

Tony Little introduces a speech made by Richard Cobden near the climax of the campaign to abolish the Corn Laws.

'Exploding the delusion of protection'

Richard Cobden on agricultural distress (House of Commons, 13 March 1845)

Laws regulating the export and import of grains for the benefit of British farmers date back at least to 1436. The Napoleonic wars caused a major disturbance to trade and to alleviate the decline in prices that followed good harvests in 1813 and the slump which followed Waterloo, Parliament enacted the 1815 Corn Law, excluding almost all imports until domestic wheat prices reached a specified level. The amended Corn Law of 1828 substituted a sliding scale of import duties.

Despite the industrial revolution, agriculture remained the biggest single employer and land provided the fortunes of the ruling class. Agitation against the Corn Laws was not just striking at outmoded legislation already refuted by economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo. It was the heart of the struggle for primacy waged by the new industrial classes, which also encompassed the battles for franchise extension and reform of government finances.

Richard Cobden (1804-65) spearheaded the crusade for free trade; his political beliefs and career are well summarised in the summary of Anthony Howe's talk to the History Group meeting in March (see pages 23-25). In 1838, together with John Bright and five Manchester merchants, he founded an anti-corn law association, the first of many which came together in 1839 to form the Anti-Corn Law League. The call for cheap bread ensured popular support but it was the organisational skills of the industrialists who saw protection as the greatest obstacle to expanding trade which promoted the League above other populist agitations. In 1841 Cobden took his campaign into parliament as MP for Stockport.

To contemporaries, 'his manner' was 'not especially attractive', nor his 'voice particularly musical' but 'all the wandering members' rushed to hear him.

His power lay 'in his knowledge of the subject, his ability to impart that knowledge intelligibly to his hearers; his clear acute, logical, comprehensive mind; and last though not least, in his thorough honesty and sincerity of purpose'.¹ Cobden himself recognised that it would not be his eloquence that demolished the Corn Laws. 'I know it as well as though I were in their hearts. It is this: they are all afraid that this corn law cannot be maintained – no not a rag of it, during a period of scarcity prices, of a famine season, such as we had in '39, '40, and '41.'²

The threat, which quickly became reality, of famine in Ireland caused by the failure of the potato crop in the autumn of 1845 finished the corn laws and with them Peel's Conservative government. However it was Cobden's campaigning which had made their demise inevitable. Commenting on the speech in March 1845, Peel is reported to have said to Sidney Herbert 'you must answer this for I cannot.'³

Richard Cobden, as he had the previous year, presented a petition and moved for a select committee to inquire into the causes and extent of the alleged existing agricultural distress, and into the effects of legislative protection upon the interests of land-owners, tenant-farmers, and farm labourers. The motion was opposed for the government by Sidney Herbert on the basis that such inquiries never led to any useful result, and was lost by 121 votes to 213.

[The object of the motion] is the appointment of a Select Committee to inquire into the condition of the agricultural interests, with a view to ascertain how far the law affecting the importation of agricultural produce has affected those interests.

Now, that there is distress among the farmers I presume cannot be established upon higher authority

than that of those who professed to be 'the farmer's friends'. I learn from those hon. Gentlemen who have been paying their respects to the Prime Minister, that the agriculturists are in a state of great embarrassment and distress. I find one gentleman from Norfolk, Mr. Hudson, stating that the farmers in Norfolk are paying their rents out of capital; while Mr. Turner, from Devonshire, assured the right hon. Baronet (Sir R. Peel) that one half of the smaller farmers in that county are insolvent, and the other half rapidly hastening to the same condition, and that unless some remedial measures are adopted by the House, they will be plunged into irretrievable poverty. These accounts from those counties agree with what I hear from other sources, and I will put it to hon. Members opposite whether the condition of the farmers in Suffolk, Wiltshire, and Hampshire, is any better. I will put it to county Members whether, looking to the whole of the south of England, from the confines of Nottinghamshire to the Land's-End, the farmers are not in a state of embarrassment – whether, as a rule, that is not their condition? Then, according to every precedent in the house, this is a fit and proper time to bring forward this resolution; and I will venture to say, that if the Duke of Buckingham had a seat in this House he would do what he, as Lord Chandos, did – move such a resolution. (*Hear, hear.*)

