgences. It went on to address matters specifically affecting a Catholic’s fitness to be accorded civil privileges. On the crucial question of oaths, the Declaration noted:

Catholics are charged with holding that *they are not bound by any oath, and that the Pope can dispense them from all the oaths they may have taken.* We cannot sufficiently express our astonishment at such a charge. We hold that the obligation of an oath is most sacred ... No power ... can make it lawful for a Catholic to confirm any falsehood by an oath; or dispense with any oath.³⁹

The linked charge, that Catholics held themselves not bound to keep faith with heretics, was rejected equally emphatically as an ‘unchristian and impious’ principle which all Catholics detested.

On the question of divided allegiance, the Declaration asserted the ‘perfect and undivided’ allegiance of Catholics to the sovereign and to the civil authority of the state. The sovereign’s supreme civil and temporal authority was entirely distinct from, and independent of, the spiritual and ecclesiastical authority of the Pope and the Catholic Church.

Finally, the charge that Catholics entertained a ‘pretended right to the property of the established church in England’, was declared to be ‘totally without foundation.’ They entertained ‘no pretension to such a claim.’ The revenues

³⁷ Catholic Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin.

³⁸ N.C. Smith (ed.), *The Letters of Sydney Smith* (2 vols., Oxford, 1953), i, pp.419-20, Smith to Lady Holland, 4 Nov 1825.

³⁹ *Declaration of the Catholic Bishops, the Vicars Apostolic and their Coadjutors in Great Britain* (1826).

of the Church of England were ‘the property of those on whom they are settled by the laws of the land.’

The lay Address was signed by over sixty leading lay Catholics. It appealed directly to the candour of its readers:

Bearing equally with you, our fellow subjects, the burthens of the country, and upholding equally its institutions and its glory, we claim to be admitted to a full participation in all the rights of British subjects. Every principle or practice, hostile in the remotest degree to those institutions, we most explicitly disclaim. Year after year we repeat the humiliating task of disavowal; still we suffer the penalties of guilt. We ask you is this to endure forever?⁴⁰

In Wilmot’s view, the Declaration left no grounds on which relief could be denied to any Catholic subscribing to it, if the basic veracity of Catholics was accepted. That was the rub: ‘opinions respecting the obligation of an oath are, in fact, the key-stone on which the whole principle of resistance to the Roman Catholic claims must depend.’⁴¹

Unsurprisingly the most decided response came from Wilmot’s third class of Protestants, the unpersuadable. For the Devon clergyman Francis Huyshe, the key-stone of the argument was not opinions respecting oaths, but ‘the essence of the Roman Catholic religion ... that which makes Popery to be what it is’, which according to Huyshe was that ‘it establishes another authority, according to whose decision its professors are bound to believe and to do.’ Wilmot’s failure to recognise the essence of ‘Popish’ doctrine vitiated his whole argument.⁴² As George Croly argued:

the Church of Rome claims to be paramount and pre-eminent ... incapable of error ... invested with the power of appointing all discipline, rules and rulers ... invested with the power of forgiving sins ... keeping the keys of Heaven; commuting, confirming, and dissolving the temporal allegiance of subjects, and exercising those rights in the person of the Pope, who sits as God’s vicar and representative on earth.

⁴⁰ *Chronicle*, 7 Jun 1826.

⁴¹ *Newcastle*, p.9.

⁴² [F. Huyshe], *A Letter to Sir Thomas Dyke Acland* (1826).

Croly drew on a well-rehearsed set of evidence: the Bull of Pope Pius against Queen Elizabeth, the decrees of the Councils of Constance, Lateran and Trent. Though ancient, they had never been explicitly repealed. The Catholic Church was furthermore ‘proverbial for annexing different meanings to the same word, according to her convenience’, and so the Declaration could not be taken at face value. Clearly, nothing a Catholic could say would satisfy Croly.⁴³ The *Quarterly Review* meanwhile found fresh reasons for doubting the value of oaths sworn by Catholics, in the casuistical teaching supposedly given on the subject at the Roman Catholic College at Maynooth.⁴⁴

Despite these reactions, anti-Catholicism was not, according to Machin, ‘a very effective force’ at the 1826 election. ‘Attempts to raise the cry of “no popery” in Britain appear negative and apathetic’.⁴⁵ Widespread and strongly expressed anti-Catholic sentiment ‘made an impact electorally, but not to the extent that leading anti-Catholics had hoped’, with a net gain for anti-Catholics of thirteen seats.⁴⁶ One hint that the Declaration and Address may have had some effect, in some places, in damping down anti-Catholic sentiment, may be found in a report from Northumberland by the Catholic George Silvertop of Minster Acres. The Catholics of that county ‘knew the value’ of the Declaration, he wrote, and had ‘felt it during the severely contested election for the county.’ The Address had also been important. ‘A copy of it was posted on the hustings at Alnwick on the first day of the contest, and on the fifteenth day ... it remained there untouched, thousands having, in the meanwhile, read it with admiration.’⁴⁷ At Newcastle, Wilmot thought, his letter to his constituents had done him ‘good service upon the whole’.⁴⁸

Wilmot’s pamphlets entered a crowded field and it is impossible to know the long-term effect, if any, of his initiative and the Catholic responses to it.

⁴³ [G. Croly], ‘Declaration of the Catholic Bishops’, *Blackwood’s*, 117 (Sep 1826), pp.429-35.

⁴⁴ [M. O’Sullivan], ‘Eighth Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Enquiry’, *QR* 74 (Mar 1828), pp.459-84.

⁴⁵ Machin, *Catholic Question*, p.85.

⁴⁶ Fisher, *Commons 1820-1832*, i, pp.223-6.

⁴⁷ *Chronicle*, 1 Feb 1827.

⁴⁸ Murray Papers, Ms.40581, Wilmot to Murray, 30 Jun 1826.

When emancipation finally came in 1829, the opposition was surprisingly soft, and it is possible that Wilmot's work, with its particular note of attention to Protestant interests, played a part, alongside the efforts of better-known and more powerful advocates, in the long process of 'softening up' Protestant opinion on this question.

Wilmot's cooperation with the English Catholics had thus far been a happy one, and the results were at worst harmless to the Catholic cause. Blount expressed their gratitude for his efforts:

Amidst the ill usage we experience ... it is gratifying to us to feel that we have zealous, disinterested friends who make our cause their own, and amongst those friends there is none whose goodwill is more flattering to us than yours.⁴⁹

However, Wilmot's priorities were not identical with Catholic ones and there was always the potential for relations to fray. His cordial relations with English Catholics were soon disturbed by events in Ireland. Fundamental to Wilmot's approach was that emancipation would be won by conciliating moderate Protestant opinion, not by alienating it. Catholics should assist, not embarrass, members of Parliament like himself who supported emancipation. He therefore favoured 'dignified conciliation' and 'calm and reasoned remonstrance'; he would do nothing for emancipation, he said, if either the English or the Irish Catholics were disposed 'to support the alternative of contempt and menace.'⁵⁰ Wilmot was therefore angered by the British Catholic Association's response to the election results in Waterford and other counties of Ireland. Pro-Catholic candidates had been elected against the wishes of Protestant landlords, thanks to a vigorous campaign by the Irish Catholic Association supported by the Catholic clergy. The British Association hailed these results with delight and warmly voted its thanks both to Daniel O'Connell and to the clergy.⁵¹

Wilmot argued that, with these resolutions, the English Catholics had thrown away all the advantages derived from the Declaration and Address.⁵² He was

⁴⁹ WH2753, Blount to Horton, n.d. [1826].

⁵⁰ *Newcastle*, pp.23-4.

⁵¹ Arundel, MD469, BCA Minute Book, 26 Jul 1826.

⁵² Arundel, MD469, BCA Minute Book, Wilmot to Blount, 28 Jul 1826.

dismayed that the Catholic clergy should assist in the erosion of the electoral influence of property.⁵³ Blount sturdily defended the clergy, asked pointedly whether ‘the elective franchise was given to the Catholics for the sole use and benefit of their landlords on all occasions, and under all circumstances’, and suggested instead that the landlords of Ireland would ‘read a salutary lesson for the regulation of their future conduct.’⁵⁴ The exchange was then published, to Wilmot’s fury, in the *Catholic Miscellany and Monthly Repository*,⁵⁵ and reprinted in the *Morning Post*.⁵⁶ Wilmot’s letter was something of a gift for anti-Catholic advocates and was taken advantage of by Lord George Beresford in a speech at a Protestant dinner in Armagh.⁵⁷ Canning was also displeased, thinking that the correspondence was ‘calculated to aggravate’ the political difficulties of the question.⁵⁸

III

His first initiative having, as it seemed, achieved little, Wilmot spent much of 1827 searching for an alternative ‘security’ for Protestant concerns. The search for securities had a long and unhappy history, beginning in 1801 with George III’s peremptory refusal to consider emancipation with the securities of a revamped oath and provision for payment of the Roman Catholic clergy.⁵⁹ In 1808 the Whigs, believing that they had the support of the Catholic ecclesiastical hierarchy, proposed the security of a royal veto on the appointment of Catholic bishops. Catholic support was quickly withdrawn in the face of fierce opposition from Ireland, and the debacle led to recriminations between the Whig leadership and John Milner, the most prominent Catholic bishop in England. The incident damaged the Catholic cause, exposing them to accusations of treachery and unreliability. Despite

⁵³ Above, pp.70-71.

⁵⁴ WH2753, Blount to Horton, 6 Aug 1826.

⁵⁵ Vol VI no 57.

⁵⁶ 6 Oct 1826.

⁵⁷ *Glasgow Herald*, 23 Oct 1826.

⁵⁸ WH2897, Granville to Horton, 20 Nov 1826.

⁵⁹ Barnes, *George III*, pp.372-9.

this experience, the Whig leadership clung to the idea of the veto until 1812.⁶⁰ Lord Grenville, a veteran of these events, warned Wilmot that the question of securities had more potential to divide Catholics than to divide Protestants.⁶¹ In 1825, Burdett's relief bill had been accompanied by two 'wings' – payment of the Catholic clergy by the state, and the disfranchisement of the Irish 40s freeholders. These provisions again divided the supporters of emancipation: many Whigs disliked the disfranchisement provisions, while O'Connell's support for payment of the clergy threatened to undermine his reputation in Ireland.⁶² The bill was lost in the Lords. O'Connell concluded that his agreement to the 'wings' had been counterproductive: he had procured 'public tranquillity' in Ireland to help the bill pass, with the result that the Lords had thought it safe to throw it out. O'Connell resolved to have nothing more to do with securities, but to rely instead on agitation to create a 'salutary apprehension' of 'the resentment of the Irish nation.'⁶³

Wilmot took the opposite view, that the agitation and aggression of the Irish Catholic Association were entirely counterproductive. In 1827, during the 'liberal' administrations of Canning and Goderich, he briefly hoped that O'Connell might be induced to see things his way. With Christopher Gallwey, the agent of Lord Kenmare, acting as intermediary, a tentative and irregular channel of communication fleetingly opened up between Wilmot and O'Connell. Wilmot, still a member of the government, knew how dangerous this correspondence was to him, and was at pains to make clear that he wrote on his own account alone.⁶⁴ He emphasised the need for a conciliatory approach to assist the English friends of emancipation, and asked O'Connell to place, and to express, his trust in pro-Catholic members of the government and of parliament – 'men,' he wrote feelingly, 'who have *risks* everything, politically speaking, for the Catholic Question.'⁶⁵ It may be doubted whether O'Connell needed Wilmot's advice, but on this point at least there was a

⁶⁰ M.J. Roberts, *The Whig Party 1807-1812* (1939), pp.39-79.

⁶¹ WH2803, Grenville to Horton, 22 Jan 1826.

⁶² Machin, *Catholic Question*, pp.55-69.

⁶³ O'Connell (ed.), *O'Connell Correspondence*, iii, pp.407-8, O'Connell to Pierce Mahony, 17 Sep 1828.

⁶⁴ WH2934, Horton to Gallwey, 9 Oct 1827.

⁶⁵ WH2934, Horton to Gallwey, 29 Sep 1827.

temporary meeting of minds, for at an Association meeting on 30 October O'Connell did express confidence in the administration, formed as it was of 'men, most of whom are the decided friends of civil and religious liberty.' O'Connell specifically mentioned Lansdowne, Spring Rice, Wilmot Horton, and Goderich. Admitting that there might be 'limits' to his confidence, O'Connell declared that 'the time for those limits has not as yet arrived. A period must be allowed to them to develop their intentions.'⁶⁶

This was only a temporary truce. O'Connell soon resumed his normal approach of agitation, and Wilmot resumed his normal hostility to the Irish Catholic Association. In 1828, he brought forward publicly a new 'security' that he had originally conceived in the spring of 1827. Far from fearing division among the Catholics, he actively hoped to provoke a split between the Association and Catholics of 'character and property' in Ireland, many of whom, he believed, would be ready to break with the Association if some reasonable compromise could be found, falling short of the full emancipation that the Association demanded, but nonetheless doing justice to 'the moderate and reasonable part of the Catholic body.'⁶⁷ Wilmot's new idea was that many of the Catholic gentry, both in England and Ireland,

would consent to accept emancipation, coupled with a statutory enactment, that they should be *forever* disqualified from voting in either House of Parliament upon any point deemed by such House to affect the rites, power, doctrine and property of the Protestant Church as by law established.⁶⁸

The idea was developed at length in a new pamphlet, *Protestant Securities Suggested* (1828). Wilmot reiterated that, in his opinion, no such security was necessary: he had designed it to meet the 'apprehensions of real danger' to Church property entertained by many 'enlightened and conscientious Protestants.' His view that Protestant objections to emancipation were fuelled

⁶⁶ *Chronicle*, 3 Nov 1827.

⁶⁷ Maria Edgeworth told Wilmot that many Irish Catholics of the 'middling class' and gentry disapproved of the Catholic Association's tactics, and were 'ashamed of the conduct of their priests'. They thought that the priests should be paid by government, and 'things would then go on much better': WH2785, Edgeworth to Horton, 15 Dec 1826 & 10 Jan 1827. Wilmot was liable to conflate such information with his own ideas as to the solutions.