The distress of the farmer being admitted, the next question that arises is what is the cause of this distress. Now, I feel the greater necessity for a committee of inquiry, because I find a great discrepancy of opinion as to the cause. One right hon. Gentleman has said that the distress is local, and moreover that it does not arise from legislation; while the hon. Member for Dorsetshire (Mr. Bankes) declared that it is general, and that it does arise from legislation. (*Hear, hear.*) I am at a loss indeed to understand what this protection to agriculture means, because I find such contradictory accounts given in this House by the promoters of it. For instance, nine months ago the hon. Member for Wolverhampton (Mr. Villiers) brought forward his motion for the repeal of the Corn Laws; and the right hon. Gentleman then at the head of the Board of

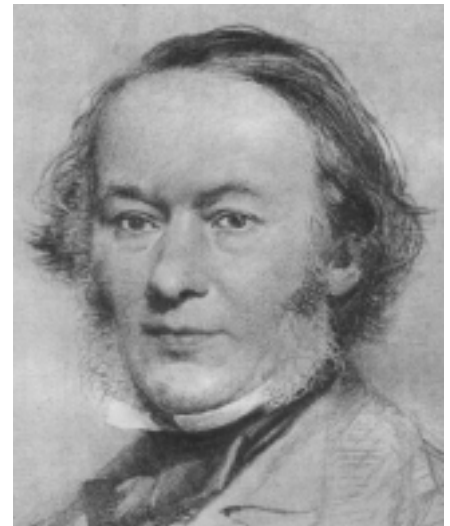
Trade (Mr. Gladstone) stated in reply to him, that the last corn law had been most successful in its operation, and he took great credit to the government for the steadiness of price obtained under it. As these things are so often disputed, it was as well to give the quotation. The right hon. gentleman said,

Was there any man who had supported the law in the year 1842 who could honestly say that he had been disappointed in its working? Could anyone point out a promise or a prediction hazarded in the course of the protracted debates upon the measure, which promise or prediction had been subsequently falsified?

Now, let the House recollect that the right hon. Gentleman was speaking when wheat was 56s 8d.; but wheat is at present 45s (*Hear, hear.*) The right hon. Baronet at the head of the government said that his legislation on the subject had nothing to do with wheat being 45s.; but how is the difficulty to be got over, that the head of the Board of Trade, nine months ago, claimed merit to the government for having kept up wheat to that price? (*Cheers.*) These discrepancies in the Government itself, and between the Government and its supporters, rendered it more necessary that this 'protection' should be inquired into.

I must ask, what does it mean? We have prices now at 45s. I have been speaking within the last week to the highest authority in England, one often quoted in this House, and I learned from him that, with another favourable harvest, it was quite likely that wheat would be at 35s. (*Hear, hear.*) What does this legislation mean, if we are to have prices fluctuating from 56s. to 35s.? (*Cheers.*) Can this be prevented by legislation? That is the question. There is a rank delusion spread abroad among the farmers (*hear, hear*); and it is the duty of the House to dispel that delusion, and to institute an inquiry into the matter. (*Hear.*)

But there is a difference of opinion on my own side of the House, and some Members, representing great and powerful interests, think the farmers are suffering because they have this legislative protection. This difference of opinion makes the subject a fit and proper one for in-



Richard Cobden (1804–65)

quiry in a Committee; and I am prepared to bring evidence before it, to show that farmers are labouring under great evils – evils that I can connect with the Corn Laws, though they appear to be altogether differently caused. (*Hear, hear.*)

'Notorious want of capital'

The first great evil they labour under is a want of capital. No one can deny it; it is notorious. I do not say it disparagingly of the farmers. The farmers of this country are just of the same race as the rest of Englishmen, and, if placed in the same situation, would be as successful men of business and traders and manufacturers as their countrymen; but it is notorious, as a rule, that they are deficient in capital. Now, can any business be carried on successfully where there is not adequate capital? (*Hear, hear.*) Hon. Gentlemen acquainted with farming will probably admit that £10 an acre, on arable land, is a competent capital for carrying on the business of farming successfully; but I have made many inquiries in all parts of the kingdom, and I gave it as my decided conviction, that at the present moment the farmer's capital does not average £5 an acre, taking the whole of England south of the Trent, and including all Wales. Though, of course, there are exceptions in every county – men of large capital – men farming their own land – I am convinced this is true as a rule, and I am prepared to back my opinion by witnesses before a committee. (*Hear, hear.*) Here, then, is a tract of country, comprehending probably 20,000,000 of cultiva-

ble acres, and £100,000,000 more capital is wanted for its cultivation.

What is the meaning of 'farming capital'? It means more manuring, more labour, more cattle, larger crops. (*Hear.*) But let us fancy a country in which there is a deficiency of all these things which ought to be there, and then guess what must be the condition of the labourers, wanting employment and food. (*Hear, hear.*) It may be said, that capital would be there if it were a profitable investment. I admit it, and thus the question comes – how is it, that in a country overflowing with capital, where there is a plethora in every other business, where every other pursuit is abounding with money, when money is going to France for railroads, and to Pennsylvania for bonds, connecting the Atlantic with the Pacific by canals, and diving to the bottom of Mexican mines for investment, it yet finds no employment in the most attractive of all spots – the soil of this country itself! (*Hear, hear.*)

Admitting the evil, with all its train of fearful consequences, what is the cause of it? There can be no doubt whatever – it is admitted by the highest authorities – that the cause is this, – there is not security for capital on the land. Capital shrinks instinctively from insecurity of tenure, and we have not in England that security which will warrant men of capital investing their money in the soil. (*Hear, hear.*) Is it not a matter worthy of consideration how far this insecurity of tenure is bound up with the 'protection' system of which hon. Members opposite are so enamoured? Suppose it could be shown that they are in a vicious circle; that they have made politics of Corn Laws; that they wanted voters, to retain Corn Laws; that they think the Corn Laws a great mine of wealth, and therefore will have dependent tenants, that they may have votes at elections, and so retain these laws. Why, if they will have dependent voters, they cannot have men of spirit and of capital. (*Cheers.*) Then their policy reacts upon them; if they have not men of skill and capital, they cannot have protection and employment for the labourer; and then comes round the vicious termination – pauperism, poor-rates, county-rates, and all the evils from which they are asking the Prime Minister to relieve them. (*Cheers.*)

But here I have to quote authorities, and I shall quote some of the highest consideration with the opposite side of the House. I will just state the opinion of the hon. Member for Berkshire (Mr. Pusey), delivered at the meeting of the Suffolk Agricultural Society. That hon. Gentleman said:

He knew this country well, and he knew that there was not a place from Plymouth to Berwick in which the landlords might not make improvements; but when the tenant was short of money, the landlord generally would be short of money too. (*Hear.*) But he would tell them how to find funds. There were many districts where there was a great superfluity not only of useless but of mischievous timber; and if they would cut that down which excluded the sun and the air, and fed on the soil, and sell it, they would benefit the farmer by cutting it down, and they would benefit the farmer and labourer too by laying out the proceeds in underdraining the soil. (*Cheers.*) There was another mode in which they might find money. I knew that on some properties a large sum was spent in the preservation of game. (*Cheers.*) It was not at all unusual for the game to cost £500 or £600 a year; and if this were given up, the money would employ 100 able-bodied labourers in improving the property. (*Cheers.*) This was another fund for the landlords of England to benefit the labourers and the farmer at the same time.

Again, at the Colchester agricultural meeting:

Mr. Fisher Hobbes was aware that a spirit of improvement was abroad. Much was said about the tenant farmers doing more. Indeed they might do more: the soil of country was capable of greater production; if he said one fourth more he would be within compass. (*Hear, hear.*) But that could not be done by tenant farmers alone; they must have confidence (*loud cheers.*); it must be done by leases (*renewed cheers*) – by draining – by extending the length of fields – by knocking down hedge-rows, and clearing away trees which now shielded the corn.