⁶⁸ Add. MS 38749, ff.141-6, Horton to Huskisson, 2 Mar 1827.

principally by fears for the property of the established Church was supported by a substantial appendix containing extracts from parliamentary speeches by prominent opponents of emancipation.⁶⁹ Wilmot's point of view is also endorsed by comments from the veteran pro-Catholic Sydney Smith:

It would have some effect if the Catholics were to admit the expediency of excluding every member from voting on the affairs of the Church, who would not take the declaration against transubstantiation. The common query is: are they to assist in regulating the affairs of our Church, who will not permit us to meddle with *their* Church?⁷⁰

Where doubt existed as to whether a particular measure affected the interests of the established church, Wilmot proposed that the Speaker should give his ruling, and if any member disagreed, the matter could be referred to a 'Committee of Religion', comprising only Protestant members, for decision; if the Committee's ruling was unacceptable to any member, the House would pronounce definitively on the point, 'Roman Catholic members being disqualified for voting.' In effect, Protestant members would decide what issues Roman Catholic members could vote on. Having analyzed all the divisions in the House of Commons since the Union with Ireland, he concluded that, at most, 68 related to questions arguably affecting the interests of the established church, while 1640 clearly did not. On these figures, Catholic members would be disqualified from voting no more than 4% of the time. Wilmot thought they could hardly object to such a 'small percentage deduction.'⁷¹

Wilmot did not publish this idea without first obtaining the support of many English and some Irish Catholics. Blount and Kenmare (probably both prompted by Wilmot) agreed that it would be a 'very invidious duty' for Catholics to have to legislate for the Protestant church; to be relieved from that duty was no sacrifice and they would both gladly accept emancipation on

⁶⁹ *Protestant Securities*, pp.v-vi, 5, Appendix A.

⁷⁰ Smith (ed.), *Smith Letters*, i, p.463, Smith to Lord Grey, 24 Mar 1827.

⁷¹ *Protestant Securities*, pp.42-5, 53-4, Appendices C & D.

the terms Wilmot proposed.⁷² Poynter agreed that, if oaths gave insufficient security, ‘let the Catholic be withheld from voting in Parliament, or from exercising any judicial function, in cases concerning the temporalities or any affairs of the Protestant Church.’⁷³ Reverend J. Collins seems to have arrived at the same idea independently. Collins and Poynter both felt that English Catholics could have no objection to such a plan ‘on Catholic principles.’⁷⁴

Wilmot later enforced this point in correspondence with P.A. Baines, one of the English Catholic bishops who had signed the Declaration in 1826, and who, in 1829, was serving at the Vatican as ‘Domestic Prelate’ to the Pope and ‘Assistant to the Pontifical Throne’. Wilmot asked whether there was any official objection, on the part of the Roman Catholic Church, to entering into emancipation with securities. In reply, Baines distinguished between securities in the sense in which the term had normally been employed, ‘to designate certain plans of vexatious, if not mischievous, interference with the doctrines or discipline of the Catholic Church’, and securities which left the Catholic Church untouched, but ‘went merely to allay the groundless apprehensions of Protestants, and to secure to the Established Church of England the undisturbed possession of its rights and revenues.’ Catholics who were willing to accept emancipation with this latter form of security were ‘not guilty of any offence against religion’; the Pope would be the last person to arraign their opinions. As to Wilmot’s specific proposal, Baines thought there was ‘nothing, in *its general outline*, which a Catholic could object to as incompatible with his religion.’⁷⁵ This, Wilmot argued, was as authoritative a statement as could be wished, since ‘all publications at Rome ... involving political or religious subjects’ were subject to the supervision of the Secretary of State, whose sanction was therefore ‘necessarily implied, whenever the opinions of the Papal See are made the subject of discussion.’ He believed that he had now shown how easily the Catholic question could be settled: Protestants could hardly be dissatisfied with the security offered, and Catholics could hardly object to it on religious grounds. The question that

⁷² *Rochester*, p14; *Protestant Safety*, p.47.

⁷³ *Protestant Securities*, Appendix G.

⁷⁴ WH2934, Collins to Horton, 16 Jan 1828.

⁷⁵ *Baines*, pp.17-19; WH2970, Baines to Horton, 7 Jan 1829.

remained was whether the plan encroached too much on the Catholic's civil rights.⁷⁶

This was more than a little optimistic, since Wilmot's proposals had been sharply criticised on many grounds. There were practical objections – that Wilmot's proposal could not be made to work; constitutional objections – that Catholic members of parliament would be placed in an anomalous and unprecedented position; and political objections – that to accept emancipation on such terms would be a greater degradation to Catholics than their current exclusion, and that the plan would therefore perpetuate or even aggravate current tensions. Doubts had been voiced even by some of the Catholics whose support Wilmot claimed. Collins told Wilmot that some of the clergy and gentry 'saw constitutional objections,'⁷⁷ while Baines thought that any Catholic accepting such a security might commit 'an error in politics'.⁷⁸ More vigorous opposition came from some Protestant supporters of emancipation. Lord Wellesley, just returned from Ireland after several years as Lord Lieutenant, thought that the cause of emancipation would be deeply injured by 'the mere proposal of such a scheme' from a known friend of the cause. It would be 'an inroad upon the constitution of Parliament' and he hoped that Catholics would never 'submit to such a degradation.'⁷⁹ Littleton expanded on these points:

the Irish Catholic would not submit to be represented by castrated members. Nor would the members quietly submit to castration. Your project, under the semblance of emancipation, inflicts a disqualification and degradation on the Catholics (especially the nobility and gentry) more odious than any existing under the present laws.

It would be 'idle', Littleton said, to consider Roman Catholic members, subject to Wilmot's restrictions, as members of parliament.⁸⁰ On this constitutional question, Wilmot's defences were weak. He cited other cases in

⁷⁶ *Baines*, pp.v-vi, ix.

⁷⁷ WH2934, Collins to Horton, 16 Jan 1828.

⁷⁸ *Baines*, p.18.

⁷⁹ Hatherton Papers, D/260/M/F/5/27/5, Wellesley to Littleton, 8 Feb 1828.

⁸⁰ WH2996, Littleton to Horton, 10 Feb 1828.

which members were debarred from voting in specific circumstances, first ‘the constitutional exception which has been taken to the Bishops voting in the House of Lords in cases of life and death’ and second ‘the exclusion of members of the House of Commons from voting upon questions in which they have a private interest.’ Wilmot also adopted the argument of Lord Kenyon to the King in 1795, that ‘either of the Houses of Parliament may, if they think proper, pass a bill, up to the extent of the most unreasonable requisition that can be made’, in other words, the constitution was that parliament could do what it liked. Acknowledging that Roman Catholic members would be in an anomalous position, if his proposal were adopted, Wilmot argued that it must be less anomalous than the existing total exclusion.⁸¹ Finally, he argued that it would be ‘anomalous and unconstitutional to allow a Roman Catholic to legislate for Protestant property pledged by the State,’ even aligning himself with the late, anti-Catholic, Duke of York on that point.⁸² Despite this, he remained, personally, in favour of emancipation even without securities on pragmatic grounds:

acting in the spirit of the adage ‘*Salus populi suprema lex*’, I should prefer to hazard the result of that unconstitutional privilege being given to the Roman Catholics, rather than to abide the issue of their being deprived, on that account, of all other privileges to which they have an unequivocal and undisputed claim.⁸³

As to the politics, Wilmot acknowledged that any solution which was not satisfactory both to Catholics and Protestants would ‘not be a conciliatory measure, but the contrary; and will only multiply, instead of diminishing difficulties.’⁸⁴ Wellesley and Littleton, more firmly grounded than Wilmot in Irish realities, realised that Wilmot’s proposals failed to pass that test. O’Connell’s reaction entirely vindicated their view:

he [Wilmot] is literally mad as any man in Bedlam to suppose that the Catholics as a body would consent to be emasculated by way of Emancipation. ... The

⁸¹ *Protestant Securities*, pp.24-30, 37.

⁸² Wilmot alluded to the Duke of York’s speech in the House of Lords, 25 Apr 1825: *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 13, cc.139-42.

⁸³ Hatherton Papers, D/260/M/F/5/27/5, Horton to Littleton, 11 Feb 1828.

⁸⁴ *Protestant Safety*, p.11.

security proposed by Dean Swift actually to emasculate the male Catholics was wisdom compared to the dream of Mr. Wilmot Horton. ... Observe the totally unconstitutional nature of this proposal. Any county or borough that elected a Catholic would have only a half representative ... I infinitely prefer our present state to such emancipation. We are now aggrieved, we should then be dishonoured.⁸⁵

O'Connell was quick to see the practical difficulties, pointing out that a corn bill would affect the income of the Protestant church and might therefore be considered off-limits to Roman Catholic members. Protestant opponents of emancipation made similar practical objections. Leslie Foster argued that political realities would render the security meaningless: the Catholics in parliament might, for instance, be able to trade their support on some great question, such as a corn bill, in return for an objective of their own, such as relief from church rates, on which they were debarred from voting.⁸⁶

Such considerations induced the Cabinet to reject Wilmot's security when they prepared for emancipation in early 1829. The Cabinet, according to Lord Ellenborough, 'considered the several securities proposed for many days; ... several which at first sight seemed most plausible, appeared, on further consideration, to be really injurious.'⁸⁷ Peel took the view – that taken by most proponents of emancipation all along – that the best security was provided by emancipation itself, that of securing the loyalty of the Catholic to the state and the constitution. Other securities might detract from this, 'by implying the continuance of suspicion and distrust.' Peel was therefore 'disposed to abandon all thought of legislative securities' such as Wilmot's.⁸⁸ He also rejected Wilmot's security on the practical grounds that the matters which really affected the interests of the Church might not be those which nominally related to them.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ O'Connell (ed.), *O'Connell Correspondence*, iii, pp.406-9.

⁸⁶ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 19, cc.540-1, 12 May 1828.

⁸⁷ Ellenborough, *Political Diary*, i, pp.297-380.

⁸⁸ Lord Mahon and Edward Cardwell (eds.) *Memoirs of Sir Robert Peel* (2 vols., 1857), i, pp.352-3.

⁸⁹ *Standard*, 6 Mar 1829.

Wilmot of course had always been ready to support emancipation without securities: his proposal had been designed to meet Protestant objections that he did not himself share. He had repeatedly stated his willingness to abandon his own proposal if government developed another, equally conciliatory in detail,⁹⁰ and he redeemed this promise at the first opportunity he had to speak on the Relief Bill:

now that there was a hope of accomplishing the great object without what in present circumstances must be considered a drawback, he rejoiced that his own measure had not been adopted. He was extremely well pleased that the present measure did not touch the question of ecclesiastical securities at all.⁹¹

Characteristically, Wilmot was not quite able to leave it at that. He began to ask how precisely the security put forward in the Relief Bill – a strengthened form of oath to protect the Protestant church – avoided the objection which Peel had made to his and other securities. The relevant part read as follows:

I do hereby disclaim, disavow, and solemnly abjure any intention to subvert the present Church Establishment as settled by law within this Realm and I do solemnly swear that I never will exercise any privilege to which I am or may become entitled, to disturb or weaken the Protestant Religion or Protestant Government in the United Kingdom.

Wilmot asked whether this oath did not bind the Roman Catholic ‘in his legislative capacity ... far more inconveniently because more undefined than he would have been restricted under my security.’⁹² He cited in his support a pamphlet by the Rev. Thomas Gisborne, written in answer to Protestant opponents of the Act who considered the new oath worthless.⁹³ In fact, the new oath did give rise to some problems. During debate in 1838 the Bishop of Exeter (Henry Phillpotts – a noted anti-Catholic participant in the pamphlet war of 1827-28), accused certain Roman Catholic members of perjury because

⁹⁰ *Protestant Securities*, p.6; *Protestant Safety*, pp.11-12.

⁹¹ *Standard*, 19 Mar 1829.

⁹² WH3004, Draft pamphlet, n.d. [c.1829-30].

⁹³ Thomas Gisborne, *Considerations on the Basis and the Means of the Permanent Security of the Established Church of England* (1829).

of their votes in the Commons.⁹⁴ It also appears that some Roman Catholic members felt to some extent constrained by the terms of the oath. It was repealed in 1868, and replaced by one, common to all members of parliament, of allegiance to the Crown and the Protestant succession. This enabled Catholics to campaign openly for the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland, which was enacted in the Irish Church Act of 1869.⁹⁵ Wilmot therefore had a point, though hardly to the extent that his own security was to be preferred.

IV

Wilmot's second intervention in the Catholic debate remains a historical footnote. Halévy's judgment, that Wilmot's proposal 'was too complicated to be considered by a practical statesman,'⁹⁶ is justified by the reaction of figures such as O'Connell and Peel. Yet there was a period in late 1828, in the aftermath of O'Connell's stunning by-election victory in County Clare, when the proposal appeared to be making headway. To many moderate Protestants, unaware that the government was quietly preparing to concede emancipation, it seemed that some resolution of the Catholic problem was urgently necessary and that Wilmot's proposal was the best available. Wilmot claimed the explicit support of three bishops: Murray (Rochester), Copleston (Llandaff), and Ryder (Lichfield).⁹⁷ The veteran Earl Harrowby thought it 'the only plan which gets rid for the present of all the interminable difficulties of wings and securities, and leaves them for consideration under more favourable circumstances.'⁹⁸ *The Times*, initially sceptical, announced its conversion in August 1828.⁹⁹ In December, it thought Wilmot's plan was 'one which

⁹⁴ R.W. Horton, *The Object and Effect of the Oath in the Roman Catholic Relief Bill considered* (1838).

⁹⁵ O'Ferrall, *Catholic Emancipation*, Appendix 2.

⁹⁶ Halévy, *Liberal Awakening*, p.275.

⁹⁷ *Protestant Safety*, p.iii.

⁹⁸ Hatherton Papers, D260/M/F/5/27/5, Harrowby to Littleton, [15 Dec?] 1828.

⁹⁹ *Times*, 4 Aug 1828.

Parliament will be apt to embrace and rest upon, in any specific measure of emancipation.’¹⁰⁰

Wilmot was able to quote testimonials from other parliamentarians and legal experts, who on investigation had found the measure to be more practicable than they had at first thought.¹⁰¹ Even the *Morning Chronicle*, though sceptical itself, admitted in mid-December that Wilmot’s plan was ‘deemed the very *ne-plus-ultra* of political wisdom.’¹⁰² Shortly before the new parliamentary session began, the diarist Greville noted that ‘many people expect that Wilmot’s plan will be adopted’, but, better informed than most, he did not believe it, ‘for Wilmot is at a discount and his plan is absurd and impracticable.’¹⁰³

The main practical effect of Wilmot’s initiative, as Grenville had prophesied, was to divide the Catholics. Moderate British Catholics, such as the Duke of Norfolk, Blount, and Poynter, who were prepared to consider emancipation with securities, now found themselves opposed by a noisy Irish contingent which had begun to dominate public meetings of their association. Their spokesman, Eneas Macdonnell, said he would ‘consider the Irish Catholics as traitors to their country, and acting dishonourably to themselves, if ... they would consent to receive any concession short of full and unconditional emancipation.’¹⁰⁴ That opinion was emphatically endorsed by O’Connell, who denounced ‘persons who enter into the question of securities’ as ‘the worst enemies of the Catholic cause’, and who began to talk of separation from the British Catholic Association.¹⁰⁵ In England, the issue came to a head at a stormy and fiercely contested meeting of the Association on 21 January 1829, again much disrupted by rowdy Irishmen. The meeting decided, narrowly, to support Blount, but it was clear that even English Catholics were far from unanimous in support of Wilmot’s plan.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ *Times*, 20 Dec 1828.