But there was still higher authority. At the late meeting at Liverpool, Lord Stanley declared:

I say, and as one connected with the land I feel myself bound to say it, that a landlord has no right to expect any great and permanent improvement of his land by the tenant, unless that tenant be secured the repayment of his outlay, not by the personal character or honour of his landlord, but by a security which no casualties can interfere with – the security granted him by the terms of a lease for years.

'A trap for unwary men'

Not only does the want of security prevent capital from flowing to the soil, but it actually hinders the improvement of the land by those who already occupy it. There are many tenants who could improve their land if they were made secure; they either have capital themselves, or their friends can advance it; but with the want of leases, with the want of security they are deterred from laying out their money. Everything is kept 'from year to year.' (*Hear, hear.*) It is impossible to farm properly unless money is invested in it for more than a year. A man ought to begin farming with a prospect of waiting eight years before he can see a return for what he must do in the first year or two. Tenants, therefore, are prevented by their landlords from carrying on cultivation properly. They are made servile and dependent, disinclined to improvement, afraid to let the landlord see that they could improve their farms, lest he should pounce on them for an increase of rent ...

Here is a little evidence of the same kind that is to be gathered from the meeting of the South Devon Agricultural Association, where the Rev. C. Johnson said,

He knew it had been thought that landlords were ready to avail themselves of such associations, on account of the opportunity it afforded them for diving into their tenants affairs and opening their eyes. (*Hear.*) An instance of this occurred to him at a recent ploughing match, where he met a respectable agriculturist whom he

well knew, and asked him if he was going to it. He said, 'No.' 'Why?' Because he did not approve of such things. This 'why' produced another 'why,' and the man gave a reason why. Suppose he sent a plough and man, with two superior horses; the landlord at once would say, 'This man is doing too well on my estate,' and increase the rent. (*Hear.*)

I will ask the landed gentry of England what state of things is this, that the farmer dares not appear to have a good pair of horses, or to derive four quarters where the land had formerly produced only three? (*'Hear, hear,' 'Oh, oh!' and ironical cheers.*) Hon. Members cheer, but I ask is it not so? (*Hear, hear.*) I must say that the condition of things indicated by those two quotations brings the farmer very near down in point of servility to the ryot of the East. (*'Hear, hear,' and murmurs.*) The one takes the utmost care to conceal the amount of his produce; the other suffers the bastinado rather than tell how much corn is grown. The tenant, indeed, is not afraid of the bastinado, but he is kept in fear of a distress for rent. (*Hear.*)

This is the state of the tenant farming without a lease, and in England a lease is the exception and not the rule. But even sometimes, when there is a lease or agreement, the case is still worse, for the clauses and covenants are of such an obsolete and preposterous character, that he will defy any man to carry on the business of farming properly under them. (*Hear, hear.*) I will just read a passage from a Cheshire lease – an actual lease – to show in what sort of way the tenant farmer is bound down:–

To pay the landlord £20 for every statute acre of ground, and so in proportion for a less quantity, that shall be converted into tillage, or used contrary to the appointment before made; and £5 for every hundredweight of hay, thrave of straw, load of potatoes, or cartload of manure, that shall be sold or taken from the premises during the term; and £10 for every tree fallen, cut down, or destroyed, cropped, lopped, or topped, or willingly suffered so to be; and £20, for every servant or other person so hired or admitted as to gain a settlement in the township; and £10 per statute acre,

and so in proportion for a less quantity of the said land, which the tenant shall let off or underlet; such sums to be paid on demand after every breech, and in default of payment to be considered as reserved rent, and levied by distress and sale as rent in arrear may be levied and raised; and to do six days boon team-work whenever called upon; and to keep for the landlord one dog, and one cock or hen; and to make no marlpit without the landlord's consent first obtained in writing; after which the same is to be properly filled in; nor to allow any inmate to remain on the premises after six days' notice, nor to keep or feed any sheep, except such as are used for the consumption of the family. (*Cheers and laughter*)

What is such an instrument as this? I will tell the House what it is. It is a trap for unwary men – a barrier against capital and intelligence and a fetter to any free man. (*Cheers*) No one can farm under such a lease. (*Hear, hear*) The hon. member for Shoreham (Mr C. Barrell) cheered: but if hon. Members would look into their own leases, though there might not be the 'cocks and hens and dogs' and probably not the 'team work,' they will find almost as great absurdities. These documents are generally taken from old, dusty, antediluvian remains that some lawyer's clerk drew from a pigeonhole, and copied out for every incoming tenant; something that had been in existence perhaps for 500 years. You give men no credit for being able to discover any improvements; in fact, you tie them down from improving; you go upon assumption that there will be no improvement, and do your best to prevent it. (*Hear, hear.*)

... [*Cobden then argued for improved systems of leases, on the grounds that with greater security of tenure, farmers would invest more in the land. However, government fixing of the price of corn would always induce farmers simply to argue for higher corn prices as the primary means of paying their rents.*] ...

'You cannot employ your own labourers in the agricultural districts'

I have alluded to the condition of the

agricultural labourers at the present time; but I feel bound to say that whilst the farmers are in a worse position than they have been for the last 10 years, I believe the agricultural labourers have passed the winter, though it was a five months winter and severe, with less suffering from distress than the previous winters. I mention this because it is a remarkable proof of the degree in which a low price of food is beneficial to the labouring classes. I can demonstrate that in the manufacturing districts whenever food is dear wages are low; and that whenever food is low, wages rise. That the manufacturers can prove. Then I stated it as my own opinion, that the agricultural labourers are in a better state than they were in previous winters; but does not that show that the agricultural labourers having only just so much wages as will find them in subsistence derived benefit from the plenty of the first necessities of life? Their wages do not rise in the same proportion as the price of food rises, but then neither do their wages fall in the same proportion as the price of food falls. Therefore, in all cases the agricultural labourers are in a better state when food is low than when it is high.

Now, I am bound to state, that whatever is the condition of the agricultural labourer, I believe the farmer is not responsible for that condition while he is placed as at present. I have heard many exhortations to the farmer that he must employ more labour. I believe the farmer is very unjustly required to do this. The farmer stands between the landlord and the suffering peasantry. It is rather hard in the landlord to point the farmer out as the cause of the want of employment for labour – as the man to be marked. (*Hear, hear.*) Lord Hardwicke had lately made an address to the labourers of Haddenham, in which he said,

Conciliate your employers, and if they do not perform their duty to you and themselves address yourselves to the landlords, and I assure you that you will find us ready to urge our own tenants to the proper cultivation of their farms and, consequently, to the just employment of the labourer.

That is the whole question. I think that it is the landlords and not the employers

who are in fault. The landlords have absolute power in the country. There is no doubt about it – they can legislate for the benefit of the labourers, or of themselves, as they please. If the results of their legislation have failed to secure due advantages to the labourer, they have no right to call on the farmers to do their duty, and furnish the labourers with the means of support. I lately saw a labourer's certificate at Stowupland, in Suffolk, placed over the chimneypiece in a labourer's cottage. It was this:–

West Suffolk Agricultural Association, established in 1833, for the advancement of agriculture, and the encouragement of industry, and skill, and good conduct among labourers and servants in husbandry. President, the Duke of Grafton, Lord Lieutenant of the county. This is to certify that a prize of £2 was awarded to William Birch, aged 82, labourer, of the parish of Stowupland, in West Suffolk, September 25, 1840, for having brought up nine children without relief, except when flour was very dear (hear, hear) and for having worked on the same farm 28 years. (Signed) Robert Rushbrooke (*a laugh*), chairman.

After a severe winter, with little employment to be had, I congratulate the country that we have fewer agricultural labourers in the workhouses, and fewer pining from want, than in former years; but a bad case at the best is the condition of the agricultural labourer, and you have to look out before it is too late how you are to employ him. The last census shows you cannot employ your own labourers in the agricultural districts. How then are you to employ them? You say, there are too many of them. That is an evil which will press on you more and more every year; what then are you to do?

'What then do you propose to do?'