¹⁰¹ *Protestant Safety*, pp.vi-vii, 44.

¹⁰² *Chronicle*, 18 Dec 1828.

¹⁰³ H. Reeve (ed.), *The Greville Memoirs* (8 vols., 1888), i, p.169.

¹⁰⁴ *Manchester Times*, 14 Nov 1828.

¹⁰⁵ *Chronicle*, 18 Nov 1828

¹⁰⁶ *Chronicle*, 22 Jan 1829.

It may be doubted whether Wilmot, for all his eagerness to serve the cause of emancipation, was quite the true friend of the cause that he wished to be. Other pro-Catholic Protestants certainly objected to his initiative. Spring Rice and Brougham both remarked pointedly that proposals for securities should come from those who considered them necessary, not from supporters of emancipation.¹⁰⁷ Wilmot's approach stemmed from his own constitutional convictions, and these left him with a couple of blind spots. He was convinced that the property rights of the established church were so firmly founded, even in Ireland, that no responsible person, Protestant or Catholic, could wish to bring such rights into question. He did not understand how critical the question of Irish church property was in Ireland, although his clandestine correspondence with O'Connell made this amply clear.¹⁰⁸ Secondly, Wilmot could not see that his proposed security would be viewed as a degradation by many Catholics, nor did he see how right-thinking Catholics could reasonably object to the limitations he proposed to their legislative power. If his proposals had a tendency to split Catholic opinion, in Wilmot's view it was only the unreasonable and untrustworthy who would be left behind. Wilmot placed too much reliance on the opinions of moderate and conciliatory English Catholics such as the Duke of Norfolk, Blount, and Poynter, and Irishmen of similar disposition such as Kenmare. Like other securities proposed earlier, Wilmot's was an excessively English solution to an essentially Irish problem. Thirdly, Wilmot's conviction that conciliation, not agitation, was the best way to achieve emancipation was fundamentally at odds with O'Connell's approach, and O'Connell clearly had the firmer grasp of political realities. For all these reasons, there could be no genuine sympathy between Wilmot and the majority of Irish Catholics.

¹⁰⁷ *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 19, cc.1329, 1331, 12 Jun 1828.

¹⁰⁸ Wilmot had been told that: 'as a national grievance the enormous wealth of the Law Church in Ireland, is equally felt by a large proportion of the Protestants as well as by the Catholics, to be an almost insupportable evil, and one of the paramount causes for the discontent and wretchedness so prevalent in Ireland; ... if ever as a political question the spoliation of church possessions comes to be debated ... the Catholic body would go the full length of their Protestant brethren in any measure of curtailment, or at least in prescribing bounds to Church monopoly': WH2934, Gallwey to Horton, 3 Oct 1827.

For all that, Wilmot's attempts to further the cause of Catholic emancipation during the period 1825 to 1829 represent one of the more sustained and energetic efforts by a prominent English politician in that cause. Analytically, his view of Catholic emancipation was very similar to Canning's, but tactically his determination to attempt a solution ran counter to Canning's preference for keeping the question quiet and waiting on time. Wilmot believed it to be his duty to attempt to find a compromise solution, when wiser or more cautious politicians hung back. This was perhaps an indication of his lack of aptitude for practical politics, but Wilmot understood and accepted the risks both to his reputation and to his career. His first intervention was at worst harmless, and possibly beneficial; his second, if not entirely wise, was at least well-intentioned and politically selfless. Wilmot undoubtedly made political sacrifices in pursuit of this cause. His determination to pursue the Catholic question publicly was one factor influencing his departure from office at the end of 1827, and it prevented him from resuming office in May 1828. It was, in fact, one of the issues involved in Wilmot's reassertion of his political independence at the cost of his official career.

8

‘Wedded to a Favourite Theory’?

Wilmot Horton, 1827-1831

In April 1827 liberal Toryism was in the ascendant. Canning was prime minister, supported by a significant section of the Whigs; the high Tories were out of office. Canning, it seemed, had ‘pulverized’ both parties.¹ However this ascendancy lasted only for a few months. By the end of 1830 liberal Toryism had ceased to exist as a coherent political force.

The disintegration of the ‘Canningite party’ between 1827 and 1830 has been well charted and superficially the causes are obvious enough. Canning’s death removed a charismatic leader, and neither Goderich nor Huskisson, his only plausible successors, had the same authority or appeal. Goderich soon proved his incapacity as prime minister; Huskisson’s decision, with others, to join Wellington’s government in January 1828, alienated some of the more rigid Canningites, while his resignation four months later caused further division. Attempts to organise a Huskissonite party in opposition were half-hearted, at least until the 1830 session, and the general election of 1830 removed several potential members (including Wilmot). Huskisson’s death in September 1830 again deprived the party of its most substantial figure. In late 1830, the remnants of the party were terminally divided by the now urgent issue of parliamentary reform.²

Deeper trends underlay these events. The political space occupied by liberal Toryism in Canning’s time was fast disappearing. Catholic emancipation was conceded, the corn laws were relaxed. The benign economic conditions of the mid 1820s, which had underpinned the liberal Tories’ claim to competence, and hence their ability to resist political reform, deteriorated; and Wellington’s

¹ Halévy, *Liberal Awakening*, viii.

² Aspinall, ‘Last of the Canningites’; Stewart, *Foundation*, pp.36-9; Jupp, *Eve of Reform*, pp.263-73.

government, though pursuing similar economic policies, did not inspire the same confidence. By late 1830, some measure of reform had become inevitable, and appeals to 'Canning's principles' were no longer a viable basis for political union.

This chapter explores Wilmot's idiosyncratic responses to this changing political environment, on three different levels. Section I explores the reasons for Wilmot's increasing isolation, in terms of Westminster politics, during this period, and considers his attitudes to both office and party connection. Section II examines his attempts to appeal directly to 'public opinion', through pamphleteering and lecturing. It explores Wilmot's conceptions of the role of public opinion in politics, and of the modes of reaching and influencing public opinion. Section III considers Wilmot's reactions to the pressure for political reform and to the first Reform Bill. The chapter thus contributes to our detailed knowledge of the disintegration of organised liberal Toryism; it provides an instance of the 'outward turn' in politics hitherto associated chiefly with Canning among the liberal Tories; and it offers new evidence on liberal Tory attitudes to parliamentary reform.

I

Philip Salmon has already provided a succinct narrative of Wilmot's later years in parliament, illustrated with much telling detail, and there is no need to repeat it. In brief, Wilmot became increasingly impatient of junior office from 1825 on. He left the government at the end of 1827, and declined the opportunity to join Wellington's administration in May 1828. He was correctly listed in 1828 as belonging to the loose Huskissonite group, but his connections with that group gradually weakened, so that by 1830 he was acting completely alone. He left parliament at the 1830 general election, but remained politically active and had some contacts both with the Wellington administration and with the Whig opposition (the latter not mentioned by

Salmon). He was appointed Governor of Ceylon in January 1831, courtesy of Goderich, and sailed at the end of June.³

Wilmot grew dissatisfied with office on several counts. His official workload was evidently daunting.⁴ In addition, unlike the other under-secretaries of state, he bore the burden of answering for his department in the Commons. From quite early on in his official career, he began to complain of ill-health brought on by overwork.⁵ He also complained of the lack of official recognition, in either rank or salary, for the extra responsibilities he discharged.⁶

More fundamentally, though, it was *lack* of responsibility which really irked Wilmot. He complained that he was never permitted to expound colonial policy in the Commons, in the way that the chiefs of other departments expounded home or foreign or financial policy. Nor would any cabinet minister undertake the task, Wilmot added, though they were ready enough to encroach on colonial business when it suited them. In his major speech on colonial trade policy in March 1825, for instance, Huskisson ‘never once alluded to the Colonial Department, as one that had anything to do with the subject’. Much of the real work of the Colonial Office therefore went unknown, and it was ‘no wonder’ that Hume should characterise it as ‘the most inefficient in the whole range of government.’ By 1826, though, Wilmot had given up asking to be permitted to make the kind of general exposition of policy that he thought desirable. For him to adopt ‘a higher and more individual tone’ in the Commons would, he conceded, ‘burlesque’ his

³ Salmon, ‘Wilmot’, pp.833-9.

⁴ By 1824 the workload of the Colonial Office, measured by the number of dispatches sent and received, had increased by about 60% since the second under-secretaryship had been abolished in 1816, and by about 400% since that post was originally created in 1806. Young, *Colonial Office*, pp.282-3. See also WH2932, Horton to S.R. Lushington, 3 Jun 1826.

⁵ WH2810, Heber to Wilmot, 18 Mar & 26 Aug 1822; WH2782, Ward to Horton, 26 Aug & 2 Sep 1823.

⁶ WH2932, Horton to Hay, 24 & 25 Dec 1825; PRO 30/29/9/6, Horton to Granville, 9 Sep 1826.

subordinate position. He admitted: 'I am *not* a responsible minister, I am the deputy and expounder of a responsible minister.'⁷

It was the effect on his own reputation which bothered Wilmot most. His letters are littered with references to 'the public' – what the public could know or what the public might think.⁸ He believed that the Cabinet, and in particular Canning, prevented him from speaking at length in the Commons, either from distrust of his abilities or out of 'impatience to get the business of the day over'. This enforced reticence inhibited his development as a parliamentary orator, while 'the public' concluded that it was 'want of nerve, or of competency', rather than constraints imposed from above, that held him back. This situation, he feared, was 'more calculated to ruin its possessor in parliamentary reputation than any other.'⁹

By 1826 Wilmot had also learned just how little, as an undersecretary, he was able to influence government policy, and he was becoming deeply dissatisfied by the lack of support for his emigration ideas in Cabinet. Typically, he was inclined to take it personally, describing himself as 'a poor under-secretary, whom under the operation of a sort of Highgate oath, every Cabinet minister thinks himself bound ... to push to the wall.'¹⁰

For all these reasons, Wilmot's continuance in or departure from office became a matter of calculation, as to how best to promote his emigration plans and to further his ambition to hold '*high* political position'. The latter must depend, he reckoned, on his reputation in the House of Commons, and the question was whether this could be better enhanced in office or out. His own 'impulse' and calculation was to go out: he would then have time to cultivate

⁷ WH2932, Horton to Robinson, 22 Mar & 5 Apr 1825; PRO 30/29/9/6, Horton to Granville, 9 Sep 1826.

⁸ As to who Wilmot meant by 'the public', see below, p.254.

⁹ WH2932, Horton to Robinson, 22 Mar & 5 Apr 1825. Wilmot thought this was most damaging in the case of debates on slavery, a subject on which he and Canning were at odds. Wilmot wished to defend the planters from misrepresentation, and to expound the progress being made on amelioration, but was required to leave all substantive issues to Canning, who in Wilmot's opinion was often ill-prepared. Wilmot accordingly found such debates a 'stultifying ordeal'. See also WH2932, Horton to Hay, 24 Dec 1825; PRO 30/29/9/6, Horton to Granville, 'Tuesday' [Apr 1824].

¹⁰ PRO 30/29/9/6, Horton to Granville, 8 Sep 1826.

‘public speaking as an art’, and to see if he could rise above his current admitted ‘mediocrity’ in that field. The alternative was to stay where he was, ‘and hold my tongue’.¹¹ Rather against his own calculation, his choice until late 1827 was to stay put, inertia no doubt reinforced by his official salary of £2000 per annum.

When Wilmot did leave office, he presented it as a deliberate and voluntary choice:

the independent opinions which I entertained upon three very prominent and important subjects, appeared to me to make a secession from office *advisable*, until I had had an opportunity of placing those opinions fairly before parliament; ... The three subjects ... were, the Catholic question, the West Indian question, and emigration.¹²

This however was a rationalisation, after the event, of a much more muddled and complex process. Being ‘out’ certainly had attractions for Wilmot, for the reasons he gave and also for the sheer release from toil, but he would willingly have stayed in office on terms that suited him. In late 1827 Wilmot aspired to a position of real responsibility, such as Chief Secretary for Ireland; failing that, he was prepared to accept a sideways move combined with free lodging in a safe government seat (which would have saved him from expensive contests at Newcastle). Goderich offered the sideways move, to the Vice-Presidency of the Board of Trade, with a seat at Hastings for £1000 – a generous offer which Wilmot turned down, against the advice of his friends. Quite possibly he was unable to find the £1000. He also turned down the Governorship of Jamaica. Wilmot therefore left office by his own volition shortly before Goderich’s government fell. Though publicly ‘content’, a few weeks later he was angry and upset to be left out of Wellington’s administration, having expected that Huskisson would look after his interests.¹³

¹¹ PRO 30/29/9/6, Horton to Granville, 8 Sep 1826.

¹² WH2933, Statement by Wilmot Horton, 6 Jul 1828.

¹³ In addition to the sources cited by Salmon, see (inter alia): WH2748, Bathurst to Horton, 27 Nov 1827; WH2807, Littleton to Horton, 26 & 29 Nov 1827; WH2818, Huskisson to Horton, 6 Dec 1827; Add. MS 38750, ff. 112-14, Horton to Huskisson, 27 Aug 1827; Add. MS 38751,

There was an unwritten convention that a ‘political’ under-secretary ‘tended to leave office with the Secretary of State who had appointed him or, later, when the administration to which he owed political allegiance resigned.’¹⁴ Wilmot nodded to this convention in both its earlier and later formulations, expressing his disposition to retire with Bathurst, on Canning’s accession to the premiership in April 1827, in view of his ‘personal obligations’ to Bathurst, who had appointed him,¹⁵ but concluding that these obligations were outweighed by the ‘political connections ... palpably founded on a concurrence in political principles’, which he had with Canningite ministers. This encapsulates Wilmot’s slightly divided sense of the bases of political union. While in practice he acted on the basis of ‘concurrence of political principle’, he still found it necessary to justify his conduct in terms of the obligations of loyalty, stemming from the receipt of patronage, which might bind him to a particular leader ‘in a personal point of view’.¹⁶ Excepting the case of Bathurst, though, Wilmot invoked this concept in order to deny its applicability to himself in specific cases. In the case of Canning, he observed that:

When ... I hear Mr Canning designated in parliament as *my patron* ... I cannot accept the imputation of patronage, because I never received such patronage at his hands, nor ... do I think ... that he was politically disposed to extend it to me.

As for Huskisson, after his failure to find a place for Wilmot in January 1828, ‘the case of *a patron* was equally out of the question, as Mr Huskisson would be the first person to admit.’ When Huskisson resigned from Wellington’s administration in May 1828, Wilmot did not think it ‘in the slightest degree necessary’ on personal grounds to ‘volunteer to follow his political fortunes.’¹⁷ On political grounds it was a different matter. Wilmot declined to

ff. 285-8, 290-91, 323-8, Horton to Huskisson, 22, 23 & 27 Oct 1827; Hatherton Papers, D260/M/F/5/27/5, Horton to Littleton, 21 Jan 1828.

¹⁴ J.C. Sainty, *Home Office Officials 1782-1870* (1975), p.12; idem., *Colonial Office Officials 1794-1870* (1976), p.9.

¹⁵ PRO 30/29/9/6, Horton to Granville, 8 Sep 1826; WH2933, Statement, 6 Jul 1828.

¹⁶ WH2749, Horton to Bathurst, 26 Apr 1827.

¹⁷ WH2933, Statement, 6 Jul 1828; Hatherton Papers, D260/M/F/5/27/4, Wilmot to Littleton, 22 Nov 1827. Wilmot believed that he did Canning a favour by staying in office in April

join Wellington, because he felt himself to be committed on the Catholic question.¹⁸ He expressed his ‘unequivocal’ adherence to Canning’s political principles; as for Huskisson’s principles, he could not imagine ‘any concurrence of political principle more complete than my general concurrence in his views of policy, foreign and domestic.’¹⁹

Like many supporters of the Canningite-Whig coalition of 1827, Wilmot yearned for a permanent union of moderates from both parties, leaving behind the old distinctions of Whig and Tory and forming a new party based on Canningite principles. These he attempted to define thus:

What was Canning’s system? Toryism, no; Whiggism still less; it was ‘Canningism’, that is a compound of Whiggism, without the vice of ultra and impracticable principles, with Toryism, divested of its prejudice and prescription. It was that of common sense, and of philosophy, in the best sense of the term, applied to politics.

Like most such definitions, this lacked much positive content, but Wilmot optimistically supposed that ‘an intelligible code of the principles on which Mr Canning would have carried on his government’ could be promulgated and widely agreed.²⁰ This is in keeping with his normal propensity to suppose that general agreement could be secured for complex propositions: what is unusual is that he did not attempt the task.

Wilmot was listed as one of the ‘Huskisson party’ in the Commons in June 1828, though Palmerston’s description of them – as men ‘who may be supposed as agreeing pretty much in opinion and likely to find themselves voting the same way’ – hardly suggests much organisation.²¹ Wilmot later wrote that he and Goderich had been ‘particularly anxious that all the party *should unite* and combine’, but that this had been ‘overruled in practice at

1827, with a Privy Counsellorship as a ‘salve to his wounded honour in not being promoted.’ PRO 30/29/9/6, Horton to Granville, 26 Aug 1827; Add. MS. 40320, f.49, Croker to Peel, 13 Jun 1828.

¹⁸ WH2933, Horton to Wellington, 29 May 1828.

¹⁹ WH2933, Statement, 6 Jul 1828.

²⁰ PRO 30/29/9/6, Horton to Granville, 26 Aug 1827.

²¹ Lord Colchester (ed.), *The Diary and Correspondence of Charles Abbot, Lord Colchester* (3 vols., 1861), iii, pp.567-8; Bourne (ed.), *Palmerston-Sullivan Letters*, p.205.

least by Huskisson and his immediate friends.’²² This appears to be the last time that Wilmot took any serious interest in party connection; after this he acted more or less completely independently.

Wilmot spent much of the latter halves of 1828 and 1829 abroad, preparing the pamphlets on emigration, the Catholic question, and slavery, which poured from the presses in 1829 and 1830. He described himself as ‘much more taken with my own opinions and speculations, than with *any* situation which could await me’, declaring that, in the event of a dissolution, he would not even seek re-election.²³ When Huskissonites surveyed the materials for a party in the Commons, Wilmot was not usually mentioned.²⁴ Increasingly, the only sort of ‘concurrence in political principles’ that Wilmot looked for was concurrence by other people in his own, and in particular in his views on emigration. On leaving government, he had foreseen no obstacle to resuming office, if offered, once he had ‘liberated his soul’ on his three great questions, and had promised himself never to engage in ‘any new process of independent political enquiry and opinion’, having been convinced by experience of ‘the danger, uselessness, and thanklessness’ of such activity.²⁵ However, Wilmot never could believe that he had sufficiently explained his views, on emigration in particular, so long as they were not taken up and acted upon. What began with a need to set out his opinions plainly became by 1830, as Macdonald complained, ‘the one engrossing and absorbing topic’ and the standard by which parties were to be tried.²⁶ As Wilmot candidly admitted:

My political position is, to stand or fall by my measure – to be a friend of the government that does it justice; and I call ‘doing it justice’ not the *adoption* of it, but giving it a fair chance of examination and enquiry.²⁷

²² PRO 30/29/9/6, Horton to Granville, 21 Oct 1830. Huskisson and Palmerston did not want Goderich to reclaim leadership of the Canningites: Jones, *‘Prosperity’ Robinson*, pp.210-11.

²³ Aspinall (ed.), *Charles Arbuthnot*, p.111, Horton to Mrs. Arbuthnot, 6 Dec 1828.

²⁴ Denison Papers, Os C 67 & 73-4, Sandon to Denison, 22 Jan 1829 & 9 Feb 1830, Denison to Sandon, 13 Feb 1830; Hatherton Papers, D260/M/F/5/27/6, Huskisson to Littleton, 24 Jan 1830. See also Add. MS 40398, ff.37-40, Planta to Peel, 3 Jan 1829. In 1830 Wilmot was listed as a Huskissonite by Sir Richard Vyvyan, not the best-placed observer: Jupp, *Eve of Reform*, p.266.

²⁵ WH2933, Statement, 6 Jul 1828; PRO 30/29/9/6, Horton to Granville, 11 Mar 1828.

²⁶ Above, p.189.

²⁷ WH2932, Horton to Brougham, 11 Dec 1830.

No political group met Wilmot's requirements. In 1830, when Huskisson omitted to give even the highly qualified support to Wilmot's emigration proposals which he had previously offered, Wilmot declared that 'it became *impossible* that I could have any longer any sort of party connection with him.'²⁸ The unenthusiastic reception given by Peel and by Grey in 1830 to Wilmot's elaborate proposals for the public employment of redundant labour, coupled with emigration, has already been described.²⁹ Peel and Wellington had both shown interest in recruiting Wilmot over the summer of 1830, but the government's condition for making an offer, that Wilmot should simmer down on the subject of emigration, was the exact opposite of Wilmot's for accepting it, that the government should take his ideas seriously. Wilmot believed that a political crisis was at hand and that it was no time to be quiet when he had a remedy to offer.³⁰ Meanwhile Grey's description of him as a person 'wedded to a favourite theory' sent Wilmot into a fury which he sustained for some weeks. The go-between, Ponsonby, asked him whether 'a great leader of an immense party' was to consent at once without consideration to a 'complicated system', the details and ramifications of which he could not possibly know.³¹ But Wilmot was asking for consideration, not consent, and Grey's response seemed to show that he would get it no more from the Whigs than from the Tories.

II

From 1827 onwards, recognising that neither government nor parliament showed much interest in his emigration plans, Wilmot tried increasingly to harness the force of 'public opinion' in his favour. His parliamentary

²⁸ PRO 30/29/9/6, no 70, Horton to Granville, 21 Oct 1830. Granville, who knew both men well, thought that the real separation had occurred rather earlier: WH2897, Granville to Horton, 27 Oct 1830.

²⁹ Above, pp.167-9.

³⁰ Jupp, *Eve of Reform*, pp.243-6; Add. MS 40340, ff. 228-9 & 236-8, Arbuthnot to Peel, 14 Jul & 17 Sep 1830; *Mrs. Arbuthnot's Journal*, ii, pp.378, 389, 393; Ellenborough, *Political Diary*, ii, p.299; C6677, Fazakerley to Horton, 18 Jul 1830; WH2900, Horton to Ponsonby, 15 Aug 1830; Hatherton Papers, D260/M/F/5/27/6, Horton to Littleton, 17 Aug 1830.

³¹ WH2864, Ponsonby to Horton, n.d. [Nov 1830], 'Tuesday night' [late Nov 1830?], & 'Saturday' [late Nov/early Dec 1830].

speeches were aimed as much at opinion outside the House as within, sometimes explicitly,³² and he supplemented these, first with pamphlets, and later with a series of classes and lectures at the London Mechanics' Institution. As Johnston observed, 'education of the public ... was a larger task than education of the public's leaders', Wilmot's goals receded into the distance, and 'theoretical issues began to take precedence over immediate measures.'³³

It is a historiographical commonplace that 'public opinion' was increasingly crucial to the conduct of politics in the early nineteenth century.³⁴ The growing importance of public opinion has been broadly associated with the growth of the 'middle classes'; but the 'middle classes' were 'emphatically plural', without 'social and political homogeneity'. In contemporary usage the 'middle classes' often appeared in idealised form as the chief exemplars of 'respectable' moral values such as 'industry, thrift, religion, probity, domesticity and sobriety', and 'public opinion' was supposed to reflect those values.³⁵ However, 'public opinion' was a more problematic concept than this. It was not always conceived as an impartial and virtuous arbiter, standing above the political fray. It could also be seen as a contesting element within adversarial politics, usually 'synonymous with the popular or radical voice'. In the 1820s, some liberal commentators noted that public opinion could be capricious, backward-looking, and potentially oppressive.³⁶

The traditional view was that this public opinion should be expressed at general elections: between elections, parliament was the proper voice of the nation, and to seek to bring public opinion to bear against parliament was 'wild democracy'.³⁷ Before about 1820, the government made little effort to organise and lead opinion: the debates around the Six Acts, passed in late

³² *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 18, c.951, 4 Mar 1828; 19, c.1503, 24 Jun 1828; 23, cc.34-5, 53, 9 Mar 1830.

³³ Johnston, *Emigration*, p.158.

³⁴ Asa Briggs, *England in the Age of Improvement* (1959; Folio Soc., 1997), pp.103-7, 175-6; Jupp, *Governing*, pp.231-64; Hilton, *Mad*, pp.15-20.

³⁵ Norman Gash, *Aristocracy and People* (1979), pp.20-25; Parry, *Liberal Government*, pp.27-8.

³⁶ Dror Wahrman, 'Public opinion, violence and the limits of constitutional politics', in James Vernon (ed.), *Re-reading the Constitution* (Cambridge, 1996), pp.83-107.

³⁷ Gray, *Perceval*, p.131

1819, represented one of its first sustained efforts to do so.³⁸ Some opposition Whigs, notably Brougham, were much more willing to appeal to and harness 'respectable' opinion outside parliament through petitioning and debate, symbolic election campaigns, and the use of the press.³⁹ After about 1820, the contest for public opinion was entered into more fully by liberal Tory ministers, notably Canning. They projected an image which appealed to 'middle-class' values,⁴⁰ and implicitly endorsed the view that 'the political part of the nation began with the educated middle class', below which 'people had, or ought to have, no politics but merely loyalty and industry.' This was reinforced by the *laissez faire* conviction that there was no political remedy for economic ills.⁴¹ Canning's 'outward turn', towards this educated public, was signified by his representation of the prestigious constituency of Liverpool from 1812, and his disbanding of his small party following at Westminster in 1813. His eagerness to speak to a wider audience than the House of Commons introduced an 'extremely divisive element' into the 'practice of early nineteenth century Toryism'.⁴² Wilmot's pamphleteering and lecturing provide another example of a determined, if much less successful, attempt to cultivate opinion out-of-doors.

Wilmot never defined what he meant by 'the public' and 'public opinion', but at different times he sought to reach opinion at three different levels. When he showed concern for his own ability as a parliamentary speaker, and for his reputation in parliament, it was clearly the audience at Westminster that he had in mind. In writing his pamphlets, journal articles, and letters to newspapers, Wilmot sought to reach a wider educated reading public, including the 'opinion formers' who conducted and wrote in the major periodicals. His work at the Mechanics' Institution was aimed at the intelligent labouring and artisanal classes.

³⁸ Brock, *Liverpool*, pp.101-13.

³⁹ Hay, *Whig Revival*, pp.2-5. For the more decorous approach of more traditional Whigs, see Mitchell, *Whigs in Opposition*, pp.8-11, 51-7; E.A. Smith, *Lord Grey, 1764-1845* (Oxford, 1990), pp.222-37.

⁴⁰ Parry, *Liberal Government*, pp.34-8; above, p.30.

⁴¹ Brock, *Liverpool*, pp.114-5.

⁴² Lee, *Canning*, pp.2-4, 57-85.

While there were one or two other ministers and officials who wrote regularly for the reviews, notably Barrow and Croker at the Admiralty, Wilmot was the only government figure of any substance at this time to have chosen the pamphlet form as his main vehicle of expression. The reasons for this isolation are not hard to find. First, the pamphlet appears to have been ineffective and near obsolete as a means of persuasion. Second, Wilmot's habit of publishing acknowledged or attributable pamphlets displeased his superiors and damaged his official career.