Are you, gentry of England, to sit with your arms folded and propose nothing? I am only here tonight because you have proposed nothing. We all know that the allotment system has been taken up; it is a plaything; it is a failure (*Hear, hear*), and it has been well for some of you that you

have wiser heads to lead you than your own, or you would shortly be in precisely the same situation they are in Ireland; but with this increase to the difficulty of that situation, that they do contrive to maintain the rights of property there with the aid of the English Exchequer and 20,000 bayonets; but bring your own country to the same condition, and where would be your rents. (*Cheers.*)

What then do you propose to do? Nothing this year to benefit the great mass of the agricultural population. You admit the farmer's capital is diminished; that he is in a worse state than he was. How to increase the confidence of capitalism in the farmer's power of retrieving themselves – how this is to be done is the question. I cannot believe you are going to make this a political game. It was well said that the last election was an agricultural election; and there are 200 members sitting behind the right hon. Baronet; that is the proof of it.

Don't quarrel with me because I have imperfectly stated my case; I have done my best (hear, hear); I ask what you have done? (*Cheers*) I tell you this protection, as it is called, has been a failure. It failed when wheat was 80s a quarter, and you know what was the condition of the farmer in 1817. It failed when wheat was 60s, and you know what was the condition of the farmer in 1835; and now it has failed again, with the last amendments you have made in the law, for you have admitted what is the condition of the agricultural tenantry. What then is the plan you propose?

I hope this question was not made a pretence – a political game – of at the last election; that you have not come up as mere politicians. There are politicians in this House who look with ambition – and probably in their case it is a justifiable ambition – to the high offices of the State; there may be men here who by 30 years' devotion to politics have been pressed into a groove in which it is difficult for them to avoid going forward, and are, may be, maintaining the same course against their convictions; I make allowance for them; but the great body of you came up not as politicians but as friends of the agricultural interest; and to you I now say what are you going to do?

You lately heard the right hon. Baronet at the head of the Government say that if he could restore protection it would not benefit the agricultural interest. Is that your belief? Or are you acting on your own convictions, or performing your duty in this House, by following the right hon. Baronet into the lobby when he refuses an enquiry and investigation into the condition of the very men who send you up here? With mere politicians I have no right to hope to succeed; but give me a committee and I will explode the delusions of agricultural protection (*cheers*); I will produce such a mass of evidence, and call authorities so convincing, that when the blue book shall be sent out I am convinced protection will not live two years. (*Cheers.*)

Protection is a very convenient vehicle for politicians; the cry of protection won the last election; and politicians looked to secure honours, emoluments, places by it; but you, the gentry of England, are not sent up for such objects. Is, then, that old, tattered and torn flag to be kept up for the politicians, or will you come forward and declare that you are ready to inquire into the state of the agricultural interests? I cannot think that the gentlemen of England can be content to be made mere drumheads to be sounded by the Prime Minister of England (*cheers*) – to be made to emit notes, but to have no articulate sounds of their own. (*Cheers.*)

You, gentlemen of England, the high aristocracy of England, your forefathers led my forefathers, you may lead us again if you choose. But, though you, longer than any other aristocracy, have kept your power, while the battlefield and the hunting field were the tests of manly vigour; you have not done as the noblesse of France or the hilalgos of Madrid; you have been Englishmen, not wanting in courage on any call. But this is a new age – the age of social advancement, not of feudal sports; you belong to a mercantile age. You cannot have the advantage of commercial rents and retain your feudal privileges too. But if you identify yourselves with the spirit of the age you may yet do well; for I tell you that the people of the country look to their aristocracy with a

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Churchill was the greatest of all prime ministers must surely take into account his peacetime premiership, but Jenkins is sidetracked by the history of the Conservative Party generally and Churchill's fears about the nuclear bomb in particular. Nonetheless an acute discussion of the insensitivity with which Eisenhower and Dulles handled Churchill in 1953 and 1954 is a prelude to Anthony Eden's discomfiture with American policy over Suez two years later.