Most of Wilmot's pamphlets were published by John Murray, and Wilmot's secretary, Matheson, reported rather discouragingly on a meeting with Murray in the summer of 1829. Murray 'expressed the strongest reluctance to the publication of any political pamphlets', because 'they almost invariably, without producing gain to himself, entailed expense and loss upon their authors.' Latterly he had refused to publish 'any pamphlet whatever', except for those, like Wilmot, who already employed him, and even then 'he would prefer not to undertake that which could only end in failure and loss.' The pamphlet form was obsolete:

The *Quarterly*, *Edinburgh*, and *Westminster Reviews*, and the newspapers, were the only sources to which the public would now apply for information and discussion upon political subjects, and had entirely superseded the writing of pamphlets, except under very peculiar circumstances.⁴³

Murray advised that Wilmot would serve himself better by writing letters to the newspapers, or articles in a review. Unfortunately the *Quarterly* – the only one of the major periodicals to be a conceivable vehicle for Wilmot –

⁴³ WH2845, Matheson to Horton, 12 Oct 1829. Wilmot cannot have been much cheered to learn that two pamphlets had managed to 'escape oblivion': Sadler's *Ireland*, which according to Murray had 'struck the public mind', and H. Gally Knight's *Foreign and Domestic View of the Catholic Question* (1828), which proposed an alternative security to Wilmot's. Matheson added tactlessly that 'the author of the pamphlet on "Colonization in Australasia" [Wakefield] ... appears to share Mr. Murray's opinion of the hopelessness of any attempt to induce the public to read a publication discussing any subject of this nature, without something entertaining and attractive.' His *Letter from Sydney* introduced 'a great variety of miscellaneous matter ... in a very amusing manner.' Wilmot's pamphlets, by implication, were too dry and dull.

was just then ‘out of the question’, having, as Murray admitted, ‘taken up quite the opposite opinions’ to Wilmot’s own.⁴⁴

Wilmot did not take the advice. He continued to publish regularly with no change of style. If one pamphlet sank without trace, his response was to publish another on the same subject, often with extensive quotation from the first. Occasionally some notice would be taken in one of the reviews – McCulloch had kind things to say about *Causes and Remedies of Pauperism considered*⁴⁵ – but in general they were ignored.⁴⁶ Macdonald blamed Wilmot for ‘expending upon publications *that are never read*, monies that you can ill afford.’⁴⁷ Wilmot admitted that ‘undoubtedly’ his pamphlets were not read, but he looked to posterity for vindication: ‘the day *may arrive*, when as much unmerited praise may be poured over me, as has hitherto been poured of apathy and contempt.’⁴⁸

Wilmot’s earliest pamphlets on all three of his major causes were published while he was still a government minister. Those on the Catholic question and emigration appeared under his own name, those on slavery appeared anonymously but were commonly attributed to him.⁴⁹ Littleton told Wilmot that his ‘turn for publication’ was liable to damage his career: if he wanted to enjoy the confidence of ‘those in power’, he should never tell anyone he published anything.⁵⁰ This, Littleton felt sure, was the common opinion:

your friends *all* thought, at least said behind your back, that *publication at all* was imprudent as regarded your own interests, and your habit of activity in

⁴⁴ WH2845, Matheson to Horton, 12 Oct 1829. Murray referred to the *Quarterly*’s enthusiasm for home colonization. Edwards’ article on the ‘Condition of the English Peasantry’ in the July 1829 issue had been ‘considered so valuable’, Murray added, that he had been requested to print it separately.

⁴⁵ [McCulloch], ‘Sadler’, p.311.

⁴⁶ The British Library’s copy of *Reform in 1839 and Reform in 1831* (1839) did not have its pages cut until 2014. The copy of *Suggestion of Protestant Securities* (1828) held by the William Salt Library, Stafford, was in the same state until 2010, though it did contain, tucked into the front cover, a letter commending it to Edward Copleston.

⁴⁷ WH2838, Macdonald to Horton, 5 Sep 1830.

⁴⁸ WH2838, Horton to Macdonald, 4 Sep 1830.

⁴⁹ WH2936, G. Hibbert to Horton, 25 Feb 1826; WH2849, Moody to Horton, 12 Mar 1826.

⁵⁰ WH2807, Littleton to Horton, 20 Oct 1827.

disseminating your thoughts on public questions was complained of by your superiors (always *good humouredly* – but still it marked disapproval).⁵¹

Wilmot refused to accept as a general rule that ‘the mere fact of publication’ by a junior minister should operate ‘as a disqualification for political advancement.’ At the very least, if such were to be the rule, then a man should be given a clear choice between publication, without office, and a veto on publication, with office. Wilmot pointed out that his pamphlets on slavery had been approved in advance by Bathurst,⁵² and that his *Quarterly* articles on taxation and the corn laws had been approved by Goderich and Huskisson.⁵³ With regard to his early pamphlets on the Catholic question, though, Littleton brought disconcerting news:

When Lord Anglesey was settling with Canning his government of Ireland, he wished to have an *understanding* who should succeed Lamb in case of Lord Melbourne’s death, and among others mentioned you. Nothing was settled. But of you Canning said, ‘Wilmot Horton would do perfectly, but he has spoilt himself for Ireland by his publications.’ And he therefore spoke of you as quite out of the question.⁵⁴

Still Wilmot would not concede that his publications, as such, had damaged him politically. Canning had approved his Newcastle speech ‘in very flattering terms’, and had not discouraged him from publishing his *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*. This had been written with the greatest pains, and contained nothing to ‘disqualify’ him from Ireland, in the eyes either of Catholics or Protestants. Wilmot thought the real difficulty lay with the king, thanks mainly to Canning, who ‘if he did not aggravate, took no pains to diminish, the prejudices which had been created in the King’s mind’, and who, Wilmot supposed, ‘found it of great practical use to throw over a volunteer Protestant advocate for emancipation.’⁵⁵

⁵¹ WH2807, Littleton to Horton, 29 Nov 1827. Wilmot’s correspondence with his publisher, John Murray, carries hints of scrapes narrowly avoided: Murray Papers, Ms.40581, Wilmot to Murray, 22 Feb 1826; Ms.40582, Wilmot to Murray, 13 Mar 1827.

⁵² They had: Bathurst Letters, pp.179-95, Bathurst to Horton, 9 & 11 Jan 1826.

⁵³ WH2932, Horton to Littleton, 8 Nov 1827.

⁵⁴ WH2807, Littleton to Horton, 20 Oct 1827. Littleton had this from Anglesey.

⁵⁵ WH2932, Horton to Littleton, 8 Nov 1827; Hatherton Papers, D260/M/F/5/27/4, Horton to Littleton, 22 Nov 1827.

As Littleton gently pointed out, Canning probably had more important things to think about.⁵⁶ However, Wilmot's sense of grievance was genuine enough, and, coupled with his wish to write freely, it weakened his attachment to office and to party.

If pamphleteering was an obsolete mode of reaching public opinion, then teaching and lecturing at the London Mechanics' Institution was, for a prominent politician, a highly original one. By arrangement with the Institution's president, George Birkbeck, in the autumn of 1830 Wilmot led a 'Select Class' of twenty members of the Institution in a series of discussions as to the 'causes and remedies of the existing distress among the labouring classes'. Birkbeck promised him 'minds at once powerful and unsophisticated; intensely desiring to discover what was true'.⁵⁷ Wilmot proceeded by his preferred methods for getting at the truths of political economy: 'mathematical' rather than 'moral' reasoning, and 'interlocutory argument', with close interrogation of each proposition.⁵⁸ By November, Wilmot had induced the class to agree unanimously to a series of eighteen resolutions, by which they comprehensively endorsed Wilmot's views on political economy and his remedy of assisted emigration. These, with introductory correspondence, were subsequently published.⁵⁹ Wilmot then sought to build on this success with a series of ten public lectures at the Institution, delivered between December 1830 and March 1831. These were again published.⁶⁰ Charles Greville, who attended the second, described Wilmot as 'full of zeal and animation, but so totally without method and arrangement that he is hardly intelligible.'⁶¹ Thomas Tooke, on the other hand, found the design of the lectures 'excellent', and Wilmot's reasoning 'sound'.⁶²

⁵⁶ WH2807, Littleton to Horton, 26 Nov 1827.

⁵⁷ The class included Henry Hetherington, radical printer and Chartist leader, and Thomas Dakin, chemist, who was knighted after serving as Lord Mayor of London.

⁵⁸ See above, pp.60-61.

⁵⁹ *Lectures, Correspondence and Resolutions*, pp.iii-v,7-14. Wilmot no doubt had every advantage, engaging with relatively untutored minds on subjects with which he was intimately familiar. He also had advantages of status and class. However the Class was an able one, and its new convictions were more than temporary, since nineteen out of the twenty reiterated the same views at the end of May 1831: *Lectures*, Lecture X, pp.30-31.

⁶⁰ *Lectures*.

⁶¹ Reeve (ed.), *Greville Memoirs*, ii, 100.

⁶² Quoted in R.W. Horton, *Observations upon Taxation* (1840).

Wilmot's proceedings at the Mechanics' Institution were evidently something of a novelty for someone of his class and political stature. *The Examiner* thought that he had 'set an example of inestimable value'.⁶³ The Select Class itself also expressed its appreciation of the 'almost isolated example' of a gentleman and senior politician voluntarily providing instruction to, and submitting to questioning by, 'operative mechanics'. They commented, rather tartly:

if those who move in an elevated sphere would more frequently mingle with the humbler individuals who constitute the great bulk of the population ... there is great probability that mutual benefit would result from such intercommunication: that the rich would form a more accurate opinion of the sentiments, feelings and capabilities of the middling and lower classes, and that, in the minds of the latter, real respect would be substituted for its merely exterior manifestation.⁶⁴

As remarkable as the fact of Wilmot's involvement with the mechanics was the spirit and intention which lay behind it. Of course, he only dealt with the Mechanics' Institution at all, because he had failed to convince the political elite to adopt his remedy: Wilmot's 'outward turn', unlike Canning's, was indicative of failure. But he was also, by this time, deeply disenchanted by the failure of the political class to adopt any efficient remedy for pauperism. Parliament had not proved receptive to 'sound' notions of political economy (that is, his own), and he deplored its obsession with economical reform.⁶⁵

In the summer of 1830, Wilmot detected 'elements of revolutionary movement' in the state of the country:

the most squalid, hopeless poverty by the side of the most luxurious riches; particular individuals uniting an extraordinary concentration of possessions in their own persons; numerous masses of paupers, unable to exchange their

⁶³ 19 Dec 1830.

⁶⁴ *Lectures, Correspondence and Resolutions*, pp.iii-iv.

⁶⁵ See above, pp.110, 164, 166-7.

labour for wages sufficient to maintain them, and finding themselves in a hopeless state of degradation and practical slavery.⁶⁶

Wilmot feared that the country would shortly be ‘revolutionized’, if nothing was done to alleviate distress.⁶⁷ He thought – or hoped – that it was ‘a libel on the constitution’ to maintain that ‘hopeless and irremediable poverty’ was inevitable for many, but, if parliament persisted in failing to address the real needs of the people, then he believed that radical reform would be both inevitable and justified: ‘if the constitution cannot mainly stand the test of those qualities, *let it perish*.’⁶⁸ This was not just a pose, or the effusion of a moment, since he repeated the same sentiment a few months later.⁶⁹

Wilmot believed that he had found in the Mechanics’ Institution a lever with which to move opinion, and force government to take his views seriously. Should Wellington’s administration not be willing to adopt his plans, he promised to ‘rouse and excite ... public feeling’ in favour of them, warning darkly, ‘I have means in my hands more than the Duke may suppose.’⁷⁰ Ponsonby was certainly impressed. He thought that the London institute enjoyed ‘extensive influence ... over the opinions and feelings of their fellow mechanics in every part of the kingdom’, and that Wilmot, through the resolutions he secured from his Select Class, had ‘found the secret’ of harnessing that weight of opinion. Ponsonby urged that a ‘dextrous minister’ availing himself of Wilmot’s plan could win the support of ‘the universality of the lower orders of the community.’ But if neither Wellington nor Grey adopted his plan, Ponsonby expected Wilmot to:

immediately procure, through the instrumentality of his mechanics, meetings of that class of people throughout the kingdom to petition the king and parliament on the subject, throwing out strong censures against public men for either their blindness or their want of feeling.⁷¹

⁶⁶ *Observations*.

⁶⁷ WH2900, Horton to Ponsonby, 15 Aug 1830.

⁶⁸ *Lectures*, ‘Correspondence and Resolutions’, p.18.

⁶⁹ *Reform*, pp.90-91.

⁷⁰ WH2900, Horton to Ponsonby, 15 Aug 1830; see also PRO 30/29/9/6, Horton to Granville, 10 Dec 1830.

⁷¹ Grey Papers, GRE/B48/1/67, Ponsonby to Grey, 9 Nov 1830.

Of course neither Wellington nor Grey did take up Wilmot's ideas, and yet the meetings of mechanics did not occur. Wilmot and Ponsonby no doubt hugely miscalculated the influence that Wilmot could exert through this means. Opinion among labourers and artisans was no more monolithic or tractable than that of any other class.⁷² But there is no evidence that Wilmot ever attempted to 'rouse and excite' opinion in this way. The idea of agitating the 'lower orders' was a fantasy, born of disappointment, which Wilmot was far too conservative to wish to realize in the turbulent circumstances of the winter of 1830-31. Huff and puff as he might, he did not really want to blow the House down. A project which was conceived as one way of averting revolution – by pressurising Wellington or his successor to adopt an effective remedy for pauperism before it was too late – ended in another, much more true to Wilmot's conservative instincts. He taught and lectured the mechanics, not to rouse them, but to teach them the truth of their situation as revealed by the light of political economy, and to save them from being a 'willing prey for the purposes of the demagogue.'⁷³

Wilmot's lectures also demonstrated his belief in the essential good judgment and good feeling of the ordinary people if they were rightly instructed. He asked:

Who has ever attempted to appeal *to the reason* of the lower classes? ... The more they are really educated, the more they are raised in the scale of intelligence, the more perfect will the institutions of the state become; not made so by frantic violence, but by temperate and reasonable improvement.⁷⁴

In this respect, Wilmot's lectures were in the same spirit as the contemporaneous efforts of the whiggish Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, or of Harriet Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy* of

⁷² See for instance Wilmot's correspondence in 1830 with Benjamin Poole, a highly articulate ribbon-weaver from Coventry. Poole told Wilmot that he made some converts, but more opponents, among the ordinary people, who were inclined to resent expressions such as 'the incubus of population'. WH2866, Poole to Wilmot, 19 Mar 1830.

⁷³ *Lectures, Correspondence and Resolutions*, p.18; WH2932, Horton to Brougham, 11 Dec 1830. The close sympathy between Wilmot and Brougham on this issue represents one of the more unlikely alliances of Wilmot's career.

⁷⁴ *Lectures, Correspondence and Resolutions*, p.18.

1832-34. The lectures, delivered at the time of the Swing disturbances, did not go unappreciated by the new coalition government. Brougham wrote that there was 'no limit' to the 'real good' that Wilmot could do the country by 'the honest and zealous course' he was taking.⁷⁵

III

In Chapter 1 we considered the general attitudes of the liberal Tories of the 1820s to constitutional questions, and their reluctance to countenance any but the most piecemeal parliamentary reform.⁷⁶ Wilmot's sturdy support of these positions, and his hostility to radical rhetoric, were explored in Chapter 2.⁷⁷

By the end of the 1820s, the issue of reform was becoming more pressing, and it proved divisive for the liberal Tories.⁷⁸ They continued to oppose any general reform, with Huskisson maintaining in traditional style that democracy led inevitably to anarchy and military despotism. However, Huskisson and some others began to believe that to enfranchise a few large towns was both inherently just and also desirable to conciliate public opinion.⁷⁹ Others continued to resist even such a limited reform, arguing that the principle, once conceded, could not be easily contained: limited reform would only encourage demands for something more sweeping.⁸⁰ By the summer of 1830, the pressure for reform had become intense, and the government's refusal to bend appeared to Huskisson a specimen of blinkered resistance to inevitable change. Wellington, he wrote, would 'live to recollect with regret his obstinacy', and would see reform 'assume a far wider range.'⁸¹

⁷⁵ WH2897, Brougham to Horton, 'Thursday' [early Dec 1830].

⁷⁶ Above, pp.25-7.

⁷⁷ Above, pp.64-74.

⁷⁸ Aspinall, 'Last of the Canningites', pp.650-56, 663-7.

⁷⁹ Huskisson supported Lord John Russell's proposal to give seats to Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester: *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 22, cc.891-3, 23 Feb 1830.

⁸⁰ For instance, Lord Sandon, Charles Wynn, and Peel, in the same debate: *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 22, cc.874-5, 887-9 & 902-7.

⁸¹ Denison Papers, Os C 76, Huskisson to Denison, 5 Aug 1830.

With Wellington's fall, reform was taken out of Tory hands. The Whig Reform Bill has been interpreted as a timely concession to pressure from without,⁸² with the Whigs credited with the wisdom and foresight to bring a significant body of middle-class opinion within the pale of the constitution and thereby avoid the threat of revolution.⁸³ It has also been interpreted as 'cure' rather than concession – re-legitimising aristocratic rule by purging the House of 'illegitimate' influence (that is, the influence of 'money', entering the House through rotten boroughs), and restoring the 'legitimate' influence of landlords and leaders of commercial interests by careful limitation of the franchise and redrawing of constituency boundaries.⁸⁴ Modern accounts tend to combine elements of both 'concession' and 'cure',⁸⁵ while some allow the Whigs a more proactive role in reshaping the constitution according to their own ideals of leadership and representation.⁸⁶

The more progressive Tories reacted variously to the reform crisis. Peel recognised that reform was inevitable, but chose to resist it anyway, believing that those who wanted radical change should be made to struggle for it: the bill should serve as warning, not inspiration.⁸⁷ Some moderates, (dubbed 'waverers'), tried to secure a compromise on a much more modest reform, but were never in a position to deliver the Tory votes required.⁸⁸ Palmerston and Goderich joined a coalition ministry committed to reform, and stuck to it, despite misgivings about the drastic nature of the government's bill. Palmerston in particular worked actively behind the scenes for a more moderate bill, with a higher property qualification and less sweeping

⁸² W.N. Molesworth, *The History of the Reform Bill of 1832* (1865); G.S. Veitch, *The Genesis of Parliamentary Reform* (1913); Nancy LoPatin, *Political Unions, Popular Politics and the Great Reform Act of 1832* (1999).

⁸³ J.R.M. Butler, *The Passing of the Great Reform Bill* (1914); G.M. Trevelyan, *Lord Grey of the Reform Bill* (1920). Dror Wahrman by contrast has argued that the Reform Act debates did much to create a political concept of the middle class for the first time: *Imagining the Middle Class* (Cambridge, 1995), pp.298-327.

⁸⁴ D.C. Moore, 'Concession or Cure: the Sociological Premises of the First Reform Act', *HJ*, 9 (1966), pp.39-59; idem., *Politics of Deference*.

⁸⁵ Michael Brock, *The Great Reform Act* (1973); John Cannon, *Parliamentary Reform, 1640-1832* (Cambridge, 1973); Peter Mandler, *Aristocratic Government in the Age of Reform* (Oxford, 1990), pp.128-31; P.J. Salmon, 'The English Reform Legislation, 1831-1832', in Fisher, *Commons 1820-1832*, i, pp.374-412.

⁸⁶ Parry, *Liberal Government*, pp.72-89; Hilton, *Mad*, pp.432-7.

⁸⁷ N. Gash, *Sir Robert Peel* (Harlow, 1972), pp.26-39.

⁸⁸ Brock, *Reform*, pp.248-67.

disfranchisement of small boroughs.⁸⁹ Goderich, while ‘convinced of the necessity of the bill’, had little ‘real enthusiasm for the project in itself.’⁹⁰

Wilmot moved further and faster than most of his former colleagues. Firmly reconciled to a substantial reform by early 1831, he accepted the details of the Bill with equanimity once they became known, and he immediately grasped, with more political sagacity than many, that the ‘advanced position’ which reform had taken could not be abandoned.⁹¹ He argued the case for reform in a series of fourteen letters to the *Globe* newspaper, under the pseudonym ‘X.L.’, between February 28 and June 28, 1831. These were later republished in the pamphlet *Reform in 1839 and Reform in 1831* (1839), which is the main source for this section.

Wilmot’s support for the Reform Bill did not manifest a conversion to reform as something intrinsically desirable. He regretted that the opportunity had not been taken to implement a more modest reform earlier – enfranchising a few great towns, disfranchising ‘delinquent boroughs’, reducing the cost of elections. ‘The body of liberal Tories would have supported these minor measures’, Wilmot reckoned, but they would have been prompted by ‘a discreet deference to public opinion’, rather than their own inclinations.⁹² In 1829 and 1830 he had voted for the transfer of East Retford’s seats to Birmingham, believing that it would ‘effect a practical improvement of a valuable and important character.’⁹³ Like Huskisson, he recognised the intensification of public feeling following the 1830 revolution in France, and argued that a modest reform, enabling ‘three or four of the great towns to send Members to Parliament,’ had become imperative.⁹⁴ Like Huskisson, Wilmot

⁸⁹ Kenneth Bourne, *Palmerston: the Early Years, 1784-1841* (1982), pp.503-24; J. Milton-Smith, ‘Earl Grey’s Cabinet and the Objects of Parliamentary Reform’, *HJ* 15 (1972), pp.67-72.

⁹⁰ Jones, ‘Prosperity’ Robinson, p.216. This judgment is borne out by Goderich’s speech in the Lords on 5 Oct 1831: *Hansard*, 3rd ser., 7, cc.1369-77. He was however rather warmer in support of reform on 13 Apr 1832: *Hansard*, 3rd ser., 12, cc.384-90.

⁹¹ *Reform*, p.9.

⁹² *Reform*, pp.7-8. This originally appeared in the *Globe* on 2 Mar 1831.

⁹³ Salmon, ‘Wilmot’, p.837; *Hansard*, 2nd ser., 22, c.1325, 5 Mar 1830.

⁹⁴ *Observations; Reform*, pp.6-7.

believed that Wellington's intransigence brought on an irresistible demand for reform which demanded a decisive response:

there was no resting place for doubt to tread upon, between the ark of reform, and the all but submerged pillars of ultra-Toryism; an immediate choice was indispensable; and men, who had as yet hesitated, shrunk before the rising flood, and became reformers. There was a new departure to be taken – a new public mind to be dealt with – a new problem to be solved.⁹⁵

Wilmot therefore became a reformer, confessedly one 'of a very late date', because he saw that public opinion imperatively demanded reform, and public opinion would in the end prevail.⁹⁶ The notion entertained by 'out-and-out Tories', that 'nothing is wanting to resist reform but the steadiness of the anti-reformers', was a 'complete fallacy.' In this new state of affairs, reform was useful only if it was thorough enough to satisfy the 'public craving', and it was 'better to do too much than too little'. Wilmot therefore accepted the first Bill without fretting about the details, and defended ministers from the charge of having 'cut and cauterised too deeply.'⁹⁷

Thus far, Wilmot viewed reform as a necessary concession to public opinion. Other aspects of his thinking were more positive. First, he recognised that certain features of the old system had generated justified resentment – the under-representation of new towns, the 'rapacious monopoly' of certain borough proprietors, the 'pantomime' of investigations into corrupt boroughs. He believed that these problems were amply addressed in the Bill's schedules of enfranchisement and disfranchisement.⁹⁸

Secondly, Wilmot immediately grasped the positive case for reform as a profoundly conservative measure which could strengthen the constitution and secure the interests of property against political and social radicalism. Sharing the government's view that property, rather than numbers, should be

⁹⁵ *Reform*, pp.8, 52.

⁹⁶ *Reform*, pp.5-6. In Wilmot's mind, the pressure for reform clearly came from below, and not from a Tory right disgruntled by Catholic emancipation, as proposed by D.C. Moore, 'The Other Face of Reform', *Victorian Studies*, 5 (1961), pp.7-34.

⁹⁷ *Reform*, pp.1, 11.

⁹⁸ *Reform*, pp.6-7, 57.

represented in the Commons, he approved the Bill's restrictive franchise provisions. The Bill would reconcile 'the educated part of the lower classes, and the mass of the middle classes,' to the constitution, by enlarging their representation and eliminating abuses. These classes would then be 'drawn together' with their social superiors 'on the improved basis of a common interest.'⁹⁹ 'Drawn together,' that is, against those who contemplated a more radical restructuring of society, including some confiscation of property. Wilmot's support for reform was another facet of his anti-radicalism. He believed that reform would undermine the case of 'out-and-out radicals', who would 'not be satisfied with any reform that has not a tendency to destroy all our institutions.' He read radical journals, and saw that those he called 'the lowest class of radicals' were opposed to reform, because they knew it was calculated to prevent a more extreme outcome. For that reason, Wilmot said, 'I become the more reconciled to it, in proportion to their opposition.'¹⁰⁰ Whereas some opposed reform because they thought it would create an electorate 'able to return members to parliament, prepared to promote their views of confiscating the property of the funds, and the property of the church,' Wilmot's view was 'precisely the contrary, – that, instead of promoting, it would thwart the views of those who contemplated the confiscation of property.' This was in fact 'the very strongest argument ... in favour of Reform.'¹⁰¹ He admitted that there might indeed be a significant influx of 'democrats' into the House, who would aim at the 'destruction of property and institutions,' but Wilmot expected that moderate reformers and former opponents of reform would unite against them. Existing party distinctions would disappear, and the House would resolve itself into 'two parties, who may be called from the tenor of their opinions, Conservatives and Levellers.' The Levellers would aim at 'some destruction of institutions, and some confiscation of property', but Wilmot believed that the Conservatives would have the better of the argument. The best way to counteract radical arguments was to subject them to serious and honest scrutiny in a reformed

⁹⁹ *Reform*, pp.8, 54-5, 58-9.

¹⁰⁰ *Reform*, pp.1-3, 56-7. Wilmot quoted extensively from the *Poor Man's Guardian* and other radical journals to demonstrate their hostility to the Bill, and to expose their supposed designs on property and other institutions: pp.39-48, 60-66, 73-83.

¹⁰¹ *Reform*, p.38. Wilmot cited speeches by Mansfield, Vyvyan, and Peel, on the dissolution in 1831.

House of Commons, which, being less liable to the suspicion that it was corrupt, or that it existed only to serve vested interests, would be better able to win the ear of the public. Parliament had to instruct the people, and, that done, Wilmot again trusted to the people's good sense:

they will only have to choose, and they will choose rightly. On the issue of that parliamentary education of the people, depends our fate as a nation, whether we are to become a flourishing constitutional monarchy, or a powerless anarchical republic.¹⁰²

Reverting to his own political preoccupations, he insisted that this benign outcome would come to pass only if parliament found 'some substantive *relief* for those evils in England, and especially in Ireland, under which portions of the people suffer.' For Wilmot, reform was essentially a secondary question. It might restore confidence in the House of Commons, but it could not by itself bring any real relief from distress. A reformed House of Commons would face exactly the same problems as before, and, to retain public confidence, would have to 'look to real remedies, and efficient measures.' Otherwise, reform would prove of little value.¹⁰³

In his final letter, Wilmot considered the impact of reform on the Church of England. The Church was under sustained and powerful attack, both from radicals who wished to weaken it on philosophical or political grounds, and from dissenters who resented its privileges and their own remaining disabilities.¹⁰⁴ The fundamental question, Wilmot argued, was whether property 'should be appropriated to the payment of a Church establishment'; fears for the future of the tithe and church property were prompting 'an ill-organised and ineffectual resistance' from the bishops. Instead of 'labouring to prevent reform', Wilmot argued that church leaders should have the confidence to address criticism head on:

¹⁰² *Reform*, pp.9, 29, 35, 64-5.

¹⁰³ *Reform*, p.8, 36-7, 71; *Lectures*, Lecture IV, pp.10-12; PRO 30/29/9/6, Horton to Granville, 27 Apr 1831.

¹⁰⁴ See, for instance: W.R. Ward, *Religion and Society in England, 1790-1850* (1972), pp.105-34; E. Halévy, *The Triumph of Reform, 1830-1841* (1923; 1961 edn.), pp.130-44; N. Gash, *Reaction and Reconstruction in English Politics* (Oxford, 1965), pp.60-65; William Gibson, *Church, State and Society, 1760-1830* (Basingstoke, 1994), pp.106-21.

If in a reformed Parliament the Church be attacked, let the guardians of her interests meet the question fairly upon the merits ... if the question be fairly discussed, the danger will no longer exist. Abuses may be rectified, as they ought to be; changes of an expedient character may be made; but there will be no dissevering of a great national interest from the British constitution, under false and ignorant pretences, passing by the real question.¹⁰⁵

Wilmot dedicated his letters on reform to C.J. Blomfield, bishop of London, who was to become the most active member of the Ecclesiastical Commissions appointed by Grey, Peel and Melbourne. His final letter had Blomfield's prior approval: as Blomfield told him, 'inquiry, full and fair inquiry, is what the clergy themselves desire.' It appears that Wilmot had also encouraged Blomfield to move in the Lords for returns relating to church property.¹⁰⁶

Wilmot also foresaw that reform would have implications for the conduct of government. He was concerned that the power of the executive should be preserved and was fearful of 'the transference of that power from the King to the people.'¹⁰⁷ He specified three 'collateral measures' which he considered necessary to the efficient functioning of the executive. The first, 'of indispensable importance', was to allow some – he did not specify how many – 'members of the executive government' to vote and speak in the Commons, 'although not elected as representatives of the people.' This bizarre proposal was intended to replace the facilities provided by nomination boroughs under the unreformed system. Wilmot argued that public duty would often require ministers to adopt unpopular courses, and it was undesirable 'that there should be no alternative between an abandonment of public duty, and a retirement from official life.' Means had to be found to enable the king to retain the services of unpopular ministers. Told that this proposal was 'unconstitutional', Wilmot conceded that it might contravene principles of

¹⁰⁵ *Reform*, pp.99-101.

¹⁰⁶ D4576/5, Blomfield to Horton, 23 Jun 1831. In the Lords, Blomfield expressed 'high satisfaction' at the prospect of full enquiry into the Church's revenues: *Hansard*, 3rd ser., 5, c.518, 29 Jul 1831.