Throughout, there are some irritations. Churchill attributed to Harrow his appreciation of the structure of the English sentence – 'that noble thing' – and his writing is always colourful, simple and direct. Not so that of Jenkins, whose eloquence has given way to grandiloquence with too many over-long sentences and unhelpful adjectives. There are a number of excursions into by-ways of little importance, such as the reasons for Churchill's first, unusually late, parliamentary oath of allegiance, the mechanics of parliamentary arithmetic, individuals' house purchases close to the King's estates and his relations with his literary agent. Asides about events in which Jenkins played a part do not always illuminate (although interestingly he makes very little reference to his father, who was a parliamentary private secretary in the wartime government). And comparisons with Tony Blair's government today are intrusive.

But the major defect of an otherwise significant book is the lack of an analytical framework for Churchill as a whole. Individual episodes of his life are treated critically and often with insight. There is also a perceptive awareness of the tension between so many of his emotions and his actions – the Anglo-American historian who understood the importance of Europe, the devotee of Empire whose decision to fight rather than negotiate sounded its death-knell, the anti-Communist who was an ally of Stalin, the Whig who joined the Tory party not once but twice.

Yet in his overall judgement Jenkins fails to separate the totality of Churchill's life from those two short years between the fall of France and victory in North Africa on which his place in history rests. What, for example, would have been a biographer's verdict had he

retired at the end of the thirties with no war? Or the view of an Indian biographer on so vehement an opponent of India's independence? Or of Churchill as a journalist, writer and painter had he not also been so prominent a politician?

That said, beside those two short years all else pales. As Jenkins argues,

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deep rooted prejudice – an hereditary prejudice I may call it – in their favour. But your power was never got, and you will not keep it, by obstructing the spirit of the age in which you live. If you are found obstructing that progressive spirit which is calculated to knit nations more closely together by commercial intercourse; if you give nothing but opposition to schemes which almost give life and breath to inanimate nature, and which it has been decreed shall go on, then you are no longer a national body.

There is a widely spread suspicion that you have been tampering with the feelings of your tenantry – you may read it in the organ of your party – this is the time to show the people that such a suspicion is groundless. I ask you to go into this committee – I will give you a majority of county members – you shall have a majority of members of the Central Agricultural Protection Association in the committee; and on these terms I ask you to inquire into the causes of the distress of our agricultural population. I trust that neither of those gentlemen who have given notice of

there are times when individuals, through the sheer force of their own will, change history. When it mattered, Churchill – quite simply – was there.

Sam Crooks is Reviews Editor of the Journal of Liberal Democrat History.

amendments will attempt to interfere with me, for I have embraced the substance of their amendments in my motion. I am ready to give those hon. Gentlemen the widest range they please in their inquiries. I only ask that this subject may be fairly investigated. Whether I establish my principle, or you establish yours, good must result from the inquiry; and I do beg and entreat of the honourable, independent country gentlemen in this House, that they will not refuse, on this occasion, to sanction a fair, full and impartial inquiry. (*Loud cheers.*)

Another speech by Richard Cobden, and speeches by many other Liberal orators, are included in the History Group's Great Liberal Speeches – for details see back cover.

- 1 William White, *The Inner Life of the House of Commons*, Reprinted by The Richmond Publishing Co. 1973
- 2 John Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden*, Chapman and Hall 1879
- 3 Jane Ridley, *The Young Disraeli 1804-1846*, Sinclair-Stevenson 1995

News from the History Group

Email mailing list

The History Group has started a new email mailing list, which we will use to send out details of forthcoming meetings and new publications to anyone who wishes to sign up (whether or not they are a member of the Group). This will be your fastest way of finding out about meeting dates and details. If you would like to join the list, log on to our website at www.liberalhistory.org.uk and click on 'want to join our mailing list?' in the navigation bar.

Help wanted!

We are always looking for volunteers to help us with activities – meetings, publications, and so on. In particular, we would like to hear from you if you would like to help us with:

- Writing reports of our meetings for the *Journal*
- Developing our website as a resource for those interested in Liberal history
- Producing the *Journal*, in particular help with DTP (a small fee may be payable)

Please contact the Editor via journal@liberalhistory.org.uk