¹⁰⁷ *Reform*, p.18.

liberty to allow such ‘ministerial’ members a vote, but insisted that they should at least be able argue their case in debate. He thought this was preferable to the alternative of retaining a handful of rotten boroughs to accommodate ministers, and later wrote that ‘there never was a more egregious blunder than not securing, in the very *infancy* of the Reform question, the power of securing seats for certain ministers without the necessity of re-election, or even of a constituency.’¹⁰⁸

Wilmot’s second proposal was to enable ministers to change office without having to seek re-election. Again, in a reformed Parliament, this ‘would only present obstacles to the current course of the public service, without securing a compensating benefit.’ On this point, Wilmot reported unanimous agreement.¹⁰⁹

Thirdly, Wilmot proposed changes to the way in which civil servants were appointed, which anticipated the reforms of the 1850s and beyond. They were intended to defuse a leading source of discontent, ‘the suspicion of an improper application of the patronage of government.’ Recent governments, he thought, had been ‘infinitely less “jobbing”’ than any that had preceded them, but whatever of ‘job’ remained should be got rid of. Entry into the civil service should be made subject to examination, by which ‘conclusive proofs of competency’ could be obtained. Wilmot pointed out that such tests already existed for entry into many professions: the navy, the artillery and engineers, the East India Company and the clergy. No-one, he thought, would welcome such a change more than ministers who had patronage to dispense, but it would also improve relations between government and the public, and ‘the wheels of government’ would ‘run on more smoothly.’¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ *Reform*, pp.14-16, 31-2; Hatherton Papers, D260/M/F/5/27/11, Horton to Littleton, 24 Sep 1834.

¹⁰⁹ *Reform*, pp.14-18, 31. The requirement to seek re-election on appointment to certain offices was ‘an anachronism which neither tories, nor whigs, nor radicals were seriously disposed to defend’; the Whigs considered repealing it in 1832, but it remained until 1867, causing much inconvenience in the meantime. N. Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel* (1953), pp.231-2.

¹¹⁰ *Reform*, pp.21-5, 29-30.

IV

In general the attitudes of pro-reform liberal Tories have received little attention, the received view being that they accepted it as a regrettable necessity. For Aspinall, 'none of the Canningites felt any enthusiasm for parliamentary reform';¹¹¹ while for Mandler, the old view of reform as concession to pressure from without was 'certainly true of the liberal Tories.' They had 'no principled rationale for parliamentary reform at all.'¹¹²

Wilmot's approach to reform certainly began with concession to pressure, but it did not end there. Like most conservatives, he accepted that government ultimately required the consent and trust of the governed; he believed that reform could re-establish that consent and trust. He saw reform as a conservative measure which would neutralise radicalism, and give parliament the chance to lead opinion in moderate courses. Certain of his attitudes – his opinion that property rather than people should be represented, his belief in active leadership by the political elite, his trust in the good sense and moderation of 'middle-class' voters, his faith in the power of reasonable argument and of education – were consonant with much Whig thinking on reform. He was less sensitive to some more subtle Whig aims: to re-legitimise individual members of parliament as the representatives of all the property interests of their constituencies, and to prevent a crude division of the reformed House into urban and rural interests.

Wilmot was more ready to accept reform because parliament had failed, in his view, to adopt efficient remedies for the relief of distress. This was entirely in keeping with the other aspects of his conduct after leaving office which have been considered in this chapter. Disappointment and disenchantment had caused Wilmot to sunder ties with other liberal Tories, without forging new ones, but the reform crisis interrupted his retreat into political oblivion. Even Wilmot now accepted that there was a political imperative more urgent – though not more important – than emigration, and this made him temporarily

¹¹¹ Aspinall, 'Last of the Canningites', pp.664-5.

¹¹² Mandler, *Aristocratic Government*, p.128.

at least a supporter of the new government. His lectures at the Mechanics' Institution and his letters on reform both served the government's purposes, intentionally, and were appreciated, by Brougham at least. This does not mean that Wilmot occupied the same political territory as liberal Tory coalitionists such as Palmerston and Goderich. The reform crisis once over, Wilmot's normal priorities would no doubt have reasserted themselves, and he would have found the new government just as unsatisfactory as the old one. But the question did not arise, since by that time he was in Ceylon.



Wilmot Horton as Governor of Ceylon

www.tamilnet

Conclusion: Drawing the Serpentine Line

Wilmot Horton and Liberal Toryism

Four main factors determined the character of politics in the Britain of the 1820s. The political tensions engendered by the French Revolution had not yet been worked out: unsatisfied demands for radical political reform – sometimes insistent, sometimes muted – posed a threat to stability. The Industrial Revolution gave rise to massive social and economic dislocations which reinforced these political tensions, or helped to produce them in the first place. Malthusian demographic theory engendered much uncertainty as to the prospect of resolving these problems through material progress. The transition from a war economy to a peace economy generated further difficulties, in particular that of reducing the size of the state.

Chapter One introduced the various ways in which historians have understood the liberal Tories to respond to this troubled background. This Chapter seeks to characterise Wilmot Horton's liberal Toryism, in the light of those models and of the conclusions of Chapters Two to Eight. The line between high and liberal Tories being, in Canning's phrase, 'not straight but serpentine',¹ Wilmot's brand of liberal Toryism will be seen to be unique to him.

To begin with Wilmot's conception of his own politics, it is evident that he favoured the same sort of formulations, of 'balance' between extremes, that Stephen Lee found typical of Canning.² In 1827, Wilmot conceived 'Canningism' as a compound of moderate 'Whiggism' and moderate Toryism, avoiding the extremes of both,³ but there was more substance in a passage from 1830, alluded to in Chapter Two⁴:

¹ Above, p.17.

² Lee, *Canning*, pp.144-7.

³ Above, p.250.

⁴ Above, p.60.

There is a *common-sense class* growing up in France and in England. The members of this class are desirous of steering an impartial course between prescription and innovation, between the prejudices of the aristocracy and the passions of the mob. They are desirous of retaining constitutional and limited monarchy, as more suited to the conservation of genuine liberty than any extreme form of government. They are advocates for amelioration and improvement, and for correcting ‘the wisdom of our ancestors’ by the stores of modern science and improved opinions.⁵

The sense of balance articulated here is not that encapsulated in the traditional Whig view of the constitution of 1688 – balance between the dangers of autocracy and democracy. On the one side is not autocracy, but ‘prescription’, which Wilmot associates with the ‘prejudices of the aristocracy’ and the unimproved ‘wisdom of our ancestors’. ‘Prescription’ here stands for the uncompromising defence of existing privileges, or resistance to reform of abuses, beyond what is just and reasonable. On the other side is ‘innovation’, associated with ‘the passions of the mob’, conceived as headlong, ill-considered change, the product of emotion rather than reason, and carrying every prospect of being change for the worse.⁶ In between stand those, among whom Wilmot places himself, who would improve and correct, but who would do so advisedly and calmly, informed by the ‘stores of modern science’, and dealing ‘impartially’ between the claims of those in possession and those without. The overriding aim is the protection of ‘liberty’, which, in Wilmot’s perception, would be threatened as much by more democratic forms of government as by more autocratic ones.

This notion of ‘balance’ was most famously articulated by Canning in December 1826, in defence of the government’s intervention in Portugal. Canning described Britain’s policy as one of ‘neutrality’, not only between ‘contending nations’, but between the ‘conflicting principles’ of constitutional government and autocracy. Although the ‘establishment of constitutional liberty’ in another European country was to be welcomed, it was no part of

⁵ *Lectures*, ‘Correspondence and Resolutions’, p.17.

⁶ On the negative connotations of ‘innovation’, see Joanna Innes, “‘Reform’ in English public life: the fortunes of a word”, in Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes (eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform* (Cambridge, 2003), p.74.

English policy to try to bring it about; on the contrary, everything possible should be done to avoid the ‘tremendous consequences’ of a war between these principles. In any such war, Canning warned, the continental autocracies would find their own peoples ranged against them and on the side of England.⁷ In Canning’s formulation, ‘neutrality’ between contending principles did not necessarily imply movement in one direction or the other, though he evidently expected liberal principles to make headway. Wilmot, commenting on Canning’s speech, was more explicit. He thought it impossible to deny the ‘growing feeling throughout Europe’, that absolutism ‘might progressively be tempered, by judicious and constitutional modifications, into a less absolute form’, with advantage both to governors and governed. Among the ‘moderate adherents’ to such views were to be found ‘some of the most estimable and some of the most truly loyal subjects’ of the continental monarchies; but there was ‘a far more numerous class’ of the ‘disaffected and disappointed’, who looked for ‘extreme change’ and ‘radical confusion’:

A war undertaken by continental Europe, to put down limited monarchy, and to confirm the principle of despotism, would, by its chemical agency *alone*, combine these masses with such a shape and life as would make the unsuspecting authors of that combination tremble even on their thrones.

To say as much ought not to be ‘stigmatized as jacobinical.’ Rather, it was to emphasise the danger of pushing the principle of reaction too far, ‘the danger, namely, of eliciting the very antagonist principle into full and entire operation.’⁸

Wilmot’s ‘balance’ was therefore one to be achieved in motion rather than stasis, but his aim was a conservative one, to protect against revolution by acknowledging that the existing order might require moderate reform. Those who would defend things as they were too rigidly were liable to provoke, and to lose, a contest with those who wanted radical change.

⁷ Therry (ed.), *Canning’s Speeches*, vi, pp.82-92.

⁸ PRO 30/29/9/6, Horton to Granville, 19 Dec 1826.

The wish to defend the existing constitution against radical attack – to avert or postpone the ‘great struggle’ which Canning foresaw ‘between property and population’⁹ – has commonly been seen as the principal ‘Tory’ or ‘conservative’ component in 1820s liberal Toryism.¹⁰ Much the same spirit was evident a few years later in the *Tamworth Manifesto*, in which the Canningite approach of the 1820s was re-forged for the post-reform era. This view of conservatism owes much more to the perspectives of Harry Dickinson than those of J.C.D. Clark – perhaps an inevitable finding when liberal Toryism is the subject of study. Wilmot’s approach was – at this level – entirely in keeping with that of his liberal Tory colleagues. The defence of ‘liberty and property’ was absolutely central to Wilmot’s politics. For him, property brought stability to social relations and provided the motive force for economic activity and improvement.¹¹ A parliamentary system based on the representation of property, rather than numbers, was necessary to the defence of property, and hence of order and liberty, against the arbitrary and fickle impulses of a ‘democratical form of government’.¹²

At the individual level, Wilmot held property rights to be almost sacrosanct. It could never be right to break one man’s eggs in order to make another an omelette; as Wilmot put it, ‘legislation ‘should violate no private right, nor sacrifice one class of the community for the benefit of another.’ So, the slave-owner was entitled to compensation for the loss of his slaves; the established Church was to be defended in the possession of its tithes, even in Ireland, and no well-meaning person would argue the contrary; changes in the incidence of taxation should be gradual, so as not to hurt those who had embarked their capital in particular courses.¹³ At a more collective level, however, Wilmot was more relaxed than many liberals about the level of taxation, and more expansive in his view of the objects to which taxation could be applied. Omelettes might be made, if the eggs came from a collective basket: hence Wilmot’s proposals for a public fund from which planters could be

⁹ Lee, *Canning*, p.180.

¹⁰ Above, pp.25-7.

¹¹ Above, pp.64-8.

¹² Above, pp.69-74.

¹³ Above, pp.197, 226, 165.

compensated, or for the government financing of emigration. Wilmot's defence of property was never a selfish matter of protecting the 'haves' against the 'have-nots': he believed that property should be shared more widely, and, indeed, that the constitution would stand or fall, and would deserve to stand or fall, according to its capacity to improve the lot of the poor.¹⁴

Like other liberals, Wilmot looked to political economy – 'the stores of modern science' – to inform his ideas on specific subjects.¹⁵ This is not to propose any strict logical identity between enthusiasm for 'political economy' – let alone any particular version of it – and 'liberalism'. Liberalism was too amorphous a concept to admit of such precision. It was rather a question of self-definition and attitude of mind. To appeal to 'science' or 'philosophy' was to claim possession of a 'liberal' mind, while for many high Tories, the rejection of political economy was equally important to their sense of self. They repeatedly denigrated political economy as a sham science.¹⁶ Wilmot's engagement with economic theory was deeper and more sustained than that of most liberal Tories, but he saw himself as a practical, pragmatic, man of business, not as a theoretician. Allowance had to be made for circumstances, for existing institutions and ingrained prejudices.¹⁷ It is doubtful, though, how far Wilmot really followed this precept. By the standards of the day, he was quite late to enter parliament and to achieve office. His opinions were largely formed in the unchallenging environment of his own study, rather than through the practical apprenticeship in the art of the possible enjoyed by figures such as Canning, Huskisson, and Peel. His habits of thought entailed the construction of linear, sequential, chains of reasoning, rather than an alert perception of external realities.¹⁸ He was never the most pragmatic of politicians.

¹⁴ Above, p.260.

¹⁵ Above, pp.55-60.

¹⁶ Above, pp.169-70, 176-8.

¹⁷ Above, pp.56-7.

¹⁸ Above, pp.54, 60-61.

By 'adjusting theory to circumstances', Wilmot meant simply that policy should start with the recognition of a very large structural surplus in the supply of labour. This perception underlay all of his thinking on economic questions. It enabled him to develop clear views, on such matters as the remission of taxation and the modification of the corn laws, which placed him at some distance from the 'orthodox' Ricardian school.¹⁹ In his belief that public spending should be kept up, and that agricultural protection should be maintained at a moderate level, he was much closer to Malthus than to Ricardo. His acute awareness of the transitional costs involved in alleviating or redirecting the burden of taxation, or of an alteration in the corn laws, again distinguished him from more dogmatic Ricardians. In the case of the corn laws, Wilmot's well-articulated sense of balance between the interests of agriculturalists and manufacturers is typical of the liberal Tory approach in the mid 1820s. In the case of public spending and taxation, though, Wilmot was clearly at odds with 'orthodox' doctrine, and it is in this area that he was furthest apart from his liberal Tory colleagues.

The main body of the liberal Tories accepted in principle the agenda of 'economical reform', minimal government and low taxation; they resisted damaging reductions in establishments, but they certainly did not envisage any significant expansion in the role of the state. They aimed to demonstrate to the public that the unreformed political system could produce good and responsive government, which served wider interests than those of the landed gentry without aggrandizing itself. For Wilmot, on the other hand, good government had to include positive action to alleviate distress. Unlike most of his contemporaries, he saw great scope for the state to intervene in social problems – first by financing, managing and regulating assisted emigration, and latterly in his ambitious schemes of public works for labourers 'abstracted' from the workforce. He saw 'economical reform' more as a threat to good government than a function of it. This departure from the normal spirit of liberal Toryism rested above all on Wilmot's different view of economic questions. Apart from his fundamental emphasis on superfluity of

¹⁹ Above, pp.162-6, 171-5.

labour, and the concomitant distrust of conventional remedies such as remission of taxation, Wilmot – a more assiduous economist than many of his colleagues – was more aware of emergent thinking in relation to the prudential check, and therefore more inclined to believe that pauperism could be alleviated.²⁰ It has also to be recognised that Wilmot's more ambitious schemes were unworkable, while even his less ambitious ones were too politically charged to appeal to cautious ministers.²¹

Wilmot considered pauperism primarily as a moral problem. He shared the widespread Malthusian concern as to the tendency of the poor laws to undermine the virtues of independence, prudence, and restraint, and thus to contribute to increase of population. The revival of 'prudential feelings' was central to his whole scheme for the relief of pauperism, and prudence was to be reinforced by the healthy dread engendered by his new, punitive, pauper regime.²² One might therefore have expected to find, in this area of Wilmot's thought, some evidence of the influence of 'Christian political economy' and evangelicalism. There are traces: Wilmot thought it 'criminal' to bring children into the world without the means to support them,²³ and if pauperism recurred, after Wilmot's solutions had been applied, then society 'would deserve to suffer for it'.²⁴ These traces are however outweighed by the much stronger evidence of settled attitudes at variance with the evangelical frame of mind. Wilmot's emphasis on moral factors reflected his concern for the relief of pauperism by material means, rather than concern for the vindication of God or the salvation of the souls of the rich or the poor. His moralistic language is sufficiently accounted for by his Malthusian understanding of the causes of pauperism, and it was shared by many secular political economists of the period. In strong contrast to the view of Chalmers and Malthus that paupers could extricate themselves from poverty by the exercise of the prudential virtues, Wilmot argued that the paupers were right to think that no amount of prudence or diligence could rescue them from their predicament, as

²⁰ Above, pp.103-9.

²¹ Above, pp.167-8, 155-62.

²² Above, pp.90-92, 104-6, 112-15.

²³ Above, p.90.

²⁴ Above, p.115.

long as a large surplus of population remained. He grew impatient with those who offered paupers nothing beyond exhortations to 'economy, industry, patience and perseverance'.²⁵ These perceptions are not consistent with the evangelical view of life as a state of discipline, probation and trial.

Evangelical attitudes might also have been expected to surface in relation to slavery. Certainly, Wilmot accepted that slavery was a 'crime', or 'stain', requiring 'expiation',²⁶ but this did not have much effect on his approach to the question. Undoubtedly, he wanted to see an end to slavery, but for Wilmot as for other ministers, this ultimate objective had to defer to the pragmatic imperative to keep the West Indies at peace. In fact it is hard to discern any distinctively 'liberal Tory' approach to this question in the 1820s.

The 'evangelical' model of liberal Toryism does not work for Wilmot Horton. In Hiltonian terms, he seems to have more in common with 'Whig-Liberals' such as Althorp, Morpeth, and Slaney, in whom Hilton discerned an 'optimistic faith in growth and progress', which separated them from the 'retributive' ideology of evangelicalism.²⁷ Whether this finding has any implications for the 'evangelical' model, in relation to liberal Toryism more generally, is doubtful, since it was precisely in relation to the issue of pauperism that Wilmot was most at odds with his liberal Tory colleagues. The model has been questioned in the central cases of Peel and Canning,²⁸ and now in the more peripheral one of Wilmot Horton. Hilton has undoubtedly peered more deeply into the early nineteenth century psyche than any historian before him, but arguably his links between political positions and religious dispositions are over-schematic. Thirty years on, the model remains in a state of trial and probation.

The explorations of Chapters Three and Five revealed very little in Wilmot's economic thinking that could be described as distinctively Tory. His sense of obligation to the poor was evidently more urgent than that of some of his

²⁵ Above, p.105.

²⁶ Above, p.196.

²⁷ Hilton, *Atonement*, p.241.

²⁸ Above, p.24.

liberal colleagues, and his impatience with them reflected Senior's complaint that Malthusian ideas had become an excuse for 'negligence and injustice'.²⁹ It would be easy to view Wilmot's attitude as evidence of his paternalistic, Tory heart, but there is little reason to attach a party label to so generic a quality as compassion, especially when, as we have seen, Wilmot did not follow Tory commentators in admitting a legal right to poor relief for the able-bodied.³⁰ Certainly, it is ironic that Sadler should have chosen Wilmot's Emigration Reports as the immediate target for his assault on political economy, since – as David Robinson shrewdly noted – their tendency was to some extent unorthodox and protective of the working man.³¹ But Wilmot's critique of 'orthodox' remedies was mounted from within the tent of political economy, using the tools and the language of that discipline, and his rhetoric did not draw upon typical Tory tropes. Wilmot's modestly protectionist stance in relation to agriculture, his wariness towards uncertain foreign markets for manufactured goods, and his understanding of the importance of the domestic market, were certainly shared by many Tories, but were by no means exclusive to them. Wilmot seems to have taken his thinking on these issues from Malthus and latterly from Robert Hamilton. When this moderate protectionism was reinforced by more specifically 'Tory' arguments or preconceptions, for instance in the condemnation of the 'factory system', or the atavistic enthusiasm for 'home colonization', Wilmot did not follow.³²

These factors are however sufficient to show that the older model of liberal Toryism, attributed above to Brock, Feiling and Halévy,³³ does not fit Wilmot Horton either. In terms of a 'sectoral' approach to the economy, Wilmot's views reflect the 'neutrality' which Boyd Hilton ascribed to the liberal Tories, rather than any disposition to favour manufacturing over agriculture. In the long term, perhaps, Wilmot's vision for Britain entailed a larger role for its manufacturing industry, but that depended on the development of suitable colonial markets. In the short term, Wilmot thought that agriculture should

²⁹ Above, pp.156-7.

³⁰ Above, p.110.

³¹ Above, p.118.

³² Above, pp.175-82.

³³ Above, p.19.

continue to receive protection, and he looked to the home market, underpinned by a thriving agricultural sector, to provide the most secure market for manufactured goods. His remedy of emigration, insofar as it applied to Britain rather than Ireland, was clearly conceived as a solution to rural problems rather than urban ones. At all points – in his analysis of the causes of pauperism, in his approach to agricultural protection, in his vision of colonial development³⁴ – Wilmot displayed a simple, binary understanding of the British economy as divided between agriculture and manufacturing. The service sector – on some views the real key to imperial development³⁵ – played no part in his analysis.

Wilmot's approach to colonial policy showed more sympathy with 'Tory' attitudes than with an 'orthodox' liberal free-trade approach.³⁶ There were of course significant differences between high and liberal Tories over trade policy, but both wings of the party believed that Britain derived significant economic and strategic advantages from the possession of colonies, and, whatever *Blackwood's* might think, the liberal Tories had no intention of throwing these advantages away. They also shared the romantic – though not exclusively Tory – vision of Britain's civilising mission to the world. In practice, ministers were constrained in the support they could give to the colonies by the imperatives of 'economical reform', but in theory they understood and were attracted by the potential for colonial development.³⁷ There was clear blue water between Tory and Whig attitudes towards colonies, and this perhaps reflects the latter's more suspicious attitude towards state power. While the liberal Tories embraced the agenda of 'economical reform', many of them had presided over a much larger state in time of war. They were comfortable with the exercise of power and perhaps had a broader conception than many liberals as to how power was sustained. There were, however, some differences or potential differences in high and liberal Tory approaches to the colonies. Wilmot's vision of a future Canada, exchanging its agricultural surpluses for British manufactures, clearly implied an

³⁴ Above, pp.90-92, 171-4, 129-30.

³⁵ Cain & Hopkins, *British Imperialism*.

³⁶ Above, pp.128-32.

³⁷ Above, pp.132-3.

increasingly industrial future for Britain, and it did not please agricultural protectionists.³⁸ His ideal of peasant proprietorship certainly had a romantic cast to it, but he appeared surprisingly indifferent to the recreation in the colonies of a society of hierarchy and rank.

In considering Wilmot's involvement with the question of Catholic emancipation, Chapter Seven on the whole confirmed the standard view that liberal Tory supporters of emancipation were concerned more with the political expediency of the measure than with principles of civil and religious liberty. Wilmot did argue the abstract justice of the measure, but his primary concern was to conciliate Catholics to the state and the constitution. As was shown, his peculiarly 'Protestant' approach to the question to some extent vitiated his support for emancipation, but this can hardly be taken as indicative of unwitting Toryism. Toryism, if it meant anything in the 1820s, meant resistance to Catholic emancipation until forced into it.

The search for aspects of Wilmot's politics which were distinctively 'Tory', apart from resistance to political reform, has therefore produced mainly negative results, except in the area of colonial policy. His paternalism towards the poor might be described as Tory, but that description has not been adopted here. His approach to the problem of pauperism was more akin to that of Senior than any other major figure; his approach to other economic questions generally reflects the influence of Malthus. Positions which were most distinctively Tory – unalloyed protectionism, active hostility to 'political economy', firm opposition to Catholic emancipation, atavistic feeling for the land, support for 'home colonization', belief in poor relief as a matter of right, resistance to political reform persisting into 1830-31 – were all rejected by Wilmot. Although we are no doubt stuck with the term 'liberal Toryism', on the evidence presented here it is not an apt one: as Boyd Hilton suggested, 'liberal conservative' would be more accurate.³⁹

³⁸ Above, pp.133-5.

³⁹ Above, p.31.

At the personal level, Wilmot's lack of political pragmatism has been noted at several points. He never understood the conditions of successful political action. In the case of slave amelioration, and on the Catholic question, he sought to bring about compromise solutions, in each case requiring general assent to complex positions, when more skilful politicians tended to hang back.⁴⁰ In the case of emigration, too, Wilmot was too inclined to add layers of complexity to resolve perceived difficulties or objections. There was a degree of political obtuseness in this. 'Where the players are many, the game has to be simple',⁴¹ but Wilmot's proposals were never simple. In terms of awareness of what could be achieved, and how to go about it, Wilmot's career was a type of political solecism.

Wilmot was undoubtedly highly ambitious, but, whenever it came to the point, he put principle, and his own conception of the public good, above his desire for office. He was not in any crude sense an unprincipled politician. Ambition did however affect the way in which he sought to promote his great cause of emigration. Anxious to achieve something great, he was never able to compromise or adjust his own ideas in order to win support for more modest and practical courses of action. In this respect, an ambition of less than the purest kind remains a vitiating factor in his career. That aside, Wilmot showed much generosity and liberality of mind, civility in controversy, and principled conduct.

Wilmot's determination to pursue his own ideas was a virtue of a kind, but he did not have the force or the charm to retain the interest of the political elite. It would be over-harsh to apply to him the observation of G.F.A. Best, that 'men of one idea are apt to be bores, and will surely be suspected of an incapacity to carry a heavier mental cargo.'⁴² Wilmot was no fool, but he was dogged, lacking the wit and flexibility of the best of his contemporaries. As a speaker and pamphleteer he was earthbound and repetitive, and was met with

⁴⁰ Canning observed in 1806 that he had met with 'many proofs' in his political life that 'nothing is to be gained by compromise': Therry (ed.), *Canning's Speeches*, ii, p.172.

⁴¹ L. Namier, 'The Memoirs of Lord Hervey', in L. Namier, *In the Margin of History* (1939), p.128.

⁴² Best, 'Protestant Constitution', p.108.

impatience. As has been observed, 'British politics is a culture of speech; no one will advance far who cannot master its technicalities nor harness its power.'⁴³

The tangible returns from Wilmot's twelve years in parliament, and his six years as a minister, were slender. He assisted rather over 2,500 Irish paupers to emigrate to Canada, and many of them took the chance to transform their lives for the better. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 adopted his principle of permitting parishes to raise money to sponsor pauper emigration to the colonies, and by 1860 over 25,000 people had been assisted to emigrate under this scheme.⁴⁴ These numbers were, no doubt, multiplied by subsequent waves of voluntary emigrants, assisted by 'friends and relatives' who had gone before. Even so, emigration at this level was far less than Wilmot had hoped for, and was dwarfed by voluntary emigration to the United States.

At a less tangible level it is hard to assess the impact Wilmot may have had. His work at the Colonial Office may have done something to mitigate the hostility of West Indian planters towards the home government, at a period when their consent to emancipation could not be obtained at an affordable price. His earlier interventions into debate on the Catholic question may conceivably have helped to soften the opinions of moderate Protestants, at the general election of 1826 and subsequently. His lectures at the Mechanics' Institution provided a good example in the field of adult education. At a still more general level, Wilmot's influence as an advocate for the values which were dear to him cannot be known. As an advocate of a role for central government in the field of social policy, he was at least a decade ahead of his time.

Wilmot offered an idiosyncratic solution to the nexus of problems noted at the head of this chapter. Most liberal Tories sought to address the tensions thrown

⁴³ Richard A. Gaunt, 'The Political Activities and Opinions of the Fourth Duke of Newcastle (1785-1851)' (PhD, Nottingham, 2000), p.336.

⁴⁴ Gary Howells, "'On account of their disreputable characters": Parish-assisted emigration from Rural England, 1834-1860', *History*, 88 (2003), p.588. Whether the new Poor Law owed anything to Wilmot's influence, in its principles of 'abstraction' and 'deterrence', is a question worthy of further research.

up by the French and Industrial Revolutions, by addressing the fourth problem, the size of the state. 'Economical reform' showed them to be virtuous, public-spirited, and active in pursuit of a particular conception of the public benefit, but they offered no way out of the Malthusian bind. Wilmot, by contrast, saw a way out of the Malthusian impasse, in the process rejecting the idea of a minimalist, *laissez faire* state, and conceiving a much more active role for the state in relation to social problems. It was not until the 1840s that the British government began to intervene in social questions as Wilmot wished, and then not in the way he advocated. Wilmot's version of liberal Toryism remained a road not travelled.

Appendix

Publications by Robert Wilmot Horton

All of Wilmot Horton's major publications are listed here chronologically. Apart from articles in journals, publication was under Wilmot Horton's own name unless a pseudonym or 'Anon' is given. Abbreviations used in this thesis are given in parentheses at the end of the entry.

'Feinagle and Grey's *Artificial Memory*', *QR* vol 9 no 17 (Mar 1813), pp.125-39

[Anon.] *Letter to a Noble Lord on the Present Situation of France and Europe, accompanied by official and original documents* (John Murray, 1815) (2nd edn. published as *Letter to the Rt. Hon. Lord Erskine on the Present Situation of France and Europe* (John Murray, 1815)

'West India Colonies', *QR* vol 30 no 60 (Jan 1824), pp.559-87 (with Charles Ellis)

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This thesis, including appendix and bibliography, is 105,630 words long.